

Report of the Synodical Study Committee on Missions

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I. Background

A. Mandate and Composition of the Study Committee

At its meeting in London, Ontario in July 2010, Synod London adopted the following recommendation:

That Synod 2010 [of the United Reformed Churches in North America] accede to overture 8 to evaluate the need for a full time / part time or volunteer position of URCNA coordinator of missions with this position functioning under the authority and oversight of a specific Consistory. One of his responsibilities would be to edit and publish the federation's mission newsletter.

1. That Synod 2010 appoint a study committee to evaluate the need for a missions coordinator.
2. Mandate:
 - a) That Synod 2010 mandate this study committee, in evaluating the need for a missions coordinator, to make inquiries of NAPARC churches regarding their policies on missions.
 - b) That Synod 2010 mandate this study committee to develop a proposed set of federational mission policies and guidelines.
 - (1) This report should include the possibility of developing a missions coordinator position.
 - (2) This report should include recommendations regarding:
 - (a) How to encourage communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations.
 - (b) How to obtain updates from the missionaries and church planters for publication in the missions newsletter.
 - (c) How to maintain the "missionsURC.org" website and utilize it to post prayer requests and other matters relevant to URCNA membership – e.g., when and where missionaries are "home" and available for speaking.
 - (d) How to ascertain and remain abreast of the disparate financial needs of missionaries and disseminate pertinent information to URCNA councils (e.g., location, family, nature & needs of a particular ministry).

3. The grounds for this mandate were stated as follows:
 - a) The URCNA has realized substantial growth in the scope of domestic and foreign mission activities of its member congregations and classes.
 - b) While the URCNA stands as one in spirit and truth, there exists among many of our member congregations, missionaries and church planters a sense of standing alone.

Synod London appointed seven members to the study committee, one from each classis of the federation:

Rev. Michael Brown, *Chairman* (Classis Southwest US)
Rev. Jody Lucero, *Clerk* (Classis Central US)
Rev. Richard Anjema (Classis Western Canada)
Rev. Bill Boekestein (Classis Eastern US)
Rev. Harry Bout (Classis Southern Ontario)
Rev. Kevin Efflandt (Classis Pacific Northwest US)
Mr. Paul Wagenmaker (Classis Michigan)

The decision of Synod London to appoint our study committee was taken in response to Overture 8 (stated above) which Classis Michigan brought to Synod London.

B. The Committee's Work and Approach to its Mandate

1) Study and Research

In order to fulfill its mandate from Synod London, the Committee studied the Biblical and Confessional View of Missions (hereafter BCVM), which is the report recommended to the churches by Synod Escondido 2001. Particular attention was given to the BCVM's Joint Venture Model (hereafter JVM) as a foundation for developing a set of federational mission policies and guidelines.¹⁴

The Committee then researched the mission policies of NAPARC denominations. Rev. Anjema researched the policies of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC) and Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC). Rev. Boekestein researched the policies of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Rev. Bout researched the policies of the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ). Rev. Efflandt researched the policies of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). Rev. Lucero researched the policies of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Mr. Wagenmaker researched the policies of the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) and Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC). The Committee made evaluations of these policies in light of the BCVM, the polity of the URCNA, and the present challenges and deficiencies we are experiencing in our federation in our attempt to do missions and fulfill our Lord's Great Commission.

¹⁴ The BCVM in its entirety is posted on the URCNA website (www.urnca.org) under "Federation Documents."

We recognized that most of these denominations had well thought-out mission policies and highly structured denominational mission committees. For example, the PCA has a denominational mission committee composed of fifteen elders: eight teaching (ministers) and seven ruling. They are elected by the PCA's General Assembly to serve for five years, and serve as an "enabling" committee to encourage and enable the PCA at every level to function as a missionary church. Their primary task is to assist in the planting of confessional churches. They also assist in recruiting candidates for mission service, oversee missionary training, and keep the home church aware and supportive of their missionaries.

Likewise, smaller denominations in NAPARC, such as the RCUS and HRC, have established denominational missions committees made up of ministers and elders. The Foreign Mission Committee of the RCUS is responsible to provide reports and recommendations to each annual synod, and then to carry out the program and budget approved by that synod. Membership on the committee is for three-year terms, staggered in order to maintain stability.

As our Committee researched the various approaches to missions taken by NAPARC denominations, it became clear that we could learn a great deal from the missions work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. While the OPC has a slightly different church polity from the URCNA, their coordination and cooperation in missions have so impressed us that we thought it would be important to provide at least a glimpse of their denominational infrastructure for missions.

The work of the OPC in missions is especially striking when one considers the origin of their denomination. In the early twentieth century, the corruption of foreign missions within the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) led J. Gresham Machen to establish an independent board for foreign missions. This culminated not only in his being deposed from the liberal denomination, but also in the eventual formation of the OPC, which has always maintained a vigorous witness to the world – and one that has not been hindered in the least but rather helped greatly by their denominational coordination. In other words, the OPC did not overreact against particular abuses in the PCUSA by ruling out or minimizing the importance of denominational missions committees. On the contrary, they have established denominational missions committees that have proven to be highly effective and efficient in the planting of churches at home and abroad.

The OPC has a plan for "Worldwide Outreach" that involves the work of three committees – the Committee on Christian Education, the Committee on Home Missions & Church Extension, and the Committee on Foreign Missions. For our purposes here we will take a look at the latter two committees. Both missions committees are composed of fifteen men (ruling and teaching elders) who are elected by the OPC General Assembly (akin to our synod), and accountable to that body for the work that they do. Committee members are elected to a term of three years and eligible for re-election indefinitely. Serving each of these two missions committees is a general secretary and an associate general secretary; all four men are ordained officers (teaching or ruling elders) and paid for full-time employment. The secretaries have no vote on their respective committees, are directly accountable to their committees, and serve at their committee's pleasure. It is noteworthy that the OPC hopes to get about twenty years of service from these four secretaries.

The Committee on Foreign Missions has some oversight of all missionaries in their nine active mission fields (China, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, Quebec, Uganda, Ukraine, and Uruguay), but this oversight is very general and administrative – setting goals for the missions, providing financial support, encouraging missionaries on furlough, and visiting missionaries on the field. All pastoral/disciplinary oversight, however, is in the hands of a missionary’s presbytery. The Foreign Missions committee also gives instruction to the denomination in biblical missionary principles, formulates mission policy, and encourages each presbytery to develop their own foreign missions committee (most presbyteries have one).

The Committee on Home Missions & Church Extension has partial oversight of those church plants to which it gives financial aid. Church plants that are not financially aided by this committee rely on the local giving of their attendees and of the presbytery to which they belong. Each OPC presbytery (akin to our classis) has its own home missions committee as well, which coordinates with the Committee on Home Missions for the work of church plants.

Funds for the support of all foreign missionaries and numerous domestic church plants, for the remuneration of the secretaries and administrative personnel who serve the two missions committees, and for the support of the Committee on Christian Education are provided by the regular monthly giving of OPC congregations to Worldwide Outreach. To meet the budget of Worldwide Outreach, most congregations simply make their contribution a line item in their own budget based on Worldwide Outreach’s suggested yearly amount for each communicant member. For 2012, the 3.5 million dollar budget of Worldwide Outreach translates to a suggested amount of \$162.66 per communicant member for the year. Each congregation also takes an annual Thank-Offering (usually around Thanksgiving) which also helps meet the budget of Worldwide Outreach. Again, these funds support all three committees of Worldwide Outreach, but about eighty percent of funds collected for OPC missions go directly to the mission field. This is a denomination that makes it a priority to ensure that its missionaries and church planters are fully funded.

2) Meeting

The Committee met on March 28-29, 2011, at Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, CA.¹⁵ In preparation for this meeting, the chairman assigned the study and research noted above. The Committee’s first item of main business was to review the mandate that was adopted at Synod London 2010. After discussing this, the Committee listened and responded to individual members present a synopsis of the mission policies of those NAPARC denominations he was assigned to research. The Committee then spent considerable time discussing and evaluating the BCVM. The chairman presented several questions for the Committee to address, such as: Does the Committee agree that points one through three in the BCVM are adequate for a proposed set of federational mission policies and guidelines? Is the Committee satisfied with the JVM proposed by the BCVM as a sufficient model for doing missions? Has it allowed churches to accomplish what it was designed to do, namely, “maintain the intimate relationship that the missionary has with his Consistory and his church, which at the same time...encourage the

¹⁵ All the Committee members were present with the exception of Rev. Kevin Efflandt, who was unable to attend due to extraordinary circumstances.

participation of sister churches in this effort?” Does the Committee believe that a synodical missions committee or missions coordinator would assist the churches to apply and follow Church Order Article 47 more responsibly? If such a synodical missions committee and/or coordinator were established, what would they be tasked to do and how would it operate under the oversight of local Consistories?

After an in-depth consideration of these questions, the Committee reached the consensus that points one through four of the BCVM formulate a solid biblical and theological foundation for missions. We have sought to build on that foundation and apply it to our present circumstances. Concerning point four of the BCVM, the Committee agreed that the JVM should remain in place as an option for any classis to use in its support of a particular mission work, whether foreign or domestic. It was duly noted, however, that the JVM has not been implemented for all mission works in our federation. In some cases where the work of church planting is being done within the URCNA, those involved in the work are not even familiar with the JVM. For some church-planters, missionaries, and overseeing Consistories, the BCVM is an unknown document. Thus, the Committee identified the need not only to establish federational mission policies and guidelines, but also to make them widely known in the URCNA. This task, however, seems to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, without the organization that a federational missions committee would provide. Without such a committee, we will have a greater tendency to function like Congregationalists in our mission efforts.

The Committee also recognized the necessity of developing a structure in addition to the JVM which will more adequately involve URCNA churches in the support of URCNA missions. The Committee believes that the establishment of such a structure will:

- encourage URCNA churches to follow more closely Article 47 of our Church Order;
- encourage URCNA churches to prioritize their giving to URCNA missions *over, above, and before* para-church organizations and non-URCNA (in some cases, non-Reformed) mission works;
- discourage disconnection of a missionary or church planter from the churches of the federation.

The Committee then deliberated at length over how to develop a proposed set of mission policies and guidelines for the URCNA. The chairman presented three possible scenarios of a shared URCNA strategy for missions, serving as a catalyst for the Committee’s discussion and an aid toward drafting a report. These scenarios included a missions coordinator (scenario one), a synodically appointed missions committee (scenario two), and a missions committee with federation-wide coordinated efforts for funding (scenario three).

The Committee discussed the possible advantages and disadvantages of each scenario, including how each model would encourage communication between URCNA churches, missionaries and church planters, maintain a URCNA missions website and newsletter, and keep churches abreast of the disparate financial needs of and pertinent information about URCNA missionaries and church planters. After much discussion and analysis, the Committee decided that a hybrid of scenarios one and two should be included in our proposed mission policies and

guidelines, namely, that synod appoint a standing missions committee, composed of ordained ministers and/or elders who are representatives of each classis, with a chairman who is a minister that functions as the missions coordinator for the federation.¹⁶

The Committee offers the following report to the churches with the earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit will use the United Reformed Churches in North America to make disciples of Christ to the ends of the earth. To that end, we also pray that the Lord would give us wisdom, passion, and courage in the planting of churches and support of missionaries so that we will fulfill his Great Commission. We are well aware that the mission work of preaching the gospel and establishing true churches through its power is part of the very essence of Christ's church. We pray that we will seek to do this work well and use wisely the time given to us in this life.

II. Fulfilling the Great Commission: A Proposal for a Shared Strategy in URCNA Missions

A. Policies

1) Biblical and Confessional Basis for Missions

a) Our Own History

As a relatively young denomination, it has been necessary to spend a great deal of time and energy to purge ourselves from the errors of a previous generation. This has been a painful but necessary process, so that we might be faithful to the scriptures and to our confessions. There must be a concern in every generation to keep the church faithful to the truth of God's Word. However, the church will not be kept pure if we neglect to do what God has commanded of us. The Lord has given his church a most strategic place in the history of the world. We must make every effort to work together in proclaiming the gospel, careful that our fear of a denominational hierarchy does not prevent us from joyfully working together in a fruitful manner, obedient to our Lord's commands. As one URCNA minister put it, "The zeal of those who formed the URCNA in the preservation of our inheritance must now lead us to zeal for the propagation of our inheritance."

¹⁶ Because the Committee did not choose scenario three as part of its report, a synopsis of that scenario is provided here. A synodically appointed missions committee would be responsible for encouraging the URCNA to give financially in a *shared strategy initiative*, which might run as follows: 1) The synodically appointed missions committee would encourage churches to give to a *shared strategy initiative* and raise annually a set dollar amount. 2) This money would be used to fund foreign and domestic church plants on a sliding scale basis set for a number of years. For example, a new church plant might be funded for four years at the rate of \$80,000 the first year, \$60,000 the second, \$40,000 the third, and \$20,000 the fourth to help get the work started. If 100 churches in our federation contributed \$4,000 annually, we could plant two new churches every year and provide them with financial aid for four years. 3) Potential missionaries and church planters, through their overseeing Consistories, could apply to the missions committee for funding. 4) The missions committee would review applications and be given authorization by synod to approve or deny funding based on a set of synodically approved criteria, such as: a) Number of core families in the initial group; b) potential financial viability within four years; c) recommendation of missionary by his Consistory and classis; d) perceived need in particular geographical area; e) priority of need in comparison to other applicants. Such a *shared strategy initiative* would enable the federation to work together in pooling funds and planting churches. Moreover, a sliding-scale of financial assistance over a set number of years would stimulate church plants with needed funds and encourage them to become self-supportive.

Eleven years have passed since Synod Escondido 2001 recommended the *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions* to the churches in order to encourage us to work together in reaching the world with the gospel. So far we have been very limited in effectively carrying out that task because we are not working together with all of our gifts and resources. With greater mutual support and encouragement throughout our federation, it seems we could accomplish so much more.

As federated churches we have bound ourselves to work together in reaching the nations with the gospel. The Church Order, Article 47, requires the churches “to preach the Word of God to the unconverted” and “assist each other in the support of their missionaries.” To that end, we propose that we make every effort to unify all of our resources (gifts, talents, and finances) as one united federation in order to bring the gospel from our homes and churches to the nations of the world. We envision that our proposal for a missions coordinator and a synodical missions committee, composed of representatives from every classis, will be an effective means of motivating and helping our churches to do the work the Lord has commanded us to do. It is our hope and prayer that this will be a great help and encouragement to our missionaries and to the elders of the sending churches.

Synod 2010 appointed us to evaluate the need for a missions coordinator, and to propose a set of federational mission policies and guidelines. We first summarize the biblical and confessional foundation on which our proposals rest.

b) God’s Mission

From beginning to end, the scriptures reveal clearly the heart that God has for his lost children, and his purpose to save sinners throughout the whole earth. In Genesis 3:9, immediately after Adam’s fall into sin, God called out, “Where are you?” not only to judge man but also to make the covenant of grace with him, promising to send a savior, the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Just as God clothed Adam and Eve in animal skins in order to cover their shame (Gen 3:21), so also he would cover all of his sinful people in the perfect righteousness of our Savior who would die for our sins (2 Cor 5:21).

The Lord later called Abraham, made the covenant of grace with him, and promised to bless Abraham and give him and his descendents the land of Canaan. From the very start, God revealed his purpose to use Abraham to bring salvation to people throughout the whole world: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3; cf. Gen 22:18).

Many generations later, fulfilling his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Lord God graciously delivered the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 6:2-8). Out of all peoples, God made them his treasured possession, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6). God’s purposes of salvation seemed for a time to become far narrower with Israel, as Moses reminded them: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day” (Deut 10:14-15). Still, in his very next breath, God called them to share his love with strangers: “He executes justice for the fatherless and the

widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Deut 10:18-19). This love of God for sojourners from other nations was demonstrated in a noteworthy manner in the inclusion of Rahab and her Canaanite family within the covenant people of Israel (Josh 6:22-25), and in the inclusion of Ruth the Moabite – both women being ancestors of Christ Jesus, our Savior (Mt 1:5).

Of course, God’s plan to bring salvation to the ends of the earth through the seed of the woman, who would also be the seed of Abraham, took on greater clarity in his covenant promises to King David, to whom God said, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12). The nations would have to bow down to this royal son of God, or else be broken with a rod of iron, and dashed into pieces through his just judgment (Ps 2:9). But in becoming the possession of this Davidic King through the redemptive grace of God, the nations would be blessed in him (Ps 72:17), for he would be their Savior, “a covenant for the people, a light for the nations” (Isa 42:6). To the Christ, God the Father says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

In the fullness of time, God the Father sent his eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be born of woman, to become a true man – the seed of the woman, of Abraham, and of David – that he might live, die, and rise again for our salvation (Gal 4:4ff). But he was slain in order to ransom people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation,” and he has made them “a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10). Throughout redemptive history, God has repeatedly shown that he would not abandon us in our sin but would provide for us a Savior. He has sought out sinners, repeatedly making promises of redemption by grace, which promises he has fulfilled in the person and work of Christ his Son.

c) The Church’s Mission

While redemption has been accomplished through the work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, it remains for that redeeming work of God to be applied to people throughout all the nations of the world. Reconciliation is likewise God’s saving work for sinners through the death of Christ, yet he includes us in the outworking of that reconciliation through the ministry of gospel preaching. “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18-20).

After he finished his work on earth and before he ascended into heaven, Christ commissioned his apostles, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18b-20). These words, known as the Great Commission, provide us with the authority, goal, means, and promise of the church’s mission to the world.

The Authority of the Church's Mission

The basis of the church's mission to the world is Christ's supreme authority. Before the Lord Jesus issued his command to "go," he gave the basis for that imperative in this indicative: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This is the first part of the Great Commission. The church's mission to make disciples is grounded in what God has already accomplished in *his* mission. As explained above, God is the original missionary and the whole Bible is, in one sense, a mission document. It reveals how the Father sent the Son to accomplish redemption for the elect, and how the Son subsequently sent the Spirit upon his church so that disciples would be made throughout the world. Thus, as the church seeks to fulfill her commission to make disciples, she does so in the power of the Holy Spirit and by the authority of the exalted Christ.

This should bring us tremendous encouragement as we engage in mission work and seek to plant churches on domestic and foreign soil. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Head of the church. He has authority to redeem a people for himself from all nations. He has authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom the Father gave to him (John 17:2). He will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). Our mission is to claim the prize which the Lord Jesus already won. The Spirit sends us to plant and water in the field that belongs to Christ, and Christ will ensure the increase, for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

The Goal of the Church's Mission

The reason Christ sends his church into the world by his authority is to make disciples: "Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations" (emphasis added). The main verb in this sentence is not "go" but "make disciples." Christ did not commission his church to make mere converts but to make disciples who are set apart by and devoted to Christ and the Christian faith. The life of Christian discipleship begins at baptism and continues in instruction from God's Word until death. Throughout their pilgrimage in the wilderness of this world, disciples are being nurtured in the faith, trained for good works, and sustained with the nourishment of the gospel.

In order for the lost and unbelieving to enter into the life of discipleship, however, they must first hear the gospel, for "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). It is therefore our duty, and highest calling as the church, to proclaim God's saving grace in Christ to the nations. But it is also a task we must be eager to fulfill, sharing with God a love for lost sinners. He is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9), for he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4; CD 2.5; 3/4.8).

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus gives us a striking picture of God's heart for sinners. The father was out on the road, waiting for his lost son to come home. While the son was yet a long way off, the father ran to embrace him, and called for celebration, saying, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24a). Indeed, there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. If we know the sacrifice the Father made for our

salvation, and if we know the Son loved us so much that he “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,” and “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8), we must then be compelled by the love of Christ to love lost sinners in the most important way – by calling them to repentance and to faith in Christ, the only Savior.

The Means of the Church’s Mission

Christ’s disciples are made through the ministry of his Word and sacraments. Jesus commissioned his church to baptize and teach: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you” (emphasis added). It is his Word about his victory that we are called as the church to announce to the world. We are subsequently to baptize those who receive that announcement, and to nourish believers with the Lord’s Supper and continual proclamation of the gospel. Thus, it is through the ordinary ministry of Word and sacrament that disciples are made, and then spiritually nurtured and equipped for good works.

This is clear from the way in which the apostles carried out the Great Commission. After receiving the power of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), they preached Christ (2:14-36), baptized believers with their children (2:37-41), and began meeting regularly with those who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). Thus, the first new covenant church was established.

The entire book of Acts goes on to describe how this pattern of planting churches continued, following Jesus’ prophecy that the apostles would be his witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). The apostles went throughout the world preaching the gospel, baptizing believers and their households, and planting churches where they appointed elders to oversee the new disciples (Acts 14:21-23). The church, therefore, is not only a people consisting of disciples from every nation, but it is also the place where people are continually being made disciples through the means of grace.

To that end, true churches must continue to be planted where few or none exist. As a federation of churches, we must be committed to the task of making disciples not only in our established congregations but also by planting new ones. Our missionary task, as our Church Order says in Article 47, “is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted,” which is often “performed beyond the field of an organized church.” Such an important task is “to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories.” Moreover, we recognize that this missionary task of calling URCNA ministers to plant churches takes priority over all other mission-related endeavors, for we have covenanted together that “the churches should assist each other in the support of their [i.e. URCNA] missionaries.”

At the same time, it is important that every member of our churches understands that reaching out to the lost world around us is not exclusively for ordained ministers or those church members who have a special interest in doing evangelism and missions. In Luke 8:39, we read that the man delivered from many demons begged Jesus if he could go with him. Jesus sent him

away with these words: “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” He did so, telling the whole city all that Jesus had done for him. In Acts we read that most of the believers in Jerusalem had to flee because of persecution, and those who were scattered went about Judea and Samaria proclaiming the gospel (Acts 8:1-4).

While God does supply his church with men especially called to and equipped for this task of preaching (Eph 4:11-12), redeemed sinners are all made witnesses of Christ, and should not be able to contain within themselves the good news of our gracious Savior. In gratitude we should all seek to bring glory to Christ by sharing his gospel with other sinners. It is not enough to confess Christ within the walls of the church, only before the elders and the congregation. Our Lord said, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32-33). We are called, then, not only to live as salt and light for him (Mt 5:13-16), but also to be prepared to speak to others about our hope in him (1 Pt 3:15).

If we do not remain committed to the primary means of fulfilling our mission by planting churches and evangelizing our neighbors, we will neglect the calling God has given the church. If we are not actively spreading the gospel to our neighbors, communities, and to our nation, then we are withholding the riches of God’s grace in Christ from sinners who have no other hope of salvation. And, as one URCNA church-planter said, “If we are not planting new churches at home and abroad, the Lord’s vineyard among us will wither and die.”

The Promise of the Church’s Mission

Just as his Great Commission to the church begins with an encouraging indicative, so also it ends with one: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20b). This should fill us with confidence as we evangelize our neighbors, send out missionaries, and plant churches. It should cause us to be unashamed of the gospel, and to have an urgency for the evangelization of the lost. Christ has promised to be with his church in all of his authority until the great day of his return. He has already been victorious in his conquest. Our task is to be faithful in announcing his victory throughout the world and instructing those who receive it.

Christ has not yet returned. He is still bringing the gospel to the nations and making his disciples throughout the world. And he continues to use ordinary local churches, even those in the URCNA.

d) God’s Mission and the Church’s Mission in Our Confessions

God’s mission is found repeatedly in our Three Forms of Unity. For example, we read in the Belgic Confession, Article 17:

We believe that our most gracious God, in his admirable wisdom and goodness, seeing that man had thrown himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself wholly miserable, was pleased to seek and comfort him when he trembling fled from his presence, promising him that he would give his Son, who would be born of a woman to bruise the head of the serpent and to make him blessed.

The blessing of salvation through God's Son is received only through faith in Christ. Article 24 reminds us that true faith is "wrought in man by the hearing of the word of God, and the operation of the Holy Spirit." We should have no expectation that sinners will be saved apart from the preaching of God's Word, and it is precisely for that reason that in a true church ministers or pastors are ordained for the pure preaching of the gospel (Articles 29 & 30).

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us in Q/A 21 that true faith comes from the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts by the gospel. Then again in Q/A 65 we are told how we obtain true faith: "From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments." Q/A 84 adds further weight to the preaching of the gospel by reminding us that through this primary means of grace the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers. Finally, Q/A 86 points out that the fruit of the gospel in the lives of believers, namely, their good works, helps win their neighbors to Christ.

The Canons of Dort remind us that "all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death" (First Head, Article 1), but that hope for sinners comes through God's gracious love, which moved him to send his Son to save all those who would believe in him (First Head, Article 2). Then Article 3 reminds us how we come to faith in Christ:

And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom he will and at what time he pleases; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15).

In the Second Head of Doctrine, Article 5 emphasizes how broadly the gospel should be preached to sinners: "Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel." (See also CD 3/4.8)

Of course, the ministry of gospel preaching is not given to the church only for bringing sinners into the church, but also for nurturing them and discipling them, as Christ commanded in the Great Commission. In the Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 14 provides a fitting conclusion to why the gospel needs to be preached continuously in all churches: "And as it has pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so he preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings and promises thereof, and by the use of the sacraments."

The Three Forms of Unity unite us together through faith in Christ our Savior, but they also stand to unite us in our mission to evangelize the lost world of sinners all around us.

e) Conclusion

So we see very clearly, both from the scriptures and our confessions, that we as the church of Jesus Christ must be planting churches, evangelizing, and preaching the gospel to the whole world. This is not optional but essential to being the church of Christ. If we neglect the evangelization of the nations, we will lose our identity as the church, which is called to be the salt of the earth. The Lord's warning in Mathew 5:13 is a very serious one: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." We must reach out with the good news of the gospel to those still in the slavery to sin. If we are slow to do this, it may be that we need to remember again how precious the gospel is that brought us salvation by God's grace. May we all recover the wonder of God's calling out to us through his Word and giving us everlasting life in Christ by grace alone. As one united federation of churches, may we be found faithful to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel, so that the name of the Lord be praised and glorified.

2) Priority of Support

Because the URCNA recognizes its obligation to fulfill the Great Commission, we have written and agreed to follow Article 47 of our Church Order which states:

The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories. The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries.

Having understood our Lord's mandate to us as his church, it is incumbent upon us that each local congregation is involved in sending out its own missionary or supporting another church within our federation who has called an ordained minister to preach the gospel to the unconverted. Since we have covenanted together to abide by our Church Order, it follows that we need to support one another financially in sending out URCNA missionaries both to the foreign and domestic fields rather than sending funds to other "mission" causes that are not under the authority of one of our Consistories.

Our obligation to URCNA missions is similar to the work of the deacons; they are mandated by God first to care for the needy within the congregation and then, as resources permit, they may help those outside the congregation (see Church Order Article 15; cf. Gal 6:10). In wisdom, we prioritize how we use the funds God has entrusted to us for acts of benevolence. Likewise, we must prioritize how we use the funds God has entrusted to us for missions. Since we are mandated by God to send our missionaries to the unconverted, we are obligated to support our own missionaries first. Every URCNA congregation, therefore, should financially support URCNA missionaries or church plants.

Moreover, every URCNA congregation should prioritize their giving to URCNA missions *over, above, and before* para-church organizations and non-URCNA mission works.

Because of our duty to fulfill the Great Commission and our obligation to our missionaries as articulated in Church Order Article 47, URCNA congregations should not fund para-church organizations or non-URCNA mission works if URCNA missionaries or church plants are lacking funds. It is essential that we have our priorities properly ordered.

3) Synodical Missions Committee with Missions Coordinator

a) Grounds for Forming a Synodical Missions Committee and Chairman-coordinator

In order to facilitate greater coordination and cooperation of mission efforts within the URCNA, this study committee recommends the formation of a federational missions committee composed of seven elders/ministers, each representing a classis, and an eighth man who serves as the committee's chairman and fulltime coordinator of home and foreign missions. The formation of this committee responds to:

- our need to work together as federated churches, as required by the scriptures, our confessions and our Church Order;
- the substantial growth in the scope of domestic and foreign mission activities of URCNA member congregations and classes;
- the sense of standing alone that exists among many of our member congregations, missionaries and church planters;
- the desire of URCNA churches to be more effective in fulfilling our Lord's Great Commission.

The URCNA historically has had an aversion to the use of standing committees in general, and to the use of any denominational mission board in particular. Article 47 of our Church Order expresses our shared conviction that it is the Consistory of the local church that directly calls, sends, and supervises the ordained servant for the ministry of the Word in any missionary effort. There is much consensus amongst our churches that this direct relationship between the local Consistory and its missionary should remain intact. In other words, there is general agreement within our federation that a synodical missions board should not exist to replace the missionary task given to the local Consistory as outlined in Church Order Article 47.

The same article, however, also states that our "churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries." To that end, Synod Escondido 2001 received a report from our first study committee on missions that proposed the use of a Joint Venture Model of doing missions. Since that time certain Consistories have established JVM missions committees which typically consist of representatives from the councils and/or membership of other supporting churches in the classis to which the calling/sending Consistory belongs. While the local Consistory continues to be the calling, sending, and supervising body for any mission work, JVM missions committees have facilitated greater cooperation, coordination, and encouragement from other churches and have been used and blessed by God for the greater support of various missionaries.

But not all of our calling/sending Consistories that have engaged in missionary efforts are making use of JVM within their respective classes. Consequently, many other churches within our federation are not as involved in the support of our missionaries as they could be, and some of our missionaries are not receiving the support they need and could be receiving. It is for this reason that our federation, while not replacing the JVM, and while not usurping the missionary tasks given to the local Consistory as outlined in Article 47, should implement a synodical missions committee that will function as an informational and communicative body (comparable to other synodical committees, such as CERCU and CECCA), to the end that all of our churches and classes are more closely connected to our missionaries and their calling/sending Consistories.

We believe that a combination of committee and coordinator will best meet the needs of greater cooperation in missions. A committee without a fulltime coordinator would likely not have the ability to adequately discharge the matters committed to it. The need for regular and sustained communication regarding mission efforts in the federation calls for a greater level of involvement than may be possible for the average committee member. A coordinator without a committee would likely be overwhelmed with the work and could possibly fail to represent the churches and their classes in the work of missions coordination.

b) Functions and Tasks of the Synodical Missions Committee

- (1) The committee would function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations by doing the following:
 - (a) obtaining updates from the missionaries and church planters for publication in the missions newsletter and missions page of the URCNA.org website;¹⁷
 - (b) ascertaining and remaining abreast of the disparate financial needs of missionaries and disseminate pertinent information to URCNA councils (e.g., location, family, nature & needs of a particular ministry);
 - (c) generally promoting the cause of missions in the URCNA in a way that consistently represents our commitment to function as a covenanted body;
 - (d) gathering information about the work of missions and church planting which could be contributed to a manual of helpful guidelines to assist Consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of missions (this is addressed more specifically below).
 - (e) producing a report on the work of URCNA missions to each synod.

¹⁷ The Committee recommends that the misionsurc.org website be discontinued and a webpage on the urcna.org website be developed for all URCNA mission work, both home and abroad, as is done successfully in other NAPARC denominations such as the OPC and PCA.

- (f) having copies of the *Biblical and Confessional Basis for Missions*, along with the missions Policies and Guidelines, printed in booklet form and made available to all the churches.

(2) Specific Tasks of Committee members:

- (a) Committee members shall assist the Chairman-coordinator in the execution of his tasks; this shall include an annual review of the labors of the Chairman-coordinator to be given to his Consistory and to synod;
- (b) Committee members shall report to their respective classes on the work of the committee;
- (c) Committee members shall maintain contact with domestic and foreign missionaries within their respective classes;
- (d) Committee members shall request financial data pertaining to support of missions from the churches of their respective classes. This financial data will be published to the churches along with amount of money needed to support URCNA missions (in terms of total monies allocated to missions within the federation; the churches providing these monies will not be identified).¹⁸

(3) Chairman-Coordinator:

- (a) The Chairman of the missions committee will serve as the coordinator of mission related communication for the URCNA;
- (b) The Chairman-coordinator shall maintain contact with domestic and foreign missionaries;
- (c) He shall maintain contact with calling churches for current needs and financial status of their mission work;
- (d) He shall encourage congregations to support financially foreign and domestic missionaries and remind them of the priority of such works with respect to para-church organizations;
- (e) He shall coordinate with the URCNA stated clerk for official correspondence from missionaries and their requests for funding from churches;
- (f) He shall visit missionaries periodically for encouragement, exhortation, and preaching/teaching/counseling, in order to assist the calling churches and missionaries as requested by either party;

¹⁸ This could be done in a fashion similar to the OPC in their *New Horizons* magazine, in which they publish quarterly pie graphs indicating amount of money needed to sustain foreign and domestic missions. As many ministers, church-planters and foreign missionaries attest, congregations are more likely to respond to such published information than to individual requests from missionaries.

- (g) He shall maintain a missions webpage on URCNA.org (the official website); the missions webpage may include the following:
- i. A media library of URCNA and NAPARC resources relating to missions for the benefit of the churches. Updates relating to the missionaries and church planters under consistorial oversight within the federation;
 - ii. Links to the websites of missionaries and church planters under consistorial oversight within the federation;
 - iii. The Chairman-coordinator shall produce and disseminate to all churches the official federational missions newsletter;
 - iv. The Chairman-coordinator may assist the churches/classes with the organization and promotion of missions conferences;
 - v. The Chairman-coordinator may assist in mission trips and other needs of mission works as requested by missionaries and their overseeing Consistories;
 - vi. The Chairman-coordinator may inform churches when a missionary is available for a call.

c) Qualifications for Synodical Missions Committee Members

(1) For committee members:

- (a) Committee members must be ordained ministers or elders.¹⁹
- (b) Committee members should have experience with missions, foreign or domestic.
- (c) Committee members should possess communication skills, particularly in the utilization of technology.

(2) For Chairman-coordinator:

- (a) The Chairman-coordinator must be an ordained minister of Word.
- (b) The Chairman-coordinator should have had personal experience and direct involvement in planting a church, foreign and/or domestic.
- (c) The Chairman-coordinator should show strength in both pastoral ministry and administrative skills.
- (d) The Chairman-coordinator should possess communication skills, particularly in the utilization of technology.
- (e) The Chairman-coordinator must be able to devote a significant amount of time to the work committed to him.

¹⁹ Ordained elders implies that the elder is serving in the term determined by his Consistory.

d) Appointment of Members

(1) Committee Members:

(a) Number of appointees: One representative shall be appointed to represent each classis of the federation, along with one alternate per classis.

(b) Means of appointment:

- i. Each classis shall appoint an elder or minister to serve as their representative.
- ii. Until the committee's Chairman-coordinator is appointed at a synod meeting, any committee member may be elected by the committee to serve as chairman *pro-tem*.²⁰

(c) Term of appointment:

- i. The term of service for committee members shall be three years.
- ii. Each committee member shall be eligible to serve up to three terms.

(2) Chairman of committee:

(a) Means of appointment:

- i. Each classis is encouraged to nominate a minister of the Word for the position of Chairman-coordinator of the Synodical Missions Committee.
- ii. From the pool of nominees synod shall elect a Chairman-coordinator for the Synodical Missions Committee.

(b) Term of appointment:

- i. The term of Missions Committee Chairman-coordinator shall be the period between the meeting of two consecutive synods following the synod meeting at which he is appointed.
- ii. Missions Committee Chairman-coordinators shall be eligible to serve up to three terms.

²⁰ This provision is included since, as recommended, the committee would be authorized by synod and the positions filled by subsequent Classes before the fulltime coordinator could be nominated and chosen by a subsequent synod.

B. Guidelines

The Missions Committee shall develop a manual of helpful guidelines to assist Consistories, church planters and missionaries in the day-to-day activity of the work of missions. This manual might include the following:

1) Guidelines for Compensation and Benefits

- a) Pay
- b) Housing
- c) Missionary's health care/insurance
- d) Professional expenses
 - (1) car
 - (2) office equipment
 - (3) other
- e) Retirement

2) Guidelines for Sabbatical/Home Assignment

- a) Purpose of sabbatical/home assignment
- b) Suggestions for frequency of sabbatical/home assignment
- c) Suggestions for activities to be involved in:
 - (1) ordination/installation
 - (2) professional development
 - (3) preparing teaching material for the field

3) Guidelines and Policies for Cases of Unusual Situations

- a) Kidnapping
- b) Death threats
- c) Civil disruption
- d) Disease
- e) Natural Disasters

4) Guidelines and Suggestions for Filling Out Immigration Papers

5) Other Specific Guidelines

- a) Personal grievances between missionaries
- b) Whistleblower policies
- c) Sexual harassment
- d) Death

C. Budget

The finances required for this shared strategy should include an annual compensation package for the Chairman-coordinator similar to that of other URCNA ministers (i.e. salary, housing, medical benefits, retirement, etc.), as well as expenses for travel and website management. These costs could be met by federation-wide contributions to the synodical budget and/or the support of the Chairman-coordinator's calling church. Additional finances may also be needed to defray expenses for the Missions Committee for website management, literature, communication and travel.

1) Suggested Budget for Synodical Missions Committee

Annual meeting	\$6,000
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2) Suggested Budget for Chairman-coordinator²¹

Salary	\$40,000 - \$60,000
Housing	\$10,000 - \$30,000
Medical	\$6,000 - \$20,000
Retirement	\$4,000 - \$6,000
Office	\$4,000
Office equipment	\$2,000
Communication/phone	\$4,000
Travel	\$15,000
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	\$85,000 - \$141,000

²¹ As with any call of a minister, the compensation package for the Chairman-coordinator will depend upon many circumstances, such as cost of living in the city where he resides, number of dependents, etc.

III. Summary and Conclusion

As a federation of churches, we have the ability to reach the lost and make disciples within our communities and throughout the world. Yet, we have reached the point where we must establish a set of policies for missions if we are to act responsibly in our commitment to the Great Commission. We need a shared strategy that will enable us to be more effective in planting churches on domestic and foreign soil. As a Committee, we are convinced that this set of proposed policies and guidelines represents an important step in that direction. Appointing a Missions Committee and Chairman-coordinator will help us share a common vision and effort for missions, making us more wise with our resources and reliable in our communication. Similar structures in other NAPARC denominations (such as the OPC in particular) have proven to be efficient in funding their missionaries and planting more churches. May God provide us with the wisdom, passion, and courage we need to make disciples throughout the world until our Lord's return.

IV. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Michael Brown (chair) and Rev. Jody Lucero (clerk) as well as any other members of the study committee present during the discussion of this report.
- B. That synod adopt this report as the mission policies for the URCNA so that churches may begin implementing it immediately.
- C. That synod appoint the study committee to serve as the interim Missions Committee until the next synod (at which time synod would form the Missions Committee proper through election of its members).