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This report from the Committee to Study Christian Day School Education is being sent to CRC congregations and classes for review. All responses to this report must be in the form of an Overture or Communication to Synod 2005. Such documents must be processed through a church council and classis before it is received by synod.

If you have any questions regarding proper procedures, please contact:

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I. Executive summary

From the beginning of its nearly 150-year history, the Christian Reformed Church has been identified with a strong and enthusiastic commitment to Christian day school education. This active support is stated as an expectation for officebearers in Church Order article 71 and has been regularly confirmed by synodical statements and decisions, the last one in 1955. Since then, however, the CRC has witnessed significant changes within its North American environment. Synod 2000 therefore asked our committee to consider the cultural, ethnic, and demographic changes in our society, particularly as they affected funding, when it appointed us to prepare another report on the CRC's tradition of support for Christian day school education.

As we reflected on the changes since 1955, we concluded that the present context is a golden opportunity to proclaim to the world beyond the CRC the good news of Christ's lordship over education. Grateful for the growing diversity in the CRC and the new mission opportunities presented to us by our pluralistic society, we also recognized that the increasing availability of educational choice and the rising cost of Christian day school education present us with formidable challenges. Taking all this into account, in our report to Synod 2003, we proposed that, in addition to the venerable biblical-theological building blocks of covenant and kingdom, we consider evangelism-mission as a third foundational principle.

The addition of evangelism-mission as a third ground for Christian day school education also addresses an oft-heard criticism of Reformed Christian day schools, namely that they isolate our children and our communities and make us introverted rather than outward-looking and mission-minded. We acknowledge that this *can* be, though it need *not* be, an unintended consequence of Reformed Christian day schools. Consequently, we asked synod to challenge the CRCNA and its member congregations to provide financial assistance to students and families "who will contribute to greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, race, ethnicity, special needs)" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 627). We also recommended that synod "urge CRC church councils to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 626).

When Synod 2003 dealt with our report, it adopted these recommendations and reconfirmed the CRC's commitment to Reformed Christian day school education along with the principle of broad-based church support for it. As a ground for this commitment, synod posited the covenantal principle that

“Christian day school education is both a communal church responsibility and a parental commitment” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 626). Synod also recognized that local congregations and groups of congregations need to apply this principle in ways that are sensitive to local needs and issues. However, Synod 2003 also asked our committee to continue its work and to address in greater detail three issues:

- a) The nature of the churches’ commitment to Reformed Christian schools and the churches’ work of evangelism;
- b) The means by which small churches can fulfill their baptismal vows as it relates to Christian day school education;
- c) The nature of divisions and brokenness in churches where not all families have equal resources, commitment, and sensitivities regarding Christian day schools.

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 630, 631)

The report we now present to synod and the Christian Reformed Church takes its departure from this new additional assignment, anticipating the more detailed discussion of our new context and the current challenges facing Reformed Christian education later in section VI. The fundamental changes we describe in the world have to do with an increasingly secular society and culture, the growing availability of educational choice to parents, and the greater diversity and resultant push for the Christian Reformed Church itself to become more outward directed and evangelistically minded. The CRC sometimes feels itself torn between pressure to focus inward in order to maintain its own identity as a Reformed confessional body and a competing push to reach out even if that means minimizing Reformed distinctiveness.

In that context, keeping biblical theological principles clearly before us and making our definitions explicit and our terms clear became the first order of the day. In particular, we attempt to clarify the proper relationship among the responsibilities of the family, the church, and the Christian school in light of Church Order Article 71 and the doctrine of sphere sovereignty. In addition, we propose a definition of evangelism-mission to guide our discussion. Evangelism should be seen as a task distinct from the broader Christian vocation that is part of the mission of the kingdom of God; evangelism is explicit gospel communication for the express purpose of calling people to conversion and discipleship.

Thus, after a section in which we reflect on our committee’s mandate in the light of Synod 2003’s decisions (section III), we devote two major sections to outlining the history of the CRC’s support for Christian day school education, particularly the key decisions of synods over the years (section IV), and provide a summary synthesis of the biblical-theological convictions that undergird it (section V). From the history, we see that the CRC has not only consistently supported the cause of Christian day schools as a principle but has also repeatedly reaffirmed active *church* involvement and support by requiring officebearers to promote the cause as well as various means of financial support for parents. The history of synodical pronouncements on the matter shows a real sensitivity to changing circumstances and needs; there is significant development and growth in the understanding of Christian education in the mission of God’s people in the world.

The biblical-theological principles undergirding Christian day school education begin with the covenant and over time also increasingly emphasize the kingdom of God. Our committee considers these themes to be still valid and essential but also judges that the circumstances of our age especially require us to consider evangelism-mission as a third building block. We judge this especially important in light of our heightened sensitivity to our calling as a denomination to be more mission minded and outward directed. This proper biblical mandate is sometimes set over against the vocation of Christian day school education that is then seen as being inward directed and concentrated only on “our” children. We judge this to be a mistake and suggest biblical-theological as well as practical reasons why we think so. Judging that the school itself has a missiological purpose, we place this whole discussion in a comprehensive *narrative* framework, the story of God and his people, providentially plotted as Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation.

With that framework in place, we examine the changed circumstances of our day in comparison with the most recent previous synodical statement on Christian education in 1955 (section VI). In short, the CRC has become more diverse; the world has become more secular. This places a twofold pressure on education. On the one hand Reformed Christian education is challenged to renew its vision and bring on board as committed supporters CRC members who may not share the denomination’s history and memory or understanding. On the other hand, the legal secularization of our public square has especially affected public education and multiplied dissent from it, with growing choice of alternative schools and homeschooling.

We judge that while these changed circumstances present interesting and demanding challenges, this is above all a time of golden opportunity for Reformed Christian education. In an aggressively secular society, the very existence of Christian schools at all levels is an evangelistic witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as increasing numbers of evangelical Christians take up the cause of Christian education and start alternative schools, the Reformed community with its long and rich tradition of theology and practice in Christian education has a responsibility to share the riches God has given it. The responsibility here is compounded by the fact that there is growing missiological awareness among other evangelical Christians, notably those in the Pentecostal tradition, that the enterprise of world missions today very definitely needs Christian education at all levels, especially Christian higher education. Our Reformed tradition has a rich history of reflection and practice here that can be a real blessing to the worldwide mission of the Christian church in the third millennium.

This situation does mean, however, that Reformed Christians, and especially parents, are called to exercise great discernment in establishing, supporting, and sending their children to schools to be educated. Clarifying the distinctive character of Reformed Christian day school education is important and so is vigilance in seeing to it that Reformed Christian schools measure up to biblical standards of inclusion. Where boundaries and obstacles based on economic or class status, race and ethnicity, or ability prevent some of God’s children from enjoying the benefits of Christian education, something is not the way it’s supposed to be. This may be part of the reason why, in the survey

we commissioned of CRC members about Christian education (section VI, B, 6), in addition to finding some erosion of awareness about Reformed identity, we found that financial need is the reason most commonly cited by parents for not sending their children to a Christian school.

In section VII, as instructed by Synod 2003, we address the special circumstances and considerations of congregational conflict, small churches, and the relationship between the church's commitment to Christian day schools and to evangelism. We believe that it is important to place these issues in context: not only have each of these matters been addressed by previous synods and by other church bodies, but also conflicts about Christian education should be seen and dealt with in the same way other issues of congregational conflict are. After a discussion of these matters, we propose that synod adopt a series of resolutions as advice to small churches in particular, noting that much of this advice also applies to all CRC congregations (Recommendation J). We judge it helpful to consider smaller churches as one more example of genuine diversity in the CRC.

The relationship between our commitment to evangelism and to Christian education has historical precedent in the decisions of Synod 1953 with respect to the native schools in New Mexico. Principles and strategies proposed then are still valuable, and our detailed recommendations for North America, Reformed universities and colleges, and world missions (Recommendations M-P) attempt to apply these principles to our current situation.

Our report concludes (section VII, D; section VIII; Appendices A, B, and C) with a detailed discussion and advice to the churches for developing congregationally based plans of financial support for Christian education. We advocate no specific plan but specify the parameters and guidelines that should be followed by the churches in implementing such plans.

Note: Throughout the report we insert FAQs (frequently asked questions) that provide short summaries of the main text, that address specific questions we anticipate, or that address questions that have already been posed to our committee. The specific questions are not quotations or direct citations of conversations or questions but the literary creation by the committee for purposes of informing and illuminating the report. These FAQs will be inserted at key points in the report. This background will help readers understand the character of the questions as well as the answers.

II. Introduction

A. *Original mandate 2001*

Synod 2001 appointed the Committee to Study Christian Day School Education in response to several overtures and a communication from various classes. The original mandate of the committee reads as follows:

That synod appoint a study committee with the mandate to study the support for distinctively Reformed Christian day schools by the Christian Reformed denomination and its local congregations, to solicit input from local congregations, and to report to Synod 2003. The study will specifically include:

- a. The biblical, theological, and confessional bases for Christian day schools;
- b. The responsibility of a congregation in relation to its promise made at baptism;
- c. Other means by which the Christian Reformed denomination and the local congregations can concretely fulfill this baptismal vow.

Grounds:

- a. The Christian Reformed Church synod has not reaffirmed its commitment to Christian day school education since 1955. Since 1955, significant changes have occurred culturally, ethnically, and demographically in our society.
- b. Unique challenges face congregational members because of rising tuition costs.
- c. Diversities of income hold the potential for creating tension within a congregation around the issue of Christian day schools.
- d. New members brought into a congregation may find it a challenge to enroll their children in Christian day schools.
- e. This study will help congregations fulfill Church Order Article 71 regarding Christian day school education.

(Acts of Synod 2001, p. 447)

B. Analysis of original mandate 2001

An analysis of the original mandate with its three points and its grounds indicate that the study ought to:

1. Provide a biblical and confessional rationale as to why the CRC denomination and its local congregations should continue to support Christian day schools or why such support is no longer warranted.
2. Clarify the relationship between a congregation's baptismal vow and its support for Christian day schools or for parents who send their children to Christian day schools.
3. Take into account cultural, ethnic, and demographic changes in our society and the CRC since 1955.
4. Consider the ramifications of rising tuition costs to parents as well as the wider diversities of income among church members. This leads to a consideration of what financial supports for Christian day schools a church ought to consider.
5. Consider how the church should promote Christian education. This includes recovering the vision and rekindling the passion of CRC members and orienting new members who are not familiar with the church's traditional support for Christian day schools.
6. Provide advice to the church, not the Christian day school. Nevertheless, the deliberate inclusion of the term *Reformed* as an adjective describing the Christian day school (the inclusion of his term was debated on the floor of synod and left in by motion) raises the question of what criteria if any a Christian day school should meet in order for the CRC to consider it for support.
7. Consider how the issue of parents who homeschool their children should be considered by the church.

C. *The decisions of Synod 2003 and the additional mandate to our committee*

Our committee reported to Synod 2003 and asked synod to commend our report to the churches for study and implementation and “declare the work of the committee completed” (Recommendations O and P, *Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 364). We are grateful that synod adopted the majority of our recommendations, including the reaffirmation of the CRC’s commitment to Christian education; the theological foundations of covenant, kingdom, and mission; and the communal responsibility of financial support for Christian education. Recognizing the diverse ways in which this support could be manifested and the primary responsibility of parents for Christian education, Synod 2003 also adopted our recommendation for a rewording of Church Order Article 71. Our final report to Synod 2005 includes the following narrative context for these recommendations adopted by Synod 2003 but does not resubmit those recommendations already adopted:

2. That synod give thanks to God for the blessing of more than a century of Reformed Christian education provided by CRCNA members and for the many dedicated parents, teachers, administrators, and supporters who have labored faithfully and sacrificially during this time.
3. That synod, while respecting the various educational choices made in good faith by families, reaffirm the Christian Reformed Church’s commitment to and promotion of Christian day school education from the elementary level through college and university.
4. That synod reaffirm that the Reformed emphasis on the covenant and the kingdom of God are foundational for Reformed Christian schools and affirm that mission is an additional foundational block for Reformed Christian schools.

Grounds:

- a. Covenant, kingdom, and mission together form the narrative of God’s plan of salvation history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation.
 - b. *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* publicly professes that education is part of “the mission of God’s people” (paragraph 50).
 - c. This is consistent with the decision of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA to adopt a strategy that includes “Christian day school education in a full-orbed CRCNA mission program” (BOT Minute 2592, 3).
7. That synod urge CRC church councils to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education. Congregations should seek professional legal and tax accounting advice when drafting such plans.

Grounds:

- a. Christian day school education is both a communal church responsibility and a parental obligation.
 - b. A covenantal intergenerational financial support plan for the Christian day school education of all the children in a congregation is a fitting response to the vow made by the congregation when a child is baptized.
 - c. This flows naturally from the mutual stewardship and accountability that characterizes healthy congregations.
 - d. Financial difficulty should not be a barrier that prevents church members from sending their children to a Christian day school.
8. That synod encourage CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race, ethnicity, special needs).

Ground: This is consistent with the CRC's commitment to greater diversity as reflected in synod's adoption of the study committee report from the Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God (see *Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 595-619).

10. That synod request CRC Publications to provide the following educational materials for use by the churches:
 - a. Material for new-member orientation that includes, among other things, the position of the CRCNA on Christian day schools.
 - b. Diaconal training material to help churches in preparing and implementing plans for the communal financing of Christian schooling.
11. That synod instruct the general secretary of the CRCNA to send official correspondence to the President and to representatives of the U.S. Congress, as well as to state governments and state legislators, calling on them to enact legislation that makes education choice without financial penalty available to families with school-age children. Similar letters are to be sent by the Canadian Director of Ministries to the Canadian provincial governments where appropriate.

Grounds:

- a. There is ample precedent for synod to make official resolutions (re "church burning," *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 542) or to direct official correspondence to appropriate governments and their leaders (re "abortion," *Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 528; "partial birth abortions," *Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 608).
 - b. Such a communication is consistent with the historic CRC position on funding for Christian day schools. A specific precedent was set in 1975 when synod sent a lengthy communication to the President of the United States pleading the same case. (A copy of the 1975 letter is provided in Appendix C.)
 - c. Educational choice is a matter of social justice. CRC members who have the resources are able to provide a Christian day school education for their children. It is the poor who suffer the most from lack of educational choice.
 - d. With the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2002 declaring that the Cleveland, Ohio, voucher plan is constitutional and an administration that favors school choice, the time is ripe for encouraging the United States government to act on this matter.
 - e. Because the situation in Canada is different from the United States (education is exclusively a provincial matter and some provinces do grant some aid to Christian schools), communicating with the provincial authorities is required and should be handled by the Canadian denominational office.
12. That synod encourage CRC members to make the matter of school choice and educational justice a matter of priority prayer and action.

Grounds: See Grounds c and d in Recommendation 11 above.

13. That synod propose to the churches the following reworded Article 71 of the Church Order:

The council shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools where the Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation is clearly taught. The council shall urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with this vision according to the demands of the covenant.

Grounds:

- a. Christian Reformed parents today have many more educational choices available to them than they did fifty years ago. The revision of Article 71 provides needed guidance to councils and parents about the educational vision and curricular content of Reformed Christian education in establishing and maintaining Reformed Christian day schools as well as for other choices such as homeschools or charter schools.
 - b. On the basis of surveys (see section III, C of this report), there appears to be an erosion of support for Article 71 of the Church Order. The present wording assumes that a clear understood consensus exists in the CRC with respect to Reformed confessional identity as well as its implications for Christian education. This assumption cannot be made today. The rewording both clarifies what is meant by Reformed Christian education and allows for flexibility in its implementation.
 - c. It is important that the Church Order articulate clearly the content and scope of the education that is desired for its present and future leadership and continuing membership. The CRC's Reformed character, its membership, and its potential to evangelize and grow as a *Reformed church* is linked to the flourishing of distinctive Reformed Christian education at all levels from elementary through university.
14. That synod urge pastors and councils to encourage the young people of their churches to attend Reformed Christian institutions of higher learning whenever possible.

Grounds:

- a. Our survey of pastors and councils suggests that the percentage of CRC young people who attend Christian colleges is perilously low. If so, this has profound implications for the future membership of the CRC. Studies (such as Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul*) suggest that an erosion of distinct confessional identity in college-level education has a noticeable negative effect on the church's retaining its educated young people and future leaders.
- b. The number of CRC young people attending college and university today is far greater than it was in 1955. A college education is as important today as a completed high school education may have been in 1955. In 1936, synod had the foresight to include high schools in its definition of Christian day school education, in spite of the fact that the "median years of school completed" for the adult population in the United States at that time was only about 8.5 years (U.S. Census Bureau). We should show equivalent foresight today when the vast majority of our Christian school graduates are going on to college.
- c. In the CRC's mission and vision statement, many of the areas listed call for "deeper understanding." That demands college-level study (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 630).
- d. It is important that the Church Order articulate clearly the content and scope of the education that is desired for its present and future leadership and continuing membership. The CRC's Reformed character, its membership, and its potential to evangelize and grow as a Reformed church is linked to the flourishing of distinctive Reformed Christian education at all levels from elementary through university.
- e. Although blessed beyond measure by their Christian education, many eighteen-year-olds are simply not at a point where they are able to fully understand, embrace, or articulate why Christian education is both essential for them personally and essential to the CRC. We need our colleges to carry on this task.

(Recommendations from 2003 report adopted by synod,
Acts of Synod 2003, pp. 619-20, 626, 627-30)

Synod 2003, however, judged that our report was not ready to be sent to the churches, did not dismiss our committee, and instead gave us an additional assignment with the following mandate:

That synod mandate the committee to augment its study by including three additional matters and request that the committee conclude their study by September 15, 2004, so that their work can be sent to the churches in advance of synod and appear in the printed agenda for Synod 2005. These three matters are:

- a. The nature of the relationship between the churches' commitment to Reformed Christian schools and the churches' work of doing evangelism, specifically including the following areas:
 - 1) Reformed Christian day schools in the United States.
 - 2) Reformed Christian day schools in Canada.
 - 3) Reformed Colleges and universities.
 - 4) The role of Christian education in world missions.

Grounds:

- 1) The specific issue of how Christian schools and their support relate to the call to reach out evangelistically to "gather God's growing family" is critical to the future of both the educational and evangelistic commitments of the church.
 - 2) This issue (Ground 1) has not been directly addressed in the current report. While the important work of training church members for mission is included, the relationship between the churches' commitments to missions and to Christian day schools has not been sufficiently explored.
- b. The means by which small isolated churches can fulfill their baptismal vows as it relates to Christian day school education.

Grounds:

- 1) The current report was written primarily with clusters of churches as its context. However, many small and/or isolated churches may require different means to fulfill their baptismal vows.
 - 2) The unique context and struggles of small, isolated churches should be addressed by the denomination.
- c. The nature of divisions and brokenness in churches, where not all families have equal resources, commitments, and sensitivities regarding Christian day school.

Grounds:

- 1) This was the original intent of the introduction of Overture 9 (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 438-39.)
- 2) Recommendation 3 of the advisory committee does not adequately address this significant concern.

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 630-31)

D. Renewed vision

The language given in our *original* synodical mandate to provide the "biblical, theological and confessional bases for Christian day schools" was the occasion for considerable discussion by our committee. We understand this instruction not as a requirement to provide specific proof texts for Christian day schools from either Scripture or the Three Forms of Unity but to direct us in a more general way to an ecclesiastical rather than a sociological or strictly practical financial study. In other words, we seek to provide a rationale for Christian day school education that flows naturally from a biblically and

confessionally informed Reformed worldview and vision of Christian discipleship. Our argument, in sum, is that the nurture of children in the believing community is a covenantal responsibility of both the parents and the larger community. Though some parents do home school their children, the necessity of a formal, institutional day school education remains for the community as a whole. In that case, covenantal demands point to a school that fully shares the faith commitments of parents and the Christian community. Furthermore, the Reformed conviction about the kingdom of God and Christ's lordship over all creation requires education that honors Christ's lordship. That, in sum, is the biblical, Reformed confessional, theological vision that flows from the Reformed understanding of Scripture (see *Agenda for Synod 2002*, pp. 63-89).

FAQ 1.1: Aren't parents the only ones who are responsible for the education of their children? How can any other person or institution, especially such powerful entities as the state and the church, intervene in that duty without serious damage to the family unit?

A: Yes, parents are the ones who are given first and primary responsibility and authority by God for the nurture and education of their children. However, the state and the church also have their own respective responsibilities in this area. The state has a justice obligation to see to it that *all* children of *all* citizens have an equal opportunity to the good education parents desire for their children as well as to protect children from abusive and harmful forms of education, even in the home. The church, in its proclamation and teaching, provides families and society with biblical norms for living that are focused on God. As the body of Christ in the world, the church preaches, teaches, and practices neighbor love. In this, it shares the state's concern for justice, equal opportunity, and protection of children.

Even with some shared concerns, however, state and church use quite different means. The state has the legitimate coercive power to tax citizens so that there will be good schools available without penalty and barrier to all children in the community. The church uses preaching and moral suasion to encourage parents and citizens to do their respective duties. That is the reason the CRC has historically, *as a church*, supported Christian day schools. To argue that this is somehow inappropriate because parents are the responsible educators of children rather than the church would mean that the same argument should be made for government-mandated public schools being a violation of parental authority.

We took it as our task to make a renewed affirmation of this Reformed vision for our times. One additional point of clarification should be made here. The traditional emphasis in the Christian Reformed Church on the covenant as the ground for Christian day school education has two inseparable but still distinct components: the vows of parents and the vows of the congregation. Failure to note that distinction will result in confusion about our committee's mandate and conclusions. The baptism of children is, in the Reformed tradi-

tion, rooted in covenant. The baptismal vow made by parents is undeniably rooted in the covenant, and there is no debate about the responsibility thus accepted by parents to nurture their children in the faith. Historically, for the CRC and for many Reformed Christian parents today, the implication of this covenant belief and commitment means Christian day school education.

However, as we shall demonstrate in section IV of our report, the CRC as a denomination has, through its synods, also repeatedly affirmed the *communal*, covenantal character of Christian nurture of covenant youth. This communal, covenantal dimension of infant baptism is made explicit in the CRC liturgical form for infant baptism when the congregation is asked: “Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?” What the congregational vow undoubtedly primarily has in mind is the faith nurture of children that takes place within the institutional church (Sunday school, catechism, youth groups). There are good reasons, however, for understanding this vow as extending to Christian day school education. In the Reformed understanding of Christ’s lordship, faith and discipleship cannot be dualistically separated into two areas: the church and the rest of life. Christ is Lord of human culture and society, politics, business, and life in community as a citizen; these are all matters of discipleship. The church cannot be the primary agent for teaching children everything that they need to know to be good citizens, prepared to contribute in constructive ways to the broader community. That is why schools have become distinctly differentiated institutions in our modern societies. Furthermore, as we shall demonstrate later in this report, faith nurture as well as leadership development in the Reformed community inseparably links church and school together. Reformed churches need well-educated leaders, leaders who have a good grasp of the Reformed worldview in its many implications and applications to life in today’s complex society. Church leaders who are ignorant of or hostile to the Reformed worldview will not be effective leaders of Reformed churches. Reformed Christian schools that become distant from or at odds with the Reformed churches that supply them with children to be taught will not be able to retain their Reformed identity. Reformed churches and Reformed Christian schools are inextricably linked with each other. Finally, that this has always been the understanding of Reformed convictions about the implications of the covenant is clear from Church Order Article 71, which instructs councils to see to it that good Christian day school education is provided for the church’s youth “according to the demands of the covenant.” (See section V of this report.)

FAQ 2.1: On what basis is the vow of the congregation made at the time of baptism to “help instruct them in the faith” extended to Christian day school education? Isn’t it about Sunday School, catechism, Gems, Cadets, and so forth?

A. Indeed the congregation’s vow is first of all a promise to help nurture children by supporting parents and the educational activities of the church prayerfully as well as financially. However the following reasons can be given for extending it to a much broader

understanding of Christian nurture, including Christian day schools.

1. A Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship involves all of life, including those areas for which the church does not train its youth but the school does.
2. The church and school need each other, Reformed churches need leaders educated as thinking Reformed Christians, and Reformed Christian schools need the support of pastors and other leaders in the church.
3. This is the historical understanding of a Reformed understanding of the covenant (Church Order Article 71).

In the committee's view, the heart of our *original* mandate is to restate for our church the present and future role of Church Order Article 71—what the congregation's vow at baptism means, how this translates into today's culture, and the conditions that are current in our church. Our task is not to set out the legalities of Article 71 but to articulate a renewed vision of the reason we have this article as part of the Church Order.

III. Reflections in light of Synod 2003

Synod 2003 adopted almost all the recommendations submitted to it by our committee. It stood firm with more than a century of CRC synodical tradition by "reaffirming the Christian Reformed Church's commitment to and promotion of Reformed Christian day school education from the elementary level through college and university" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 619). Synod also reaffirmed the conviction "that the Reformed emphasis on covenant and the kingdom of God are foundational for Reformed Christian schools" and added the affirmation "that mission is an additional foundation block for Reformed Christian schools" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 620). Synod found a creative way of affirming this threefold foundation, honoring the best of the CRC's century-long tradition of church financial support for Christian education while at the same time addressing a pressing contemporary challenge for the CRC in today's world by encouraging "CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race, ethnicity, special needs)" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 627). When synod urged CRC church councils "to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education" and provided as its first ground the covenantal principle that "Christian day school education is both a communal church responsibility and a parental commitment" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 626), it affirmed the heart of our committee's work in response to the mandate of Synod 2000. We are profoundly grateful for synod's affirmation of our work, and this revised report maintains the basic direction of the 2003 report though we will not be repeating recommendations approved by Synod 2003 in the recommendations we submit to Synod 2005. What follows in this report and its recommendations to Synod 2005 that is revised or new arises specifically

out of the additional mandate given to our committee by Synod 2003 and does not seek to alter or change direction but flows directly from it.

However, though synod found much in our report that it approved and the advisory committee kindly commented “we commend the committee for making an excellent beginning,” it also took note of need for further reflection and clarification. In the words of the advisory committee:

No report, no matter how well written, is likely to address every issue that needs to be addressed, and that is also true of this report. In addition to the traditional theological grounds of covenant and kingdom, the report affirms that mission is an additional foundational block for Reformed Christian day schools. More needs to be written about the relationship between mission and Christian education and how this relationship should shape the task of Reformed Christian day schools. The report also does not distinguish among single-church/single-school situations, schools that draw the majority of their students from non-Reformed churches, and schools that enjoy the support of a cluster of Reformed churches.

(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 619)

Our committee acknowledges the need for further reflection and clarification and is willing to accept synod’s additional mandate.

We wish to point out the significance of this additional concern of synod. What is remarkable is that the single-church, single-school situation and the reality that some schools draw the majority of their students from non-Reformed churches is now seen in some sense as the problem that the normal scenario and expectations of our report do not adequately address. We need to pause and note how remarkable and significant the dimensions of our additional mandate really are. When synod gave thanks to God for the blessing of more than a century of Reformed Christian education provided by CRCNA members and for the many dedicated parents, teachers, administrators, and supporters who have labored faithfully and sacrificially during this time, it was probably not thinking that this new problem is precisely one of the most remarkable of these numerous blessings. For example, for the first century of the CRC’s history the single-church, single-school situation was the norm in the CRC; cluster communities such as Grand Rapids, Chicago, and Patterson, N.J.—the locations of the first three Christian high schools in the CRC—were the exception. For sure, the situation where the majority of students in a Reformed Christian day school were non-CRC was rare, and the significant presence of nonethnically Dutch children was virtually nonexistent. What our committee is being asked to address is the question of how we come to terms with the incredible *success* of Christian education, particularly its significant expansion in the last twenty-five to thirty years beyond the boundaries of our predominantly ethnically Dutch CRC communities. There are two very important lessons for the CRC that need to be noted at this point:

- In light of this history of blessing, especially in terms of the CRC’s successful witness to the value of Christian day school education beyond the confines of the CRC itself, it would have been a tragic failure of nerve (a loss of faith and courage) for the synod of the CRC and the denomination as a whole to waver in its robust affirmation of Christian education. The delegates of Synod 2003 did not waver but faithfully led synod to continue the tradition of such affirmation.

- While we must take seriously the threat to the future of Reformed Christian education posed by financial hardship and the high cost of such education, we need also remind ourselves that sacrificial giving for Christian education has also been a hallmark of the CRC tradition. We must neither exaggerate nor underestimate the reality of today’s financial crisis, and, along with creative new solutions to financing—notably by recognizing the obligation of the entire church community to support Christian education—we also need to remind ourselves of the obligations of sacrificial stewardship.

We now briefly consider the relationship among church, school, and family in a Reformed Christian understanding. Persons unfamiliar with our denomination might well wonder what business it is of the annual synod of the CRC to be discussing Christian education because Reformed Christian day schools are not parochial schools owned and operated by CRC congregations. A more knowledgeable person might even ask whether such a discussion is not out of keeping with the spirit and perhaps even the letter of Church Order article 28: “[The] assemblies [of the CRC] shall transact *ecclesiastical matters only* and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner” (emphasis added). Engelhard and Hofman, in their *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (2001, pp. 165-66) state this principle and its biblical-theological rationale this way: “Although Christian people have a responsibility to serve the Lord in all spheres of life—physical sciences, education, political life, art, business, etc.—these are not to be regarded as ecclesiastical matters.” They cite H. Bouwman’s *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* in confirmation: [Because] “the state, the home, and politics each had their own sphere of life given it by God . . . those cases which do not belong to the task of the church should not be treated at the ecclesiastical meetings. The church has no right to do that” (ibid., 166). This principle has become well-known among us thanks to the influence of Abraham Kuyper who popularized it under the rubric of sphere sovereignty.

FAQ 3.1: What exactly is sphere sovereignty, and where does this term come from?

A. Made popular by Abraham Kuyper, sphere sovereignty arose as a social doctrine in response to concerns about *state* control of non-state social spheres such as the family, schools, the arts, and so forth. It was a way of insisting on the liberty of citizens to live in these social spheres without inappropriate state intrusion. Social spheres, so Kuyper believed, were directly responsible to God and derived their legitimacy from God, not from the state. They were “sovereign [under God] in their own sphere.”

FAQ 3.2: If we take sphere sovereignty seriously isn’t Church Order Article 71 itself a violation of the principle? After all, here the church is telling parents how to educate their children. Isn’t that an intrusion into family rights?

A. This is a matter that is often misrepresented and misunderstood. Sphere sovereignty does not mean that when it comes to legitimate

state interests (public health and safety, freedom from coercion and violence, and so forth) that the state may not intervene—e.g., in cases of domestic abuse, contagious diseases in a school, churches worshiping in unsafe buildings—as the servant of the public good. Sphere sovereignty never meant *laissez-faire*. So, too, with the church. While churches are off task and act inappropriately when they try to raise a family’s children, they have every right and even duty to use *spiritual* means (proclamation, persuasion, witness, pastoral care) to help their own church members, including parents, live as obedient and faithful Christians. The church has a special interest in the education of its children. So no, Article 71 does not as such violate sphere sovereignty.

FAQ 3.3: Okay, perhaps Church Order Article 71 does not imply the church’s intrusion into the family. What about the school? Isn’t the church here interfering with the sphere of the school?

A. Not at all. Notice that the Church Order article encourages *parents* to establish Christian schools and have their children educated in accord with the Reformed confession and worldview of Christ’s lordship over all things. The Church Order does not encourage or give permission to local church councils to *directly* try to govern the affairs of local, independent, parent-controlled, Reformed Christian schools. For example, the church has no business dictating to such a school what its curriculum should be or telling the school board when to hire or fire a teacher.

FAQ 3.4: So, we have covered the church’s relationship to the family and to the school. There is another dimension of sphere-sovereignty that is potentially troubling. From this doctrine, could we not conclude that is it wrong and even dangerous for Christian schools to accept any financial assistance from the government? Does the state then not improperly interfere in the sphere of the school as well as the family? And if so, the same applies to the church’s helping fund Christian education through its diaconate.

A. The issue here is not financial assistance but *justice* and *control*. Don’t forget that even the Dutch Reformed Christian schools, thanks to Abraham Kuyper, received and still get full funding as a matter of public justice. You do well to raise the issue, however. Schools that do get government money need to be wily as foxes as well as innocent as doves; money may come with strings attached. Whether that is also true with respect to church assistance is perhaps harder to say because churches, unlike governments, have only persuasive spiritual power rather than coercive sword power over Christian schools.

We do need to ask, therefore, whether the CRC ignores the principle of sphere sovereignty when it comes to the schooling of its children. The education of the church’s children seems to stand on a somewhat different footing vis-à-vis the church as an institution than, say, the broader vocation of church members

in the construction or agriculture business or in their civic and political stewardship. There is a Church Order article about schools and education; there is none about voting, jury duty, or contributing to domestic charities. Why is this so? What special interest does the church have in the education of its children, not just in faith-nurture but in the broader education for vocation and service in the kingdom of God? Why is education different, if not an exception to the broad, popularly understood notion of sphere sovereignty?

Our committee does believe that the education of the church's children is different from other social spheres and that the institutional or official church (as constituted by the offices Christ appointed) does have a special interest in Christian schooling. The links between the church and the family and thus also with the school are of a special sort. Consider, for example, how the church shares so many of the characteristics of both the biological and extended family and the school. The church is the family of God who is the Father of his people (Eph. 3:15; cf. Matt. 6:8-15; Lord's Day 13, Q. and A. 33). The church as the household of God (Eph. 2:19) is to be led, ruled, and served by those who have proven themselves capable of doing the same in their own households (I Tim. 3:4, 5, 12, 15; 5:14). The church is also a school as the numerous references to the words *teach* and *teaching* in the New Testament make clear (see e.g., Col. 3:16; Eph. 4:20-24; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:11, 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). It is, of course, a mistake to draw from these biblical images a precise contemporary sociology of institutions. That is not the purpose of scriptural revelation. At the same time, we may not overlook the fact that the church of Christ in its official and institutional form and role has, according to the New Testament, among other things a decidedly familial and schoolish character. In our modern social context where schools have become a distinct and separate sphere from the church and family, we are obliged to consider how these three relate to one another in their tasks and responsibilities.

In a preliminary way, we can say that the church has three related interests in actively engaging and seeking the well-being of the Christian school. At the most basic and pragmatic, the church needs educated leaders—leaders who have been trained not only in the Reformed faith in church but also in a Reformed worldview in the school. Here the identity and continuity of the Reformed confessional tradition is at stake. The stewardship of its riches cannot be fulfilled by the official church alone; schools at all levels are essential to preserving and applying the broad historical heritage that is our legacy from the Reformation. For example, the Reformed tradition has a long history of reflection and practice on a whole host of important moral, social, political, and scientific issues going back to the Reformation itself. The official church can give and has given guidance in a broad sense (such as, for example, the 1991 synodical study committee report on creation and science), but it does not teach biology, chemistry, and physics, nor does it engage in historical scholarship with respect to science. For these tasks to be done well, in a manner in keeping with a Reformed worldview, Christian schools at all levels are essential.

Second, a broadly educated leadership is a critical component of the church's faithful witness to the world. If the church's leaders are unaware of what is going on in the world and are not able to interpret our world from a worldview that is Reformed, they cannot equip Reformed saints for ministry

in the world (Eph. 4:12). This is the reason that Church Order Article 6 prescribes a solid theological training for its ministers, a training that has a liberal arts background as the prerequisite. When the CRC, in 1876, established Calvin Theological Seminary, a solid literary-preparatory program was an essential part of the training for CRC ministry. This requires schools that serve a larger purpose than only that of the official church's task.

Third, it is a fundamental responsibility of the official church to disciple the nations, beginning with its own members. In the Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship, following Jesus is not restricted to a personal and private matter of one's soul. Jesus is Lord and it is as Lord that he calls the church to disciple the nations. When God's people are sent out into the world, they must be fully equipped with all the treasures of faith, love, hope, and knowledge that the church as a whole possesses. Included in that treasury are jewels of knowledge and skill that only schools can pass on to our children. It is as a co-worker in equipping God's people for the mission of discipling the nations that the church has a vested interest, a high stake in the full range of education received by its children. Stated differently, it is the church's confession and task to proclaim to the whole world: Our world belongs to God! Practically speaking, the church cannot teach this truth by itself. It is in Christian schools that teachers fit children with the spectacles of the Bible so that they can notice the sparkles of light of Christ's kingdom in a dark world—sparkles on everything from asteroids to zebras, from economics to Ecuador—and learn to discern the difference between glitter and gold.

Perhaps the best way to get at the respective roles and mutual relationships of family, church, and school in the mission of God's kingdom is to consider them from the point of view of the child who is being taught in the faith. When devout new parents send out birth announcements, they bear witness to the world that "God has given us a child." For this reason, because that child belongs to God, she is taken to an assembly of God's people in worship and given the sign and seal of covenantal promise in the water of baptism. At the time of baptism, parents vow in reliance on the Holy Spirit *and with the help of the Christian community* (emphasis added), to do all in their power to instruct her in the Christian faith and to lead her by their example into the life of Christian discipleship. In response, the congregation also promises to receive this child in love, pray for her, help instruct her in the faith, and encourage and sustain her in the fellowship of believers ("Service for Baptism," *Psalter Hymnal* [CRC Publications, 1987], p. 955).

The faith nurture of the child referred to in the preceding vignette can be considered from a number of different angles. The primary responsibility here lies with the parents. However, as Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78 remind us, telling the children of the next generation "the glorious deeds of the LORD and his might/ and the wonders he has done" (Ps. 78:4) in order that "you and your children and your children's children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long" (Deut. 6:2), is a covenantal, communal, and intergenerational responsibility. The responsibility of teaching the next generation is a communal responsibility because the *reality* that is to be passed on is a covenantal, communal reality—"I am your God, and you are

my people.” What parents (and the congregation) promise in baptismal vows is to nurture their children into the community of God’s people. Baptism means that God’s children are entrusted to us to bring them up as God’s children. The baptized child is not only a member of family X but, *in the first place*, part of God’s family, and it is here that we must see the link between baptism of children and the issue of Christian education.

Our Reformed understanding of baptism is difficult for North Americans. Even our Christian culture tends toward individualism and consumerism—my faith is my choice. In this context (thinking of baptism as God’s sign and seal on us, God’s action by which he claims us and our children as his own, promises his grace and favor to us, and incorporates us into the body of Christ and the narrative of his covenantal story with us), all of this is foreign to the spiritual and ecclesiastical climate of our age. It is this story of God and his people that must guide all the education provided for our children, whether in the home, the church, or the school. The nurture of a baptized child is to be a nurture into the story of God and his people. Baptized children are educated *narratively* (beginning with basic Bible stories at home and in Sunday school) with the goal that they become *active participants* in that story, that they accept as their own the mission of God’s people in his world. This full vision of baptism is summarized well by the ecumenical statement of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (“Baptism” section, par. # 7):

Baptism initiates the reality of the new life given in the midst of the present world. It gives participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. Through the gifts of faith, hope and love, baptism has a dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations, and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

All Christian nurture, therefore, serves the end of this covenantal, intergenerational narrative; the story of God and his people in his world. Whether we think of the home, the church, or the school and the respective task of each, or how each should relate to the others, this basic vision must remain in the forefront. One of the consequences is that each of the three spheres should not think of the other(s) as competitors nor of the education of God’s children as somehow primarily for our sphere. When the church considers God’s children as belonging primarily to the official or institutional church and as candidates for ordained ministry or monastic life, it arrogates to itself a proprietorship that belongs to the Lord of the church alone. Parents, however, may also be guilty of trying to own their children as when they pressure children into careers and vocations that will enhance the family’s prestige or wealth rather than seeking first the kingdom of God. It is such circumstances that our Lord himself warned about with his disturbing and hard words about needing to hate our father and mother if we are serious about following him (Luke 14:26). The gospel of the kingdom relativizes all our earthly and human relationships, including in our family. Finally, schools, too, may be guilty of trying to own the children of the community as for example when they schedule school activities in such a way that family life and church activities become almost impossible. The only antidote to such possessiveness is the spiritual challenge to seek first the kingdom of God, to remember that all education, in home, in church, and

in school, is to tell the story of God and his people in the world for nurturing Christian discipleship.

As we consider the obligations of Christian discipleship and wrestle with the perception of a tension or conflict between Christian education and missions or evangelism, it is very important that we listen to, and try to understand, the concerns raised on this point in our churches. There is both a sociological and a theological (evangelism) dimension to this issue. We will consider the sociological angle first. We need to acknowledge that there are sometimes unintended negative consequences to our best efforts of Christian discipleship. There is, for example, the potential negative consequence that vigorous support for Christian day school education may isolate and separate its supporters from the rest of the local community. This can happen within congregations where distinctions may arise between Christian school children and public school children or, in cases of full congregational support for Christian education, between the congregation and the larger local civic community. We should not draw the conclusion here that Christian day school education is therefore a mistake, but we do need to recognize that the dynamics we describe here are real and that congregations cannot ignore them. Recognition and acknowledgement are the necessary first steps toward avoiding conflict and bringing reconciliation and healing when conflict does arise. In addition, when they become aware of this social phenomenon, churches and schools both need to find creative ways to encourage children as well as adults toward constructive interaction with the local civic communities of which they are a part. Cooperative community service projects, generous availability of physical resources for community events, sponsoring Boy Scout or Girl Scout troops, and so forth are significant ways of mitigating the risks of isolation and separation.

The tension we are describing can be popularly summarized as the conflict between two competing values: (1) internal nurture and growth of our own children and (2) reaching out beyond ourselves to lost and hurting people with the gospel. It is worth noting that the laudable goal of reaching out beyond our own community and tradition can also have unintended consequences. It is possible to be so self-conscious and defensive about our own identity as Reformed people, particularly when we link it to the particularity of Dutch ethnic identity, that we devalue its importance, minimize it, and eventually lose it altogether. If the perception takes hold that being Reformed is an obstacle to reaching the lost with the gospel, then, so the argument would go, we should jettison that which is Reformed. Once again, we caution synod and the church: We should not draw the conclusion here that evangelism and missions are necessarily problematic for Reformed Christians because reaching out beyond confessional boundaries jeopardizes confessional Reformed identity. Yet, we do need to recognize that the potential dangers we describe here are real, especially in North America where the church world is characterized by intense market pressures that place high demands on confessional integrity and denominational loyalty (see more discussion on this point in section VI, A, 1 and 2). Recognition and acknowledgement are necessary here as well if we hope to avoid conflict in the churches and to bring reconciliation and healing when conflict does arise.

Bearing this in mind, along with the preceding positive discussion of the relationship between our commitment to both evangelism and mission, in summary, we alert synod and the CRC to the possibility that even our most obedient efforts of Christian discipleship may have unintended consequences. On the one hand, support for Christian day school education can have the social effect of isolating our children and supporting communities and, on the other, a single-minded zeal for reaching out can take place at the expense of Reformed Christian identity. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 114 reminds us that even our best works in this life are corrupted with sin.

With that brief introduction and background, we can begin to address the first issue in our expanded mandate: to explore “the nature of the relationship between the church’s commitment to Reformed Christian day schools and the church’s work of evangelism.” We must begin by stating clearly what we mean by key terms such as *evangelism* and *mission*, particularly because these two words in particular were a source of some confusion in the reception of our 2003 report where we used them practically as synonyms. In the broadest sense, we understand mission, as in the expression “the mission of God’s people in the world,” to be the full-orbed, comprehensive discipleship of those who follow Jesus Christ in their individual lives as well as corporately. This idea could be stated alternatively in terms of submitting to the lordship of Jesus Christ or being active citizens of the kingdom of God. Within that broad vision, the official church has a specific task, one given to it by the Lord and given to no other institution or people. The church’s mandate and its basis was clearly given by our Lord when he ascended into heaven: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20). When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the emboldened apostles proclaimed the good news of the risen and ascended Christ, called people to repentance, baptized, and established new communities beginning in Judea and Samaria and expanding to the ends of the earth. Over time, the forms and institutional structures of these communities became more fixed with offices and specified tasks (see lists in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, the Pastoral Epistles). These offices and tasks—preaching, teaching, disciplining—have one goal: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

Evangelism is a circumscribed and specifically defined task within this broad responsibility. Based on the Greek εὐαγγελίζω = to announce or proclaim good news; εὐαγγέλιον = good news, gospel; the word *evangelism* refers to any explicit announcement of the gospel message calling a sinner to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Evangelism’s goal is to yield the response “What must we then do?” (Acts 2:37) to which some variation of the apostle Peter’s response on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) is the only possible answer: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Although it has the potential of adding to confusion rather than clarifying, we need to point out that much missiological literature today will use the plural *missions* as a synonym for *evangelism* and thus distinguish both terms from the singular *mission* that is then generally understood as defined above.

FAQ 4.1: Isn't the use of the word evangelism in such a narrow sense really non-Reformed usage? I have always been taught that to restrict it to what I guess looks to me like soul saving is really sort of fundamentalist or evangelical and not properly Reformed.

A. Here is another example of common confusion. There has been an understanding by some in the CRC, mistakenly invoking the memory of Abraham Kuyper, to go to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and infer from the lordship of Christ (“all authority in heaven and on earth”) that evangelism means nothing more than bearing witness by showing how Jesus is Lord of my life. On this understanding, explicit proclamation of the good news with the intention to persuade someone to believe is only one way of doing evangelism. Other ways include working for justice; being an honest businessman, a faithful spouse, a good parent, a good steward of the environment; and so forth. To the degree that these are all witnesses to the lordship of Christ, which is the basis of the Great Commission, evangelism is as broad as life itself.

This is an example of a half-truth that becomes a problematic untruth. Of course Jesus is Lord, and our lives must honor him as Lord. To the degree that they do so, they bear witness to him. However, an honest examination of the Great Commission, not to mention the examples of the book of Acts, makes it clear that our efforts in evangelism—proclaiming the good news—must be more intentional, more explicit and have conversion, baptism, and discipleship as their goal. The claim, sometimes made by some Reformed people that evangelism is fundamentalist or perhaps even Arminian is often, we must shamefacedly acknowledge, little more than an excuse for failing to witness explicitly to our faith and for our Lord

What then are some of the key issues we must address as we consider “the nature of the relationship between the churches’ commitment to Reformed Christian schools and the churches’ work of doing evangelism” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 630)? It should be noted that we were not asked to spell out for the school (or the home, for that matter) what its proper attitude and relationship should be to the church. Our mandate is rather straightforward: Assuming that the church has a commitment to Christian day schools and to doing evangelism, what is the proper relationship between these two commitments? Later on in our report, we will consider in greater detail some of the reasons why communities experience tension between these two tasks, but now we merely state the principle. On the basis of what we have stated thus far in our report, we are comfortable and convicted about making the following claim: Christian Reformed churches have a responsibility to both be actively supportive of Christian day school education *and* to engage in the work of evangelism. It is a

serious error to posit one of these responsibilities over against the other in order to diminish its importance or discourage participation by members of the congregation. Support for Christian education should never be used to undermine the work of evangelism, and evangelistic outreach should never be given as a ground for failing to support Christian day school education.

Granting that neither Christian education nor evangelistic outreach should be allowed to trump each other in contending for the allegiance and support of CRC congregations and members does not mean that there will never be disagreement about degrees of support and priorities within the overall mission of the church community. All of us have limited ranges of vision and none of us see with the full eye of God, including the needs of the church and world and what specific responsibilities flow from them. Therefore, keeping in mind the overall mission of God and his people in the world and the specific tasks of the official church in particular, we believe that it is important for synod to remind the churches and their members that mutual respect for each others' commitments, gifts, and interests is called for as the best way of promoting that mission.

The section we have now completed raised many issues and did not attempt to provide answers to all the dimensions of the questions we raised. That is only appropriate for a synodical committee such as ours. While synods can provide leadership for the church in setting forth a framework to assist churches in wrestling with these issues, these are matters that must be resolved at the level of local congregations. We will be coming back to the issues raised in section III above. Later, in section VII, we will be considering in greater detail in a very practical way of how the church and school can cooperate with families in fulfilling the mission of God's people in the world, including what role the school may have in assisting the specific calling of evangelism. At this point, however, we shall reinforce the basic vision just set forth by looking at the history of the CRC's support for Christian day school education.

IV. The church and Christian education in the Reformed tradition

Throughout its history, the CRC has consistently supported the cause of Christian day schools. Church Order Article 71 places the responsibility for supporting Christian education in the hands of all church councils (pre-2003 wording):

Christian Schools: The Council shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian Schools and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant.

Similarly, according to Church Order Article 41, each council is to be asked, among other things, at each classis meeting, "Does the council diligently promote the cause of Christian education from elementary school through institutions of high learning?" According to Synod 1936, the expression "support the cause of Christian schools" means that "it is the duty of the council to use every proper means to the end that a Christian school may be established where it does not exist and to give whole hearted and unreserved moral backing to existing Christian schools *and* measure of financial help in

case of need” (*Acts of Synod 1936*, pp. 36-37). The remainder of this section of our report provides an overview of the CRC’s commitment to support Christian education financially as well as morally. Only a few years after the establishment of the CRC in 1857, the vision of Christian education was firmly in place. Synod 1870 declared its strong commitment to the duty that every congregation do its utmost to see to it that Christian education was available for its children:

Primary education is discussed with [the firmly expressed conviction by all present] that the school is the [nursery of and for] the Church. It is [therefore] the duty of [each congregation to see to it that they establish a free school], and if this be impossible, [to do everything in their power to achieve education that is both Reformed and in the Dutch language.] This the Assembly impresses on Consistories and Churches.

(*Acts of Synod 1870*, Art. 36)

We call synod’s attention here to three features of this declaration still relevant to our times. First, the close relationship between church and school is expressed in the intimate terms of family life: “the school is [the nursery of and for] the Church.” Second, the education offered is to be *free* from control by either the state or the church. Third, the education provided is to be distinctively Reformed.

Schools of course require teachers, and it is noteworthy that only one year later (1871) the broadest assembly of the CRC not only supported the *idea* of common teacher training but apparently was committed to denomination-wide financial support for such a venture.

Classis Michigan proposes that teachers be trained for work in our schools from our own Reformed group. This idea is explained further by the Rev. VanderWerp. The need for this brings about a long discussion, and all agree that this is a pressing question. The Assembly decides that they should look for a good leader, and they find that a Mr. H. Baron seems to have the necessary qualifications. The Assembly is thus keeping him in mind.

(*Acts of Synod 1871*, Art. 21)

From subsequent minutes of the annual CRC general assembly, it appears that a denomination-wide coordinated effort for teacher education was proving difficult to achieve. In 1872, the matter was referred back to congregations (and a different person was recommended for the instructional post than had been announced in the previous year):

Art. 21. (p. 134) of the previous Session is brought up for discussion, which deals with training of teachers from our own Church group. The discussion and the decision: Congregations shall have this problem referred to them and give it their careful attention. A Mr. F. Winterberg is recommended for this.

(*Acts of Synod 1872*, Art. 10)

The following year (1873), the general assembly reaffirmed its strong commitment to establishing Christian schools and established a denomination-wide accountability for congregations to implement this by requiring each congregation to report on its efforts at the next session.

Return to Art. 10 concerning Primary Education. A discussion on this, with the result that the need of free Chr. Ref. Schools be strongly recommended to the Congregations, and that the Congregations take steps to bring such schools into

being. Also each Congregation is to report at the next Session what has been accomplished by it along these lines. Sunday Schools shall also be organized in all the Churches.

(Acts of Synod 1873, Art. 8)

From the reports given at the 1874 assembly, it is apparent that progress in establishing Christian schools was slow. The assembly vigorously reaffirmed (“insists in the strongest way possible”) the commitment to Christian day school education. The expansion of the mandate of Sunday schools to include reading instruction (“as a last resort”) should also be noted.

Article 8 of the previous Minutes is first brought up for discussion. This deals with Primary Christian Education, and that in free institutions, as well as training in our Sunday Schools. The President inquires if the Congregations have made any progress along that line. It appears that in Grand Rapids there is such a day school, but other Congregations state that little progress has been made as yet, although most Congregations do have Sunday Schools. Since the Assembly is thoroughly convinced that there is a need of free Christian Schools, it insists in the strongest possible way that they be brought into being and fostered. In those Congregations where it is impossible at this time to have such educational instruction, it is permitted to teach Reading in the Sunday Schools, but only as a last resort.

(Acts of Synod 1874, Art. 10)

The suggestion of the assembly over several years that congregations unable to establish schools ought to teach reading in the Sunday school ran into an unexpected obstacle. When the 1875 assembly discussed the progress of Christian education in the denomination, it first had to come to terms with an objection from the Grand Rapids congregation—such education on the Sabbath would be a violation of the fourth commandment. In response to the objection “the Assembly judges that instruction given in such a way is not a transgression of the fourth commandment,” the president of synod explained that the unique circumstances of the church in question made some instruction in spelling, reading, and Holland language instruction necessary and that this would “be carried on only as a last resort” (*Acts of Synod 1875, Art. 4*). The assembly received reports from seventeen congregations with mixed results indicated. The president of synod

encourages the delegates to be diligent, and that in those areas where there has been no teaching in the Holland language a beginning can be made in a very small way by acquiring a Classroom as a place for teachers and teaching, for, after all, with the blessing of the Lord, this project is bound to succeed. In general it appears that some progress had been made since the previous session in the establishment of schools, and one hopes that the desired ends may be reached under God’s guidance and with his blessing, as in the case in the Netherlands.

(Acts of Synod 1875, Art. 4)

After six years of discussion and committed resolutions, the responsibility for financial support of local Christian schools was placed in the hands of each congregation by the assembly of 1876 (the assembly that also gave the green light for establishing Calvin Theological Seminary). The assembly did, however, commit denominational funds (via the church magazine *De Wachter*) to promoting Christian education.

Section three of the Agenda is now up for discussion. The Assembly takes up the consideration of the establishment of a fund for Reformed Holland Schools. After much discussion over this matter, the following is decided upon: That in each Church a receptacle be placed, or by means of "penny societies" a collection of monies be made. The last part, concerning the school matter at Cleveland mentioned in the Agenda, is sanctioned, namely that articles be written repeatedly and inserted in the "*Wachter*" expressing the needs of Christian church schools and instruction in the Holland Language. Many of the delegates promise to use their talents for the benefit of the Editor and for educating the public.

(Acts of Synod 1876, Art. 47)

Four years later, Synod 1880 again discussed the matter of encouraging and supporting Christian education, but the resolution seems less principled and more attuned to the issue of Americanization.

The question is raised if any means can be put into practice to advance primary Christian education. It is stated that it would be very desirable to have Christian Schools where both Holland and English are taught, so that our children need not be ashamed of their education. The State sanctions such schools.

(Acts of Synod 1880, Art. 62)

The enthusiasm of synodical gatherings for Christian education appears not to have been contagious as the following resolution by the 1881 assembly shows.

The final matter of the Agenda is discussed: The Synod returns to the previous ruling of the Synod of 1880, in the matter of education, and the best methods of fostering Holland Christian Education. After an earnest consideration of this matter: Since the parents, on the whole, do not see the need of Holland Christian Education, (to the best of their ability) the delegates promise to insert Articles in the Church publication the "*Wachter*" periodically under the caption "Holland Christian Education," to prepare families for same, and to return to a discussion of this question at a later date. Where it is possible to obtain such instruction for the Children at this time, every effort should be made to support and foster such.

(Acts of Synod 1881, Art. 56)

Synod's resolve remained firm, and once again the church's periodical was designated to continue its role as cheerleader for Christian education.

A significant turn in the Christian education discussion took place in 1892. Synod received the following requests:

- a) From Classis Hudson: What can the Synod do to stimulate an interest in the Holland Christian Reformed Church in America in regard toward Christian Schools?
- b) From the Consistory of Roseland (Chicago): The Synod impress upon our Congregations, especially the largest and the wealthiest the need for the establishment of Christian Schools.

(Acts of Synod 1892, Art. 22)

Synod apparently now had a standing denominational Committee on Christian Education. Its report to Synod 1892 was accepted and includes the following three recommendations.

The Committee on Christian Education presents its report which is accepted by the Synod.

- a) The Synod calls the attention of the Ministers and of the Consistories to take to heart, with all their strength and their gifts, the support and the construction of Christian Schools.
- b) The Synod recommends the organization of Christian School Societies for the purpose of fostering Christian Education.
- c) When these Societies come into being, the Synod will give them its moral support. The Society is to be organized with the Name "The Society for the Advancement of Christian Education on Reformed Principles."

(Acts of Synod 1892, Art. 23)

This decision is significant in that the *content* of Christian education is now less focused on the Dutch language and the Reformed confessional tradition and more on Reformed worldview (Reformed principles). This Kuyperian emphasis on a Reformed world-and-life view was strengthened and elaborated in the following declaration of Synod 1898:

Not a general, but a specifically Reformed instruction is the requirement for our children. Indeed, no educational system is satisfactory, but the acknowledgment of the necessity of regeneration, and additionally the acknowledgment of the covenant relationship in which God has placed our children, are the principles from which education must proceed. Christian education according to Reformed principles is the incontrovertible duty of Reformed Christians. All ministers and elders must labor to the utmost of their power in the promotion of Christian education wherever and whenever possible. The grounds for these declarations are:

- (1) God's Word requires that children be trained in the fear and admonition of the Lord.
- (2) Parents at the time of the baptism of the children have promised before the Lord and the congregation to do this.
- (3) here may be no separation between civil, social and religious life, education, and nurture.
- (4) Christian education promotes the honor of our King who has been given all dominion in heaven and on earth, including the realms of education and nurture.

(Acts of Synod 1898, p. 38)

The statement of 1898 represents a conclusion to three decades of discussion in the CRC about Christian education. The issue does not feature prominently in synodical discussions again until the 1930s. However, we need to take note of a significant change in Church Order Article 21 (now Art. 71) on Christian education. The original church order of Dort (1618-1619) reads as follows: "Everywhere consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters, who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism." This wording assumed a close link among the state, the church, and schools. However, the situation in the United States with its clear separation of church and state presented the church with a new challenge—to encourage the establishment of free, parent-controlled Christian day schools. Accordingly, Synod 1914 altered Church Order Article 21 to read: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant." Finally the revised Church Order of 1965, in the renumbered article 71, shifted the focus to the members of the congregation.

The consistory shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools, and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant.

Aside from the Church Order change in 1914, synodical discussion of Christian education was insignificant until 1934 when Classis Sioux Center asked Synod 1934 to interpret the question pertaining to Christian Schools as found under Church Order Article 41 (see *Acts of Synod 1934*, p. 137). Three questions were asked. They were:

1. Which schools are meant?
2. What does the expression “support the Christian Schools” signify?
3. What is classis to do about it if in its judgment a consistory does not support such schools according to its ability?

As to the first question, synod is asked to express whether *schools* refers to the primary schools or to technical and professional schools.

As to the second question, synod is requested to state whether a consistory is duty bound to further the cause of Christian education by doing all in its power to bring into existence and to support a Christian school in a locality accessible to the children of the congregation or whether the question is satisfactorily answered when a consistory states that it supports Christian educational institutions. A committee was appointed by Synod 1934 to help provide answers to the questions raised re Church Order Article 41 and the meaning of *schools*. Synod 1936 received the report of this committee and adopted the following declaration:

Synod declare[s] that it is in full accord with the answers given by the Committee of 1934. It is convinced that the answers are of vital importance to the life of the Church. “Schools” in article 41 is identical with “schools” mentioned in Article 21, that is, free Christian schools, supported by the parents. Our Church stands committed to the cause of Christian education in every unit of our educational system. Consistories, therefore, are to do all in their power to bring about the erection and to promote the growth of Christian schools. To take offerings for the cause while no attempt is made to establish a Christian school does not satisfy the requirements of Article 41 and 21. Consistories who do not put forth wholehearted endeavors to bring about the erection and maintenance of Christian Schools should be admonished until they repent of their failure to do all they can. Accordingly, Synod answers the questions of Classis Sioux Center in the following manner:

(a) The term “schools” in the phrase “The cause of Christian Schools” in Article 41 refers to the Christian primary and grammar and high schools (or Academies) where the bulk of our children get their general school education as distinguished from technical and professional schools, while the college would fall under the question of Article 41 in the measure in which it might become the common instrument of a general education.

(b) The expression “support the cause of Christian Schools” means that it is the duty of the consistory to use every proper means to the end that a Christian School may be established where it does not exist (Article 21), and to give wholehearted and unreserved moral backing to existing Christian schools and a measure of financial help in case of need.

(c) If, in the judgment of Classis, a Consistory does not support the cause of Christian Schools, Classis should continue earnestly to admonish such a

consistency publicly in its classical meeting and privately through the church visitors until it truly repents.

(Acts of Synod 1936, pp. 36-37)

To wrap up this survey, it should be noted that Synods 1951 and 1953 affirmed two different sets of principles of Christian education and recommended them to the members of the church for study. The 1951 affirmation concerned nine principles that had been adopted by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) of 1949 (*Acts of Synod 1951*, p. 44). A study committee appointed to study these principles (*Acts of Synod 1951*, p. 45) reported to Synod 1953 with a reshaped statement of five principles:

- I. Believing parents are called of God to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord.
- II. Parents may enlist the aid of others in the task of educating their children, but the responsibility for this education continues with the parents and is nontransferable.
- III. Catechetical instruction is a particular ministration of the Word instituted by the Church for covenant children.
- IV. Education in the way of the Covenant includes the whole of the child's nurture as well as the development of his talents for God's glory.
- V. Christian Education must foster the development of the principles of Christ in every area of life

(Acts of Synod 1953, pp. 507-9)

Synod 1953 judged that further cultural and analytic study of the RES principles was needed and appointed a new study committee that reported in 1955 (*Acts of Synod 1955*, pp. 193-200). The 1955 report called attention to a desperate crisis in education in its "failure to achieve mastery of the fundamentals of human knowledge, and the absence of biblical truth as normative for thinking and acting, generally known as Secularism" (*Acts of Synod 1955*, pp. 194-95). The report responded directly to this perceived threat in crisis-laden language that sounds remarkably contemporary:

In the face of an educational situation that is becoming daily more desperate, the church's testimony must be unmistakably clear. The Christian church, true to the God Who has revealed Himself both in His general and special revelation, is called upon to interpret all of human endeavor in terms of this revelation. Only education founded on the Word of God can overcome the impasse in educational theory and practice associated with the concept of modern education. Christian education has the true goal, the true standard, and the true motivation. The true goal is the forming of personality as image of God. The true standard is the truth of God's Word. The true motivation is the "new obedience" which is the obedience of faith.

The Christian Reformed Church stands committed to the Christian school as the agency that can make Christian education effective in the totality of life. Meanwhile the Christian Reformed Church considers the family the foundation of all educational effort and charges the parents, on the basis of the covenant promise and mandate, with full educational responsibility. And she employs catechesis to instruct the youth of the church in the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

In view of her great interest in education it is well that the Christian Reformed Church periodically reaffirm her position concerning education and express herself in a way which is relevant to the problems and issues of the day. In keeping with its mandate, therefore, your committee submits the following declaration of principles, based on holy Writ in its normative, directive, and

mandatory character as summarized for us in the three forms of Unity of the Reformed Churches.

(Acts of Synod 1955, pp. 195-96)

The report went on to draft seven basic commitments in Christian education, including the following important covenantal ground:

Children born of Christian parents are members of the Church of Christ. They are children of the promise. God calls them His own (Gen. 17:7; Mark 10:16; Acts 2:39). In the providence of God they have been placed in covenantal relationship to Christ and their education must be in keeping with this relationship. It must be education in Christ. Secular education divorces an area of life of the child in Christ from Christ Himself. Christian education is education in Christ for those who are in God's providence placed in relationship to Christ. *A covenantal relationship demands a covenantal education.*

(Acts of Synod 1955, p. 197; emphasis added)

While the primary responsibility for education rests upon the parents, the church also has a responsibility, thanks to the covenant and the lordship of Christ over all things. This responsibility has a flexibility in that it must be applied differently in changed historical circumstances. The report also appealed to a new ground found in the liturgical form for infant baptism:

The family and the church are institutions called into being by divine mandate. This cannot be said of the modern school. It is a product of human civilization, and therefore a social institution. Formal schooling as we know it today has become a necessity in the complex society of the modern day. Parents cannot fulfill their God-given mandate in our culture and civilization without calling upon others to assist them in their task. *This is recognized in the Form for the Baptism of Infants in these words, "...and cause them to be instructed therein"* (emphasis added).

(Acts of Synod 1955, p. 199)

The subject matter of the elementary and secondary schools must present a medium, a milieu, in which the covenant child's life in Christ can develop to its fullness in all areas of living. No area of thinking and living may be divorced from God and his Christ for the covenant child. *It is for this reason that the Christian Reformed Church stands committed to the Christian school as the agency to make the Christlike life effective in the totality of life for every covenant child* (emphasis added).

The church is obligated to see to it that parents as members of the church fulfill their promise made at the baptism of their children. *Since the Christian school is the only agency that can provide a Christian education for the youth of the church, the church is duty bound to encourage and assist in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools.*

(Acts of Synod 1955, p. 199; emphasis added)

In conclusion, we note that the Christian Reformed Church from the beginning has clearly and consistently endorsed and supported the cause of Christian day school education. On several occasions, it has even voiced support for broad denominational financial support as well as congregational financial support for the cause. There is clear precedent for similar endorsement today.

V. Biblical-theological foundations for Christian education

The last time a Christian Reformed synod dealt with the matter of Christian day school education by way of a study committee report (in 1955), it adopted a statement of principles that included a *reason for* as well as suggestions concerning the *content* of Reformed education. Because these *grounds* and *content* are as important today as they were then and because the 1955 statement in our judgment remains valid for us today, we begin by highlighting the key ideas from the passages cited in the previous section of our report. According to the report, the primary responsibility for educating children of the church community rests with the parents (Deut. 6; Ps. 78). This obligation is placed upon parents by the covenantal promises they make when they present their children for baptism:

Children born of Christian parents are members of the Church of Christ. . . . In the providence of God they have been placed in covenantal relationship to Christ and their education must be in keeping with this relationship. It must be education in Christ. . . . A covenantal relationship demands a covenantal education.

(*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 197)

The divine covenant is not made with solitary individuals or even individual families but with the entire body of believers—with the *people of God*. The church community thus also has responsibilities. This begins with discipling parents to encourage them in remaining true to the vows they made when their children were baptized. The church must also provide active support for the education that it encourages its members to receive:

Since the Christian school is the only agency that can provide a Christian education for the youth of the church, the church is duty bound to encourage and assist in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools.

(*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199)

It is here that synod introduces what we today refer to as contextualization. The circumstances of the present time determined by historical developments must be taken into account. For synod, this meant that, while parents retain the primary responsibility for their children's education, the complexity of modern society makes it impossible for them to do it by themselves. Though the school as an institution cannot be said to arise from a divine mandate (as for example marriage and family are) and is instead a historical, culturally dependent institution, synod believed that schools were necessary in the complex society of the modern day. Concretely, in synod's judgment, this meant that

Parents cannot fulfill their God-given mandate in our culture and civilization without calling upon others to assist them in their task. This is recognized in the Form for the Baptism of Infants in these words: ". . .and cause them to be instructed therein."

(*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199)

The preceding quote, with its oblique reference to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, provides a hint about the synod's address to the curricular *content* of a Reformed Christian education. All areas of human life are to be included in the purview of a Christian education; all culture is potentially

open to obedient Christian discipleship. This cultural mandate, however, must be understood within the frame of Christ as Lord over all:

The subject matter of the elementary and secondary schools must present a medium, a milieu, in which the covenant child's life in Christ can develop to its fullness in all areas of living. No area of thinking and living may be divorced from God and His Christ for the covenant child. It is for this reason that the Christian Reformed Church stands committed to the Christian school as the agency to make Christ-like life effective in the totality of life for every covenant child.

(*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199)

In sum then, considering the brief account given above along with the historical overview of CRC denominational support for Christian day school education (in section IV), it is apparent that the Reformed conviction about God's *covenant* with his people, especially signified in infant baptism, has consistently been the *primary ground* for the CRC's commitment to Christian education.

What is particularly valuable about the 1955 report is the way in which it blends the traditionally strong Reformed emphasis on covenant with another characteristic Reformed doctrine, the kingdom of God. This emphasis on the lordship of Christ over all things not only provides additional support in providing solid doctrinal reasons for Christian education, it also links up with its *content*. Because Christ is Lord of all things and education is an integral part of our social and cultural world, he must also be Lord of the school. This requires Christian schools. This education, however, must be *in Christ* and must be conducted in such a manner as to acknowledge that Christ is Lord, that "no area of thinking and living may be divorced from God and His Christ for the covenant child" (*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199). So then, as we consider the last statement made by the CRC synod about Christian education in 1955, we see that it rests on two theological pillars—the *covenant* and the *kingdom* of God, and these two realities are inextricably joined together in God's mission plan for all creation.

We need now to consider whether these familiar and much-loved staple doctrines of the Reformed faith are still adequate bases for supporting the task of Christian education today. It is unarguable that they are still *necessary*; we must consider whether they remain *sufficient*. In recent years, the CRC has been appropriately challenged to become more mission-minded and diverse, to reach out beyond the confines of its historically Dutch ethnic community and engage the larger world with the gospel of the kingdom. To draw the contrast most sharply using the distinctions drawn above, we could say that while a covenantal emphasis seems to focus attention on "our own children" (with *our* confusingly taken as ethnically *ours* as well as confessionally *ours*), the emphasis on missions and evangelism focuses the church's and the school's attention on outsiders. Stated differently, it could also be formulated in terms of setting the mission mandate of Matthew 28:19-20 ("Therefore go and make disciples of all nations") over against the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, with the former having a decided priority over the latter. Missions and evangelism would then be understood as *more* important than Christian education.

Our committee considers this line of thinking to be incorrect and not very helpful. While a case can be made that our rationale for Christian education must go beyond what we have historically understood it to be in the Christian Reformed Church, particularly in paying attention to outreach and diversity, setting missions in opposition to covenant and kingdom is both a theological and a practical mistake. Theologically, separating the so-called cultural mandate from the great commission or missionary mandate is problematic because both are rooted in kingdom and covenant promise. This can be seen from the following parallel:

**Cultural Mandate
(Genesis 1:27-30)**

Basis: Authority of God the Creator of Heaven and earth
Royal grant (vs. 30)

Commission: Govern, subdue, rule

Promise: Blessing (vs. 28)

**Mission Mandate
(Matthew 28:18-20)**

All authority in heaven and earth

Make disciples, baptize, teach obedience

“I am with you always”

In both Genesis and Matthew, the Sovereign One royally commissions his representatives, gives them a task that involves establishing the king’s dominion over the earth and people, and covenantally promises his blessing. However we understand the practical outworking of this in the life of God’s people, it is clear that theologically these two are inseparably linked in the providential purpose of God for his people, i.e., in his creation and redemption plan for their well-being. Instead, we ought to look for a way, theologically to unite them rather than set them over against each other. Later in this same section, we will propose the category of narrative as the way to achieve this.

Setting missions in opposition to covenant is also a practical mistake. When we diminish the importance of nurturing covenant children, we slight the Lord to whom they belong. Children of the faith community are integral members of the flock and are loved by the Good Shepherd, loved to the point of his laying down his life for them (John 10). It is a mistake to set missions and/or evangelism over against the ongoing discipling of Christ’s sheep and lambs. As our Lord reminded his disciples in one of his postresurrection appearances, while we are fishing (for men), we must also feed the flock (John 21). Where obedience to either one of these two mandates for the church is inadequate, God’s people need to be prodded to greater faithfulness. Renewed obedience in one area should not be at the expense of another important task. Our obligation as a church to evangelize and to educate is not an either/or but a both/and. Here we would remind synod once more of our earlier observation that Christian schools have been an important avenue by which leaders have been formed whose public witness has been a blessing to the world as well as to our church.

In the second place, the claim that Christian schools impede evangelistic efforts ignores the school’s own important missiological significance. Christian Reformed folk have more than a century of experience in Christian education,

education that stretches from kindergarten to post-baccalaureate graduate education. At a time when evangelicals in North America are establishing a rather remarkable number of Christian alternatives to public school education, often without adequate theological or philosophical foundations (see Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*), Reformed Christians have a solemn obligation to the kingdom of Christ to share the insights of this rich legacy of practice and reflection. As we think about the Christian schools initiated and supported by Christian Reformed folk and the importance of the CRC's Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary to the "Opening of the Evangelical Mind" (Alan Wolfe, *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2000), we would not be wrong in considering Christian education as the CRC's great gift to North American evangelical Christianity. We who are the legatees of that rich heritage have a divine calling to be its responsible stewards.

Third, it appears to be the case that the Christian school has a positive effect on new church development (NCD). In a thorough study of CRC new church plants between 1970 and 1990, CRC home missionary David Snapper concluded, "the research disclosed high correlation between the success for the NCD and the proximity of a CSI-affiliate school. Snapper notes, "while we cannot conclude that a CSI-affiliate school will cause church growth, its symbiotic presence in the environment may be a measure of a community's 'readiness' to plant a new congregation." He concludes: "Such schools seem to either signal a fertile NCD environment or to contribute indirectly to NCD success" ("Unfulfilled Expectations of Church Growth," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 [1996]: 484). This ought not to surprise us because Christian education is integrally bound to Reformed confessional and theological identity as well as to a Reformed worldview.

In conclusion, while we judge it to be a mistake to set evangelism and/or missions *over against* Christian education, we do endorse adding Matthew 28:19-20 and the Great Commission to covenant and kingdom as doctrinal-theological pillars for Christian day school education. We also need to point out here that Christian schools are no *substitute* for active evangelism and community outreach by the church. Rather, a Christian school ought to be seen as an essential component in the church's responsibility to disciple the nations.

With all these additional theological and practical matters, is there a different way of conceptualizing the grounds for and content of Christian education? Can we incorporate covenant, kingdom, and mission as well as other elements into a unified theologically defined concept? We suggest the notion of narrative as a possibility for such an integration. Narrative has been proposed as one way of conceiving the framework for the curricular content of Christian education (see CSI publication, *The Christian Story and the Christian School*) and is a biblically based frame for integrating the covenantal obligations of parents and the Christian community, the worldview dimension of the kingdom of God, and the lordship of Jesus Christ as well as the missionary call of the Great Commission. We shall first consider this latter, broad role of narrative.

Narrative or story is an alternative way of speaking about covenant. As CSI's new Bible curriculum summarizes it, the Bible is "The Story of God and His People." John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with this covenantal assertion: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true

and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and ourselves.” Analogously, we can say that the whole narrative of Scripture, or the history of salvation, has two essential participants—God and his people. The plot of this story is the plot of providential history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. This C-F-R-C narrative structure as the basis of the CRC’s *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, of course, also has profound worldview implications (see Cornelius Plantinga’s recent rationale for a Reformed Christian college education, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning and Living*, and Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*), but, before it is an *idea*, it is a *reality* that gives Christians their identity.

What does it mean to be a Christian? A Christian is a member of the covenantal people of God; all of us together are pilgrims on the way to the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11). God’s covenant people today participate in the plot of the divinely governed narrative that began with creation and identifies us today as those who live in the in-between-times—after the first and prior to the second coming of Christ. This narrative sense of identity, it hardly needs saying, as a countercultural force is a crucial ingredient in the struggle of the kingdom of God with the idols of the day. What a narratively shaped Christian education should do is encourage God’s covenantal people who live in two different narratives—that of the city of God and that of the earthly city—to a life of discipleship in which the values of the city of God dominate. Good Christian education presents an alternative narrative to the narratives of popular culture and the mass media discussed in section VI, A, 1 of this report.

In terms of curricular content for Christian schools, thinking narratively helps Christian educators rise above some of the tensions and difficulties that have arisen in the Christian school movement. The covenantal emphasis is susceptible (though it is not intrinsically so determined) to a separationist model of Christian education. Christian education is then regarded as for *our* children, our children who need to be protected from the world. When combined with pietism (to be distinguished from appropriate piety), the school takes on a fundamentalist tone, defensive and anti-intellectual, and is withdrawn from many of the big issues of the broader community. Here the school takes on a role as a primarily evangelistic institution, an integral part of the church’s broad calling to save our children. Here, somewhat ironically, the misuse of the covenant conviction blends with the evangelistic concern mentioned earlier in this section of the report.

On the other extreme, an overemphasis on the lordship of Christ or on the kingdom of God can also lead to excess. Some versions of kingdom theology are triumphalistic, finding in the efforts of churches and Christians a postmillennial hope that *we* will bring about the kingdom of God through our rigorous moral efforts. In its worldview form, an emphasis on the *vision* or *perspective* of the kingdom can lead to a kind of intellectualism in which Christian ideas and the development of a Christian mind is the one and only goal of Christian education. Our committee is not eager to join in the chorus of anti-intellectualism all too prevalent in our time and in our communities, but it is important to insist that developing a Christian perspective on every school subject while a necessary component of a good Christian education is not a sufficient criterion. The risk here is that Christian academic excellence fosters

an elitism that becomes indifferent to other elements of Christian discipleship and citizenship. We can be grateful for the reputation for academic excellence enjoyed by most CSI schools. However, as we face the idols of our day (see section VI, A) there is a real danger that we begin to define the *raison d'être* of Christian schools in terms of such academic excellence. This danger is heightened by the deplorable state of far too much public school education in North America. In such a climate, it becomes easy to celebrate the Christian school for its *achievement*, especially achievement that is recognized by the world, whether it be in academics or athletics. When such worldly affirmations of success become too important for us, Christian education loses its soul.

Here, too, a narrative framing of success provides a quite different vision for Christian schools. Of course God asks that we use our minds and bodies in such a way that we magnify him through the gifts he has given to us. Lack of discipline, laziness, and indifference must be confronted spiritually. In the final analysis, however, success within the frame of the Christian story is quite different from that of the world. Christians, also in their assessment of schools, should measure success in terms of good done in and for the kingdom of Christ. The values of the kingdom are the inverse of those exalted in the world. In those terms, Mother Teresa was a greater success than, say, billionaire Howard Hughes.

This is a fundamental message that must be clearly taught and learned in the Christian school. The goal of Christian education is to prepare our children and young people to participate in and contribute to the plot of God's providential narrative. It would be a loss for the kingdom of God if our Christian schools produced many business executives, doctors, bankers, and lawyers but no inner-city pastors, missionaries, or advocates for the poor and hungry. This is indeed something that a school's teachers and students must *know*; it is also something they must learn to *do*. The Christian life of faith, as the apostle James reminds us, is not only a matter of believing but also a matter of working. All this must be shaped by the grand covenantal narrative of God and his people, a people called to be kingdom citizens under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

FAQ 5.1: I'm a little confused here. If Christ is Lord of all "every square inch" and all that, how does that square with Christians' running into their own private ghettos of education and hiding from the world that Christ rules? Isn't Christ Lord of the public school? And because that is so, should we as Christians be there transforming the public schools into what Christ wants them to be?

A. A very good question. This is one of the areas of greatest confusion in our Reformed world in recent years. The thinking goes exactly as you formulate it. If Christ is Lord of all, should we be everywhere in society and culture transforming it in a Christian manner, bringing it into the kingdom of God? There are major leaps in this argument and thus major problems. To say that Christ is Lord—obviously true, a keystone of the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20, Phil. 2, Rom. 12:1-2, Col. 1 and 3)—has led some to confuse the kingdom of Christ in the sense of those who openly acknowledge him with the kingdom of this world. You see, though Christ is

King not all acknowledge him as King, and we make a huge mistake when we fail to take this into account. To put it in New Testament terms, this is a failure to keep clear the distinction between the church and the world. The New Testament uses *world* in at least two quite different senses. In John 3:16, for instance, it is the world as created by God, especially human creatures, that are said to be loved by God. He created them, he sent his son to die for lost human beings. The same Gospel of John (17:9-18) also records our Lord's praying to the Father that his disciples (and we!) might be kept *from* the world. In fact, he indicates that he is *not praying for the world* here, in the sense of world as that which is opposed to the kingdom of God. Sometimes in our zeal to reach out we forget who we are. To use another wonderful distinction from our old friend Abraham (Kuyper, that is), we become so engrossed with *common grace* that we forget the *antithesis* (between the church and the world).

VI. Christian education in today's world

A. *Why a new report?*

The *original* mandate given to our committee includes as a ground the fact that the CRC has not produced a synodical statement on Christian education since 1955, observing that much has changed since then. One of the first tasks of our committee was to attempt a summary of the cultural, social, ecclesiastical, and educational changes of the last fifty years. Thus, in this section of our report, we first consider changes in the *world context* within which Christian education must operate; second, we consider some changes in the Christian Reformed Church in the last half century; third, we examine some conflicts about Christian education; and finally, we conclude by summarizing the variety of choices and challenges facing CRC members as a result of these changes.

1. Changes in the world: Secularism and consumerism

To observe that North American culture and society have undergone major changes since 1955 is to state the obvious. Our concern here is less with these changes in themselves than with their impact on Christian schools and the Christian Reformed Church, neither of which exist in a cultural or social vacuum. Reformed Christians do not consider cultural involvement as an evil to be avoided but accept the calling to discern what is good and what is evil in culture. In addition, Reformed Christians believe that Christians have callings to serve Christ the Lord in the arena of culture also. Such a conviction of cultural vocation implies that the Christian role is not to be a passive consumer of the world's culture but an active transforming influence for good in the societies where our Lord has placed us. The world's charms are seductive, however, and we must honestly face the possibility that our churches and schools may have been subtly influenced and transformed by the idols of our culture into their deforming images. To the extent that contemporary idols such as materialism, consumerism, and hedonism gain footholds in our faith communities, we may see declining commitment to and support for Reformed Christian day schools.

In 1955, the nurturing of CRC children was done basically by our churches, homes, and Christian schools—a pattern often referred to as a “three-legged stool.” However, there was always another “leg”—the mass media and popular culture. Although less noticeable in 1955, some fifty years later the mass media has become a dominant influence in our society. As a result, according to Neil Postman, our children are now educated by two dominant curricula: the “first curriculum of the *school* and the alternative curriculum of the mass media, particularly television” (*Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, chs. 3, 4). For Christian parents, this is a matter of great concern because the mass media leg unbalances the home, the school, and the church legs by their overwhelming presence and their promotion of a quite different set of values. The problem is exacerbated by modern computer technology. While the Internet is a blessing as a source of information, it also makes available a Pandora’s box of material that, when opened, is subversive and hostile to the Christian faith and its moral commitments.

Increasingly, even non-Christian observers of the mass media note that it is not neutral but has its own biases and even religious commitments. In many ways, the popular culture spread by North American mass media promotes ideas and values hostile to commitments of Christian morality. In a word, our society is being pressured to become more and more secular by persistent attempts to remove religion from the public square and relegate it to the private sphere. We and our children are offered the tantalizing idols of secularism such as individualism, consumerism, hedonism, rationalism, and relativism. Christianity in particular is treated with hostility because it is judged to be exclusive, divisive, and thus hateful. The religious ideology of secularism directly clashes with the Reformed conviction that Christ is Lord of all. Because that conviction is one of the essential grounds for the practice of Christian day schools, secularism presents a major threat to Christian education at all levels.

This intensified drive for secularization represents a significant social and cultural shift since 1955, and this change can clearly be seen in the public schools of Canada and the United States. Public education has become aggressively and increasingly secular in the last forty years. This is not a particularly new insight or radical claim. When *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* made explicit in quasi-confessional terms what had been a long-standing tradition of denominational commitment to Christian schooling, the study version of *Our World Belongs to God* in its commentary on paragraph 50 also underscored the urgency of Christian education in *our time*:

Nowhere is the growing secular spirit of our society more evident than in our educational institutions. For at all levels of learning secular humanism has become the dominant philosophy in public education. . . . In this time of educational ferment we must be firm in our commitment to Christian education as we within the Reformed tradition have come to understand it. In school life we must discern the religious roots of the prevailing secular spirit. . . . The basic problem is the wholesale replacement of a Judeo-Christian worldview by the religious worldview of secular humanism. As churches we repent of our failure to protest this robbery of our heritage in such a strategic area. We pledge our active intercession for reformation in school and society.

We dedicate ourselves to promoting Christian education which follows the biblical principles seen within the Reformed tradition (pp. 80, 81).

This assessment about the secularization of public education is, if anything, even more true today than ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. A series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions concerning the First Amendment, as well as changing mores and laws in Canada, have had the effect of making the public school free of religion—at least free of the Christian religion.

The point we are making here should not be misunderstood. We are not suggesting that public schools and teachers are the *cause* of secularism or that in some deliberate way all public teachers are apostles and prophets of secularism. On the contrary, the pressure of secularism is a pervasive spiritual force that affects all of us—individual Christians, our churches, and also our Christian day schools. The latter are never isolated and insulated greenhouses where tender plants are protected from the culture’s idols. What must be said, however, is that public education in North America is *institutionally committed by law* to secularism. In parallel with the claims made about institutional racism, one need not be an *intentional* or particularly active secularist to contribute to the secularizing direction of education. Furthermore, the pressure to denude our public life of Christian presence and testimony is not new to our day; it is a feature of modernity itself. Already in 1846 the great Princeton Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge told his church’s general assembly that secular education was “becoming the popular theory in this country”:

It is already difficult, in many places, to retain even the reading of the Scriptures in the public schools. The whole system is in the hands of men of the world, in many of our states, and is avowedly secular. Now with regard to this scheme it may be remarked that it is a novel and fearful experiment. The idea of giving an education to the children of a country from which religion is to be excluded, we believe to be peculiar to the nineteenth century. Again, it is obvious that education without religion is irreligious. It cannot be neutral, and in fact, is not neutral.

(*Princeton Review* [1846]: 439)

What Hodge found to be peculiar for his own time is now commonplace among us. We take it for granted that public school education should be neutral. Hodge, however, thought it to be a dangerous and destructive notion, one that, in his judgment was “fortunately, too absurd, too monstrous, too unthankful to take a deep and lasting root in American soil” (*Systematic Theology*, 515).

Unless children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they, and the society which they constitute or control will go to destruction. Consequently, when a state resolves that religious instruction shall be banished from the schools and other literary institutions, it virtually resolves on self-destruction.

(*Systematic Theology*, 3:353)

What Hodge and many others of his day did not envision was a time when what they looked at with horror would be commonplace in America.

Similar convictions and sentiments can also be tracked among the nineteenth-century advocates of Christian public school education in

Canada such as John Strachan and Egerton Ryerson in the Province of Ontario. Ryerson, the first superintendent of education in Ontario and a contemporary of Charles Hodge, believed that while public education should not be sectarian, “it should, nevertheless, be unmistakably Christian in content, for no one doubted the Christian basis of Upper Canadian Society. Equally significant was Ryerson’s conviction that morality, the inculcation of which he regarded as a special obligation of the schools, could only be grounded in Christianity” (John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, p. 145). What made the Canadian situation different from the American was the special provision made for Roman Catholics to establish their own public schools. The objection of Roman Catholics had to do in large part with the use of the Protestant Bible in the classroom. The response of Protestant spokesmen is significant for what it tells us about the religious convictions of the Ontario Protestant common public school:

If the use, by Protestants, of the Holy Scriptures in their [public!] schools is so objectionable to our fellow-subjects of that other faith [Roman Catholic], the children of both religious persuasions must be educated apart; for Protestants can never yield to that point, and if it is insisted that the Scriptures should not be a text book in schools, we must part in peace, and conduct our education of the respective Bodies according to our sense of what is right.

(*A Profusion of Spires*, p. 146)

So, it is fair to conclude that public education at all levels is not religiously neutral. It is also obvious that the course of secularization in public education in both Canada and the United States has run its full course so that the presuppositions of the nineteenth-century common school have been turned upside down. Here, too, some historical distance is helpful. As we make the positive case for Christian day school education, it seems to some who advocate a continuing and even strengthening Christian presence in public schools that our support of Christian schools is too often unfairly at the expense of public schools. Christian school supporters, so it is sometimes said, exaggerate the problems of public schools and are unwilling to own up to problems in Christian schools. This issue must be faced. Our committee wishes to underscore our conviction that the relationship between public education and Christian day schools must not be seen, by Christians at least, as a straightforward win-lose situation in which it is necessary to trash public schools in order to build up Christian schools. Support for Christian education that would joyfully try to ride on the back of the misery of public education is unworthy of disciples of Jesus Christ. As, citizens we must seek the best education for *all* the children of our community.

The concerns about and even objection to public school education arising from Reformed conviction do not depend on public education’s inferiority as such nor does it waver in the face of quality public education. The objection is a religious, philosophical, and spiritual one. As long ago as 1929 and 1930, then editor of *The Banner* the Rev. H.J. Kuiper,¹ in an extended series of articles about Christian education, complained about the sorry moral and spiritual state of public schools but insisted that the problem was *structural*: Public education opposes specifically Christian

instruction and thus jeopardizes the spiritual formation of Christian children (*The Banner*, 3/21/1930, pp. 269-70). In addition, Kuiper directly took on the familiar argument that believers could be a positive, even Christian presence in public schools through Bible reading, prayer, and other witness. Acknowledging that the public schools in some smaller communities had a quasi-Christian character, Kuiper forcefully denounced this as *illegally* taking advantage of a situation and turned the tables by pleading for opening Christian schools to others, calling them the church's greatest *evangelistic* asset (*The Banner*, 9/6/1929).

When Kuiper indicated that he thought active Christianizing of the public schools by believers was *illegal* and should not be encouraged, his journalistic sparring partner in *The Banner*, the Rev. John Vander Mey, after agreeing that Christian schools were a good thing and should be established, pleaded for moderation of zeal in pressing the issue. Calvinists, he insisted are not separatists and, unlike the situation in the nineteenth-century Netherlands where a virulent anti-Christian secularism reigned, there is openness in American public education for Christian moral teaching and leadership. Particularly in communities where there is no Christian school, parents should be encouraged to foster Christian leadership and instruction where it is tolerated in spite of the law. He lamented Kuiper's extreme and sectarian spirit and pleaded for a moderate and mediating position—a yes to Christian schools but also a mildly qualified yes to public schools (*The Banner*, 11/18/1929, pp. 756-57; 11/25/1929, pp. 780-81). The polemical Kuiper, holding the editorial reins in firm hands, immediately denied the charge of being a separatist and a fanatic *with indignation* (*The Banner*, 12/13/1929, pp. 932-33). Kuiper later concluded the discussion by expressing his concern that a failure to assess the public school system in a spiritually and religiously accurate manner resulting in a moderate, mediating position—Christian schools are a good thing but we must also actively support public education—would inevitably undermine the cause of Christian day schools by understating the urgency of the matter. Public education, he was convinced, jeopardizes our children's spiritual formation. Kuiper believed that his debate with Vander Mey had in fact already had a negative effect on Christian education. In many Christian Reformed communities, he contended, "the opposition to the Christian school movement has appreciably stiffened" (*The Banner*, 3/21/1930, pp. 268-69).

Our brief recounting of this lengthy and pivotal discussion in the history of CRC support for Christian education, now some seventy-five years ago, is instructive for our current discussions in the church as well. As Synod 2003 made abundantly clear, the CRC is of a mind to continue more than a century-long tradition of enthusiastic support for Reformed Christian day school education. Yet, the questions posed by Rev. Vander Mey in the 1920s and 1930s have not gone away; they have intensified. Our committee believes that there are two lessons to be learned from the exchange we have briefly summarized. Where there is indeed an openness within public schools for Christian teachers and/or parents to bear positive witness to their faith, such openness should be lauded with thanksgiving. At the same time, we share Kuiper's concern that the spiritual situation of public

education be considered honestly and openly and in such a way that it does not undermine or have a negative effect on support for Christian education.

While the Rev. Vander Mey's observation may have been true in the 1930s that, unlike the situation in the nineteenth-century Netherlands where a virulent anti-Christian secularism reigned, there is openness in American public education for Christian moral teaching and leadership, this is most certainly not the case today. We reiterate a point made earlier that in its support for Christian day schools, the CRC must acknowledge the Christian liberty of parents, recognize that not all its members are of the same mind, and make allowance for all sorts of special circumstances. What we emphasize is that especially today parents must be discerning and spiritually vigilant when making and helping their children make important educational choices that shape life. As a *general* rule, it seems to us that thanks to its legal, institutional commitment to secularism, the North American public school is a far more dangerous place spiritually in 2005-2006 than it was in 1955, to say nothing of 1855.

FAQ 6.1: But our local public school doesn't seem to fit the pattern of aggressive secularism at all. The majority of teachers and even students are members of local evangelical churches and the environment is decent and the education good quality. Why generalize like this?

A. Thank God for his common grace and the existence of such schools, but consider the long-term religious consequences. By law and design public schools *may not* and *cannot* provide a Christian interpretation of God's world to children nor should we expect them to do so. They are required to interpret the world apart from and without referencing God at all. There is no getting around that point. By definition, public schools are *institutionally* incapable of fulfilling the calling parents have to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord and in light of the wisdom of his revelation. That is a major reason why Christian parents home school or send their children to schools that do, by intention and design, educate from a Christian worldview.

In this world where the secularizing pressures to limit our faith commitments and expression to a private sphere are overwhelming, Reformed Christianity in particular is threatened at its core. The Reformed faith is cosmic in its scope and public in its expression; Christ is Lord of every domain of our society and culture, and retreating from this broad vision into a private faith is to exchange Reformed Christianity for something much less. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to maintain the commitment to and enthusiasm for distinctively Reformed Christian day school education. At the same time, when the church faces such pressures, it needs Reformed Christian education all the more. It is hard to imagine the CRC's developing future leaders who are committed to the Reformed faith in its cosmic vision without Reformed Christian education from kindergarten to college. The complexity and challenges of our modern (some refer to it as postmodern) world demand well-rounded and well-trained

Reformed Christians who can be a transforming influence in the world. From a human standpoint, the very future of the CRC as a Reformed church, preparing a new generation of Christian disciples committed to a cosmic vision of Christ's lordship, may depend on how successful we are at maintaining flourishing Reformed Christian schools at all levels. Both the church and the school face enormous cultural pressures and challenges against Reformed identity; for either to withstand, they will need the full support and cooperation of the other.

Anxiety about potential future calamities in the kingdom of Christ is not a good or sufficient reason to embrace the cause of Christian education. The desire for and support of Christian education is born out of faith and is an expression of positive, confident, joyful obedience. If we believe that Christ is indeed Lord of all, we must not exempt the CRC from his reign. To put it even more starkly, the future of Christ's kingdom does not depend on the survival of the CRC. Nonetheless, it is in the CRC that the Lord has placed us and has entrusted to our stewardship a vision of Christian discipleship that has been a blessing and can continue to be a blessing to North American society. It is thus in the spirit of our committee's synodical mandate that we call the CRC to reaffirm and renew that Reformed vision—a vision that sees Christ as Lord of all, including our educational institutions.

It is also worth noting that a commitment to Christian schools and Christian education actually has a quasi-confessional status in the Christian Reformed Church. Recall that *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* states this explicitly in paragraph 50: "In education we seek to acknowledge the Lord by promoting schools and teaching in which the light of his Word shines in all learning, where students, of whatever ability, are treated as persons who bear God's image and have a place in his plan." This contemporary testimony thus commits us as a denomination to an inclusive view of Christian day school education where no child of the covenant community is left out for any reason, and the education of all the church's children is a responsibility of the whole community.

We suggested above that the CRC has a vested interest in Reformed Christian day schools if it is to retain its own Reformed identity. Conversely, if Reformed Christian education is to flourish, the church must repay the favor and support Reformed day schools. This, too, has been a long-standing conviction in the Christian Reformed Church. H.J. Kuiper, in his series of articles in *The Banner* on Christian education in 1929 and 1930 regularly posited the thesis that where Christian schools flourish, Christian Reformed congregations will also (see, e.g., *The Banner*, 8/16/29, pp. 564-65). It is here that the spirit of secularism threatens both church and school at a different level. If the vision of Christ's lordship over society, culture, and education diminishes in either church or school, the other's Reformed identity is also threatened. Church and school are in a symbiotic relation-

¹ We are indebted to James De Jong's forthcoming book on H.J. Kuiper for the references that follow in the text.

ship, and their successes and fortunes are closely linked. When the vision for the Reformed worldview fades in our communities, we, too, are vulnerable to the seductions of secularism and are tempted to privatize our faith.

A loss of Reformed self-consciousness in our communities will likely also result in diminished allegiance to Christian day schools. For one thing, they are no longer in competition only with public education. Political trends increasingly favor parental choice in education and offer hope for greater justice in educational funding. Our committee lauds all efforts to increase choice and enhance educational opportunity. These efforts are fully in the spirit of Church Order Article 71 as well as previous CRC synodical pronouncements that place the primary responsibility for educating children on parents.

However, a caution must also be sounded because increased choice requires an informed consumer. The term *consumer* illustrates the problem perfectly. In a culture and society driven by materialist and consumerist ideals, it is also possible that we begin to treat church and school as simply one more consumer product and make choices not on sound biblical, theologically informed preferences but on less important ones. The greater availability of choice demands enhanced discernment on the part of Christian parents who need to be able to make discriminating decisions when faced with all the various options available. To provide just a few examples: How does one distinguish between a school that only puts a layer of Christian-values icing on a secular-curricular cake and one that truly integrates the Christian narrative into the entire curriculum? How does one tell apart schools that actually succeed in such integration from those that only add piety in the form of worship exercises to an otherwise indifferent or even secular curriculum? How does one determine if a school absolutizes academic excellence, athletics, or social activism at the expense of a balanced, integrated Christian curriculum for all children? Finally, what are the differences between Christian schools' and charter schools' emphasizing traditional family values? Similar sorts of questions must be asked about homeschooling curricula and organizations. Christian Reformed parents face so many more choices in education today than they did in 1955. Therefore, it may be even more important for CRC parents today to have an informed framework for understanding Reformed Christian education (see section V) than it *may have been* in the more homogenous CRC communities of 1955 and earlier.

In our consumer society, the availability of choices in education brings with it the potential for bane as well as the opportunity of blessing. Parents run the risk of thinking about the education of their children as just one more consumer product to be purchased for helping their children get ahead. Christian education is only a financial investment from which parents then want a good return. Entrance into Ivy League schools, a well-paying job, or a better athletic program might all become more important than preparation for service in God's kingdom. Christian discipleship then becomes hostage to unworthy consumerist goals. Parents are not the only ones tempted by consumerist ideas; schools may succumb as well. A Christian school may be tempted to compare itself to non-Christian schools

with respect to standards in athletics, arts, merit scholarships, and so forth on purely worldly terms rather than seeing its mission as preparing students for kingdom service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Facing a myriad of choices in education, parents will naturally be led to shop for the best school for their children. Christian schools must bear in mind that parents seek quality education for their children out of love and that parental concerns are not necessarily driven by un-Christian consumerism. Consequently, parental concerns and complaints about alleged failings of Christian schools deserve to be listened to and treated with respect and care. Here great discernment is needed. Are parental concerns directed to the Reformed Christian character of the school? To students becoming better disciples of Jesus Christ, equipped for service in his kingdom? It could very well be that the Christian school in question has succumbed to worldly consumerist pressure and is more concerned about the success of its football team than its identity as a Reformed Christian school. On the other hand, a parental concern could also be the opposite: concern that with all the tuition being expended on Christian education, their child does not have as good an opportunity to get a football scholarship as the neighbor child who attends the public school because the school's values are elsewhere. In the former, the school is guilty of consumerism, in the latter it is the parents. Both are conceivable; both undoubtedly happen in our communities. We need to keep this spiritual context and contest of our age constantly before us as we consider the place of Reformed Christian day school education today, at the beginning of the third millennium.

FAQ 7.1: We took our child out of our local Reformed Christian school because the administration and school board seem indifferent to our concerns. We will be sending our child to another Christian school this fall. Are we the sort of consumers that you complain of in your report? Do you judge our actions as a bad thing?

A. Not necessarily. We sense how hard this is for you. You are trying to do the best for your child and are in a situation of conflict that does occasionally happen in Christian communities; it is a tough spot for parents to be in. Because you do not specify what exactly it is that you are dissatisfied with, it is hard to answer your question in general. From your question, it appears that you have done the right thing in making your concerns known to the school board. We don't know how else to advise you and other parents in similar situations but to suggest that you ask the administration and board of your school to join you in an extended study and discussion of what it means to be a Reformed Christian day school. Perhaps, you might begin by together carefully reading and reflecting on this study committee report. We hope that such prayerful dialogue would be a basis for discussing in an open and Christian manner the differences you may have with each other's views (see Recommendation F).

FAQ 7.2: *Thanks for being so understanding. Our minister and church council really don't want to get involved because they say that the church must not interfere with the school's freedom. Is this what you meant by sphere sovereignty?*

A. Only up to a point. (See FAQ 3.1-3.4.) The church *as institution* (the official church) has no say in the direct governance of an independent, parent-controlled school. However, the church and its officebearers, particularly ministers of the Word, do have a responsibility to be a prophetic voice in all spheres of life, and the school is certainly one of the most immediate and important areas of concern for the church. It is perfectly appropriate for the official church to ask its members to be vigilant for the well-being of the schools they support, to do what is humanly possible and necessary to maintain the Reformed identity and Christian character of such schools. (See Recommendations G-I.)

We should, of course, not live in fear of possible storm clouds on future horizons and be paralyzed in our acts of faithful obedience to our Lord. At the same time, it would also be a breach of trust for us to become indifferent to potential drift away from the ideals of Reformed Christian education. The threat of drift is real, and it should be as much a matter of concern to the church as it is to the school. The long and clear history of educational institutions that have fallen from the Christian ideals of their founding, with many even repudiating the Christian faith altogether, shows the close connection between the health of the school and the involvement of the church. This is especially true for church-affiliated colleges such as the relationship between Calvin College and the CRC.

The story of the secularization of American universities is well chronicled (G. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*; James Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*). As important as the stories of decline is the account given by Robert Benne's recent book, *Quality with Soul*, which is an account of the schools that have *resisted* to some degree or other the siren calls of secularization. Benne's story demonstrates that resistance to the spirit of the age, especially to the process of secularization in the school and privatization of faith in public life, requires the close cooperation of church and school.

As Benne examines the common factors that help a school maintain its Christian vision and practice and not succumb to secularization, the main one is keeping close links with the sponsoring church and upholding its distinctive confessional identity. Thus, when a Lutheran school loses its *Lutheran* identity it will most likely eventually lose its Christian identity as well. For a school to remain *Christian* and not secularize, it is important that it keep its Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, or Reformed identity. Putting it negatively, Benne describes the process of secularization thus: "first, making education 'non-sectarian' by identifying with a general, generic Christianity; then by an appeal to spiritual and moral ideals of a vaguely religious or patriotic cast; and finally by the exclusion of specifically Christian religious values and practices in the name of allegedly universal intellectual, moral and democratic qualities" (p. 4). Benne warns:

“One decisive mark of secularized schools is the lack of mutual recognition and care by both school and church, when neither sees the other as crucial to their mission” (p. 182). The lesson from history is thus clear: If we want to keep our Reformed Christian schools authentically Christian, it is important that they stay Reformed. The Reformed Christian school needs a healthy Reformed Church for the sake of its own health—and vice versa.

It is important to make clear at this point that the close faith relationship between a Reformed Christian school and a Reformed church does not mean a church-operated school. School and church retain their own distinct identity and governance autonomy. Nonetheless, a mutual regard for each other’s religious identity is not only appropriate but necessary. In particular, both church and school bear mutual accountability for maintaining the confessional integrity of each. Here, too, it is worth noting the common pattern of drift that Benne catalogs in the process of school secularization. It begins by eliminating the tradition’s distinct worship practices (chapel is generic, then optional, then cut out altogether) and codes of conduct. In an attempt to make the school less sectarian and distinct, efforts are intensified to recruit students and teachers who do not identify with the tradition. The result is likely to be a decline in support from the sponsoring denomination. Because decline in students and funds must be made up somehow, the school works even harder at recruiting outsiders to the tradition, which then erodes support even further.

The portrait Benne paints describes the process by which a school loses its distinctive religious identity, then loses its Christian identity, and then becomes secular. We cannot avoid facing the reality of drift away from the core vision of our tradition or be sanguine about the possibility that our Reformed Christian schools at all levels are also threatened by the forces of secularism. Because the confession that Jesus is Lord over all of life is a key conviction of the Reformed tradition, both the Reformed school and the Christian Reformed Church will need to be proactive in affirming and passing on to future generations the value of such a Reformed vision and identity.

Finally, we cannot adequately describe our cultural context without using the word *postmodern*. Although postmodernism, by its very nature, is infuriatingly difficult to pin down, its dominant notion is the refusal to acknowledge any objective truth. No single narrative, and for sure not the biblical one, has more validity than any other one. In fact, according to postmodernism, there are no large narratives that provide meaning across different cultures; it is all a matter of one’s perspective, of finding the truth of one’s own story. Instead of Enlightenment confidence about our knowledge and optimism about the human future, post-Enlightenment thought is characterized by a hopeless, centerless pessimism. Truth is judged to be unattainable, values are all relative, and we are consigned to choosing all things for ourselves. This attitude is pervasive and powerful in contemporary North American society. It is also, so Christian conviction and experience teach us, a dangerous attitude—one that potentially threatens our very freedom and openness as a people. Christian resistance to this postmodern

danger would seem to be an obligation to our Lord and to our fellow American and Canadian citizens.

However, our communities themselves are not unaffected by this new relativism. When a culture through its mass media emphasizes maximizing personal feelings, then decision-making based on personal commitment or religious duty is minimized, as Charles Colson has noted, in favor of a therapeutic mindset in which being happy rather than holy is *the* ultimate religious goal. It is not surprising then that many relationships based on love, trust, devotion, and commitment break down. The rate of divorce in Christian communities is practically the same as that of the society around us. Not only does this affect the way in which we conduct Christian education but so much of the school's and the church's energy then goes into healing the broken situations arising from the self-centered, hedonist, consumerist values of our world. We risk becoming so self-absorbed by our own hurts that we fail to see the larger spiritual conflicts of our day. The relevance of a Reformed Christian education with kingdom vision may not be apparent to some and may seem to others as irrelevant and the financial sacrifice as poor stewardship. Furthermore, the pressure of relativism pushes our young people toward moral and religious pluralism. The ideal of tolerance is powerful.

In conclusion, much has changed since 1955 in the cultural water in which we swim as Reformed Christians in North America. Increased secularization worships the creature rather than the creator, and idols replace the Lord in the hearts, minds, and imaginations of our youth. Postmodernism nips at the heels of these idols only to replace them with other goddesses. The mass media leg of the nurturing stool has taken on cancerous characteristics as it infects and infests our churches, homes, and schools. In this context, it seems to us that Reformed Christian education is as critical as ever. Reformed Christian day schools can play a significant cultural role in our society by using the light of God's Word to shine in all areas of learning so that students of various abilities are treated respectfully as God's image bearers who have their place in God's plans as the narrative of God and his people continues until the Consummation. This requires diligence on the part of parents, churches, and other supporters of Christian day schools. Know that our communities—our families, our churches, our schools—are confronted by powerful idols in our day, notably those of secularism and consumerism, and that we may never be satisfied with mere institutional loyalty. We and our institutions must be led by the Holy Spirit and ruled by God's Word. That is the challenge given to all of us.

2. Changes in the Christian Reformed Church: Diversity and identity

Not only have our culture and society changed since 1955, and undoubtedly the CRC along with them, but our church has also changed from within. This change can be summed up in one word—diversity. In 1955, a visitor from Vancouver, British Columbia, who attended worship in Midland Park, New Jersey, would immediately feel at home with the order and style of worship. There was a standard and recognizable liturgy, and every congregation sang from the red *Psalter Hymnal*. 'Tis so no longer.

Liturgies can vary greatly from congregation to congregation and song lyrics on overhead projectors often replace the *Psalter Hymnal*. In addition, most CRC congregations, with some exceptions (notably in what is now Classis Red Mesa) were monochromatically white and primarily ethnically Dutch. Here, too, things are no longer what they used to be, and our committee here reiterates the observation and endorses the conclusion of the 1996 Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God report that the growing ethnic and racial diversity of Canada and the United States presents “a truly exciting challenge for the CRCNA, which in God’s sovereign grace is already becoming a diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic family of God” (*Agenda for Synod 1996*, p. 218). In the remainder of this section in our report, we will first address the area of worship, particularly preaching, and second, the challenges of our increased diversity.

It is not the task of our committee to determine or assess the extent to which the preaching from our CRC pulpits has changed over the last forty years, but we can make a case for the sort of preaching that nurtures the commitment of CRC members to Christian education. In keeping with the Reformed kingdom vision described in the previous section of this report, we endorse preaching that proclaims the relevance of the good news to all areas of life—preaching that courageously exposes the secular idols of our age, especially the idols of the opposing kingdom. Such preaching is critical and requires a strong narrative sense of the Bible’s history of redemption, insight into the story of our secular culture, and the prophetic ability to relate the one to the other. Specific sermons about Christian education may be less important than the type of preaching we have been describing—preaching that centers on the lordship of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. This is the sort of preaching that equips CRC congregations with the biblical wisdom and discernment required to deal with the many complex issues involved in Christian education in our contemporary secular world.

This kind of preaching is hard to maintain in the cultural context described in the previous section. When faith is privatized and individualized, then congregations may desire messages that massage their feelings instead of messages that confront the idols with which they are becoming increasingly comfortable. That a growing sector of North American evangelical preaching leans toward such therapeutic goals rather than truth or holiness has been compellingly demonstrated by David Wells in his books *No Place for Truth* and *God in the Wasteland*. It would be a mistake to assume that these same influences have not affected CRC pulpits as well. What we do have is anecdotal evidence encountered by our committee members, particularly from the testimony of Christian school teachers, that the Christian Reformed pulpit is too often silent or muted in its support for Christian education. If so, then it is even more urgent that CRC preaching be powerfully directed at proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ and at releasing us from our captivity to the age’s fashions and idols.

Of the present age’s idols, perhaps none appeals to the old Adam in us as does North American individualism. Individualism comes to expression in church life as localism or congregationalism. The allegiance and support of

individual members and local churches turns away from denominational ministries to local ones. Especially where denominational offices are at some distance from them, local congregations feel less and less involved in the denomination's churchwide ministries. This trend is noticeable in the CRC with decreasing support for ministry shares during a decade of remarkable and increasing prosperity. The independent spirit of congregationalism may also have made a significant contribution to the loss of CRC membership over the last decade. Along with controversial agenda items such as women in ecclesiastical office, which has created unhappiness, a general sense of alienation from denominational ministries contributes to a climate in which breaking old bonds of ecclesiastical fellowship and forging new ones seems to be relatively painless.

The concerns expressed about consumerism in the previous section need to be repeated here. Pure consumers are by definition individualists; they purchase for the moment, for the immediate gratification and not for the greater good or the long run. The primary concern facing our communities when it comes to consumerism is the matter of stewardship—stewardship of our confessional heritage as well as our finances. Our denomination as whole as well as individual congregations needs to be concerned about the possibility that Christian education will become elitist and will be the exclusive province of the wealthy. According to paragraph 50 of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, Christian schools exist “to prepare all students of whatever ability” for kingdom service. We must continue to insist that Reformed Christian education is not only for the most academically gifted or for the privileged. We must continue to insist that a return on education of success and monetary reward is not the first priority. We should not be sanguine about the seductive lure of such consumerism. While increasing costs of education may cause financial hardship for some, the general affluence of most CRC communities today does raise the question of whether Christian education is simply one more consumer choice in competition with a new car, a motor home, expensive vacations, or a summer cottage. Under these circumstances and values, it will be difficult if not impossible to maintain the vision for and commitment to a community of belief and its countercultural witness as a signpost of Christ's kingdom. The lure of consumerism and the call to obedient stewardship is a message the whole church needs to hear. We need to ask ourselves whether a move toward congregationalism and indifference to denominational identity and ministry represents the same consumerist and individualist spirit that tempts individual believers and families. If so, then there is here yet one more link between denominational Reformed identity and willingness to sacrifice for Christian day school education.

Legitimate concerns about individualism, congregationalism, and consumerism, however, should not obscure the importance of Christian liberty. Denominational covenants and confessional commitments must not be treated cavalierly by members or congregations. Yet, synod must be sensitive about the danger of sounding like it is issuing top-down imperatives about how parents should educate their children. We call all CRC church members and particularly officebearers to keep in mind, and be

faithful to, the vision of Christian education stated in our Church Order (new wording):

The council shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools where the Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation is clearly taught. The council shall urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with this vision according to the demands of the covenant.

At the same time, in keeping with the careful wording adopted by Synod 2003, we note the importance of affirming Christian liberty along with, and as an essential ingredient of, our full commitment to Christian day school education: "That synod, while respecting the various educational choices made in good faith by families, reaffirm the Christian Reformed Church's commitment to and promotion of Christian day school education from the elementary level through college and university" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 619).

The preceding caution about Christian liberty may be one of the reasons for the muting of CRC pulpits on the subject of Christian education. There may, however, also be another reason. Some pastors and church members believe that explicit calls from the pulpit to support Christian education run the risk of offending new members who have no experience with Christian education. We celebrate the diversity that has blossomed in our denomination since 1955. The increases include Christians from other cultures, Christians new to the faith, and Christians from other denominations. Therefore, there are many more members of the CRC today than in 1955 who did not grow up nurtured in the Reformed world-and-life view and its entailments, including our denomination's commitment to Christian education. For that reason, this is not a time for the CRC to mute its voice in support of Christian education but to raise the volume. In our new circumstances, it is all the more imperative that we articulate for this generation, in refreshingly new ways, the gift of our Reformed story and its cosmic vision of Christ's rule over all things. If we wish to remain a confessionally Reformed church, we cannot shy away from this grand story. We must not relegate our commitment to Christ to a small private sphere of life but must insist on a full-orbed cultural and public discipleship. Christian day school education, which fills in the cultural education of children in areas where churches and families cannot, is thus an integral part of the Christian community's discipleship training for service in Christ's kingdom. To remain true to ourselves as a Reformed denomination, we need to give ourselves permission to tell the whole Reformed story both to those who are new to our denomination and to those who already cherish it. Reformed Christian day schools are an integral part of that story.

Here, we again remind synod and the CRC of the close, symbiotic relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Christian day schools. This link is first of all a faith—confessional—world-view link rather than an institutional one. School and church share beliefs and convictions. As a confessional church in a voluntarist North American church environment that is not hospitable to confessional denominations, the CRC faces the same struggles for identity and survival that other

confessional bodies (e.g., Lutheran) do. North American evangelical Christianity is pragmatic and sectarian (in contrast to the more established church life of Europe). Doctrine and theological reflection take a decided second place to revival strategies that nurture church growth. It is in such situations that therapeutic emphases triumph over truth and faithfulness. Not only is being happy more important than being faithful to the truth, being happy is also more important than being holy. A church that prizes truth and faithfulness to a rich confessional tradition does not have an easy time maintaining its identity as a confessional church in North America.

It is precisely here that Reformed Christian schools provide the CRC with support and additional resources for maintaining its Reformed identity. Reformed Christian schools shape the world-and-life view of students who go on to become ordained or lay leaders in CRC churches. These are the sorts of leaders who understand the Reformed vision; who practice it in their families, vocations, and civic life; and who will insist on preaching and worship that nurtures commitment to and love for the Reformed faith. This means concretely that Christian Reformed pastors must themselves be educated in a Reformed worldview framework. Preferably, this would be an education that extends from kindergarten to seminary, an education that grounds pastors in the cosmic, catholic vision of Christ's rule over every square inch of creation, the hallmark of a Reformed vision of the kingdom of God.

Here we need to address a sensitive potential misunderstanding and objection. There is a chance that the previous two paragraphs will be read as saying something to the effect: Be careful who you let in and especially to whom you give leadership positions in the CRC. Leadership positions should only be given to lifelong members of the CRC who have been inculturated through participation in all the right CRC institutions. We understand why such an interpretation *could be* inferred from the preceding and recognize that in today's climate there may even be some who will construe our position as exclusive or perhaps even racist. Most emphatically this is not what we are suggesting. We value and affirm the growing racial and ethnic diversity of our denomination. At the same time, we do those who join us as well as our heritage a disservice if we fail clearly and vigorously to proclaim, celebrate, and bear joyful witness to the great and grand vision of Reformed Christianity. If this becomes problematic, we must face the question of whether the CRC wants to remain a confessionally Reformed church. We believe that the CRC and Reformed Christian education need each other and should support each other in their common commitment to Christ's rule over all things, including culture and society. The Reformed faith is under pressure in North America, and faithful resistance to the spirit of the age makes it imperative that church and school sing from the same score. Only when pulpits enthusiastically and clearly proclaim the good news that Christ is King will our communities gladly and generously support Christian education. Only if Christian schools remain true to that vision will they produce the kind of lay as well as ordained leaders the CRC needs now and in the future.

FAQ 8.1: *How can officebearers in the church and parents whose children attend Reformed Christian schools meet the concerns expressed in Church Order Article 71 “to establish and maintain good Christian schools where the Reformed vision of Christ’s lordship over all creation is clearly taught” and to see to it that “children [are] educated in harmony with this vision according to the demands of the covenant.”*

A. The following list is basic though not exhaustive:

1. Insist on good preaching that presents a full-orbed Reformed worldview.
2. Train council members well on the essentials of Reformed faith, polity, and practice.
3. Have elders discuss the education of children during home visits.
4. Encourage openness in the school toward parents as well as high levels of parental involvement in, and consent to, school curriculum and activities.

3. Conflicts about Christian education

Reflection about developments since 1955 leads us to conclude that the partnership between the CRC and Christian day schools has changed significantly in those years. In 1955, in most CRC communities, the constituents of church and school were nearly identical. That allowed for both church and school to legitimately assume certain things about each other. That is no longer possible. Not only does the CRC membership include those with little experience and understanding of the CRC’s commitment to Christian education, but the Christian schools themselves include parents with little background or understanding of the Reformed life- and worldview. This presents us with new challenges as well as new opportunities to reaffirm our confession and to renew our commitment.

This is also a good place to address the additional mandate given to our committee to consider in greater detail “the nature of divisions and brokenness in churches, where not all families have equal resources, commitments, and sensitivities regarding Christian day school education” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 631). We observe once again that our original mandate only asked us to address the first issue—finances—and that finances once again appear as the first item on the list in our enhanced mandate. There is good reason for that. Apart from financial constraints, the issue of conflict in commitments and sensitivities would be no different from other areas of church conflict such as women in ecclesiastical office or worship style. This is a point worth emphasizing. When it is suggested that ministers and councils should be neutral with respect to Christian education because of sensitivities in the congregation—e.g., public school teachers and/or supporters in the pews—what is being suggested is a principle that seems unworkable as a general rule. The CRC includes among its membership those who passionately believe that women in office or not, contemporary worship or traditional, are imperatives flowing from a Reformed understanding of Scripture applied to our day. It may or may not be possible to achieve a consensus

compromise—as the CRC has attempted with women in office—but the principle of neutrality is not possible.

Each congregation, council, and pastor, however, must recognize two distinct issues with respect to Christian day school education: (1) even when Christian day school is uniformly supported and successful in a community, its very success may have unintended negative social consequences; (we shall not repeat our earlier discussion at this point but do alert the reader to section III as well as to Recommendations C and I); and (2) it is important to be aware of the exact place where a particular congregation is at with respect to Christian education. The first step in conflict resolution is awareness. Bearing in mind the social complexities of integrating new members into established communities, we must still commit ourselves to discipling new members and new churches in all aspects of Reformed doctrine and life. Christian education is not unique here. Recognition that parents do have responsibility and liberty means that their spiritually guided and biblically informed choices must be respected. They may, however, also need to be challenged on occasion; that, too, is the hallmark of responsible biblical pastoral guidance in preaching and teaching. Our committee is not inclined to, and we believe synod should not, attempt detailed case studies or issue specific rules for application in concrete instances. The guidelines we suggest here must suffice; wise pastors and councils, as always, must apply them to their situations and specific circumstances.

We judge, therefore, that the new circumstances of the CRC in 2005—greater diversity, new members, and new churches—are a wonderful opportunity to bear witness to the Reformed vision of an integral Christian education. We have an opportunity to disciple our own members in the riches of the Reformed tradition and to bear witness and give leadership to the many other Christians who are increasingly opting for some kind of Christian education.

With the growth of non-Reformed Christian schools, Christian Reformed parents face many new choices that were unknown and even unavailable fifty years ago. Here the close relationship between church and school again asserts itself. As CRC parents face increasing numbers of choices, it is imperative that CRC church leaders provide pastoral guidance to such parents by clearly, vigorously, and enthusiastically proclaiming the cosmic vision of the Reformed faith. Not all Christian schools are alike. Reformed Christians should be able to recognize the shortcomings of a school that only adds piety and chapel to an otherwise secular curriculum. They should also know and be able to articulate the difference between Reformed Christian schools and charter schools that emphasize traditional family values but lack a broader Christian perspective in all subject matters. In our increasingly complex world, it is important that CRC congregations are guided by God's Word as articulated in the Reformed confessional and theological heritage. The urgency of our times requires this. A decreased level of support for Christian education in CRC pulpits would be an unhealthy sign of a loss of Reformed identity and diminished allegiance to the Reformed confessions. The church and the school stand together in

mutual support of a Reformed witness to our world. It would be fitting for synod to give thanks to God for bringing the CRC *anno domini* 2005 to new circumstances of greater diversity and declare this to be a wonderful opportunity to bear witness to the Reformed vision of an integral Christian education wherever it takes place—in the home, school, or church. Synod should also urge all the members and churches of the CRC to give leadership to the many other Christians who are increasingly opting for some kind of Christian education.

In summary, all of these changes in culture, society, and the CRC require nothing different from what we have always been called by the Lord to do as a church. We do, however, have an obligation to do so in new ways—taking new and different circumstances into account with renewed vigor. We now go on to consider the vexing matter of educational *choice*.

4. New options in education: Choice

From its early history, the Christian Reformed Church as a denomination has strongly encouraged and supported Christian day schools (see section IV). These schools developed over time from parish schools to parental, society-governed institutions. The content of education also evolved over time from a concern to maintain the Reformed confessional heritage by maintaining the Dutch language to a desire to Americanize and eventually to provide students with a Reformed world-and-life perspective in order to be effective kingdom workers in God's world. Over the past one hundred years, members of the Christian Reformed Church have established hundreds of Christian day schools throughout North America. During this time, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church has time and again reaffirmed its full commitment as a denomination to Reformed Christian day school education, prior to the most recent reaffirmation in 2003, some fifty years ago in 1955.

Since synod's 1955 statement, perhaps the biggest change in education is the wide range of choices available to parents and their children. For most of those years prior to 1955 the choice was simple: either the local public school or a Christian school. Today, while state and provincial governments continue to mandate education for children from approximately five years old to youth in their teens, many governments have allowed for more choice by parents as they comply with mandatory education at this age level. The various choices can be categorized as follows:

- *Government schools*—schools most commonly known as public schools and controlled by state or provincial governments.
- *Charter schools*—schools permitted to operate with individual, corporate, or government ownership, funded by state or provincial governments, with permission to educate in nontraditional ways.
- *Alternative public schools*—Christian schools that function within the structures of a public school board (e.g., Edmonton, Alberta). *Note:* The United States parallel is magnet schools.
- *Private or independent schools*—schools controlled and governed by a society of supporters (parents and others) or by a founder and followers of a certain philosophy of education.

- *Parochial schools*—schools operated and controlled by a denomination or an independent church.
- *Home schools*—schools wherein one or both parents teach the children, usually in the home.
- *Virtual schools*—systems of education that can be purchased using the World Wide Web.

a. The need for discernment

At the root of the many and varied reasons for this explosion of choices is a growing dissatisfaction with public school education. Public school education has become one of the most significant and divisive political issues in our North American public square, the premier arena for our culture wars. The major change from the beginnings of the nineteenth-century common-school tradition in both Canada and the United States is that a common school depends on a common, unified vision of society and moral order and such a common, coherent, unified, public vision simply no longer exists in North America. North American public education in the nineteenth century had as its basic purpose the enculturation of all children, but especially those of immigrant newcomers, into the ideals of Canadian and American citizenship—how to become a good Canadian or American. In both countries now, this ideal is elusive if not unachievable because a single notion of what it means to be a good American or Canadian is itself being questioned. One single, monolithic national ideal may be unrecoverable in our pluralist societies, and, with its disappearance, the rationale and possibility of a *common* public school that does justice to all minorities as well as to the majority becomes practically impossible. *Pluralism* and *tolerance* have become the bywords for a multicultural society. Because schools are the principal communities of memory in a society, the place where common traditions, knowledge, and skills are passed on from generation to generation, the lack of the same inevitably leads to conflict, which is exactly what we are seeing in North America. If there is a crisis in North American public education, it is an identity crisis with competing visions striving for influence and control. This is the explanation for the rise of home schools, charter schools that emphasize values education, and multiple forms of Christian day schools.

This explosion of choice presents the Christian community with two major challenges: discernment and justice. With the rise of alternatives to public school education that embody many of the concerns of Christian parents, such as values education, Reformed Christian parents need to be discerning and carefully consider, for example, whether free charter schools really offer the same thing as Reformed Christian day schools. What may appear to be similar may in fact be quite different.

b. Educational justice

As the cost of Christian education, along with all education, continues to increase, cheaper alternatives to privately funded (in full or in part) Reformed Christian day schools will become more and more attractive. This is especially true for options such as charter schools that emphasize

values in keeping with Christian morality. It is crucial, therefore, for the well-being of Reformed Christian day schools that financial reasons not be the primary obstacle for parents. For these reasons, various plans to expand *affordable* choices for Canadian and American citizens, especially for the poorest of our citizens, should be seen as a matter of justice. In a pluralist society, all parents, irrespective of their financial resources should have free opportunity to have their children educated according to the dictates of their consciences. Additionally, though there are indeed many choices available to parents, financial considerations make the choice very difficult for some parents. What is most troubling about the matter of finances is that the disparity between those who can and those who cannot afford to pay increasing tuition costs may in some cases fall out along racial lines. When the potent mixture of poverty, class, and race come together, there is a real potential for tragic and painful conflict between brothers and sisters in Christ. Such conflict and disunity is one of the most serious impediments to the gospel message. Synod 2003 recognized this when it passed four of our recommendations that encouraged diversity and justice out of conviction that denominational efforts to help all CRC members to be able to send their children to a Reformed Christian day school is one of the real tests of our commitment to become a more diverse church by dealing directly with matters of injustice and inequity. The following recommendations were adopted by Synod 2003 on diversity and justice in education:

7. That synod urge CRC church councils to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education. Congregations should seek professional legal and tax accounting advice when drafting such plans.

Ground: (d) Financial difficulty should not be a barrier that prevents church members from sending their children to a Christian day school.

8. That synod encourage CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race, ethnicity, special needs).
11. That synod instruct the general secretary of the CRCNA to send official correspondence to the President and to representatives of the U.S. Congress, as well as to state governments and state legislators, calling on them to enact legislation that makes education choice without financial penalty available to families with school-age children. Similar letters are to be sent by the Canadian Director of Ministries to the Canadian provincial governments where appropriate.

Ground: (c) Educational choice is a matter of social justice. CRC members who have the resources are able to provide a Christian day school education for their children. It is the poor who suffer the most from lack of educational choice.

12. That synod encourage CRC members to make the matter of school choice and educational justice a matter of priority for prayer and action.

(Acts of Synod 2003, pp. 626, 627, 628)

In order to help synod come to an informed decision about what it should say in its advice to the churches concerning the matter of finances, it is important to know what the current situation is in terms of government funding. In Canada, particularly in the western provinces, the provincial governments contribute to the education of all children by contributing half or more of the cost of education for parents who choose independent (not governed by publicly elected boards) schools.

In the United States, the wall erected between church and government has prevented almost all government support for the education of children whose parents enroll them in nonpublic (the term of choice in the United States with the same meaning as independent in Canada) schools. Some parents benefit from funds for special needs' students or from funds for poor families. Some states provide ancillary services such as transportation, some textbooks, technical equipment, and social services. Recently, a few states have adopted small tax-credit programs that provide scholarships for students attending nonpublic schools. The constitutional legitimacy of certain voucher programs was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2002 when it upheld the constitutionality of the Cleveland, Ohio, voucher program.

The closest relationship between Reformed Christian schools and the government is in Alberta. The most visible example is the Edmonton Society for Christian education. For three years, this Reformed Christian school society, founded by CRC members with a strong Dutch ethnic similarity, has contracted with the Edmonton Public Schools as an alternative school within the public school governance. The Edmonton Christian School receives full funding from the city, its principal is appointed by the public-school superintendent, and all of its teachers have joined the Alberta public school teachers' union. The contract allows, even encourages, the Edmonton Christian School Society to choose its own teachers and to carry out its clearly Christian mission. This option is now available throughout the province of Alberta.

From the preceding overview, we can see that some progress has been made in providing a more just way of funding Christian day schools. There is, however, still a long way to go, and the churches of the CRC and their members should continue to heed the urging of Synod 2003, noted above, by pleading and working for greater educational justice in North America. Disparity in educational opportunity based on economic ability is a grave injustice, and basing the availability of Christian education solely on CRC parents' ability to pay for a Christian day school education will make it difficult for CRC congregations and members to continue strong support for Reformed Christian schools. Our report addresses some of these concerns in greater detail in the next section.

When the multiplication of choices in education is combined with observations about the changes in the CRC, we must take note of new challenges to CRC members. There are numerous CRC members who teach or are otherwise involved in public education from elementary school to university level. The Reformed understanding of Christ's lordship means that we honor the desire to be ambassadors of the kingdom in public

education, as difficult as that may be. The intention of parents to be a witness and a blessing in public education must also not be overlooked.

Our committee recognizes that these are complex and intensely personal choices facing CRC members. Furthermore, the church must not infringe on the Christian freedom of the believer (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19) by requiring one and only one path of Christian discipleship. The intention to be a public witness to Christ in education can take different forms. What must not be forgotten, however, is that the CRC's traditional commitment to Christian day school education is not in the first place an individual matter but a covenantal communal matter. Synod 2003 both acknowledged and honored the legitimate diversity in the CRC along with the principle of Christian liberty as with wisdom and sensitivity it made its basic affirmation of support for Christian education:

That synod, while respecting the various educational choices made in good faith by families, reaffirm the Christian Reformed Church's commitment to and promotion of Christian day school education from the elementary level through college and university.

(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 619)

In this way, CRC members are called, with equal conviction, to maintain the communal commitment to institutions of Christian education and the recognition that Christian believers are called to free and discerning obedience. In addition to what we have already said about homeschooling, we would also call attention to the following issues.

In the previous subsection, we noted some of the reasons why many parents are demanding greater choice in education. For Christians, this must never become simply a personal selfish matter (let me have *my* share of tax money) but an issue of justice. One of the chief objectives of broad-based support for Reformed Christian education is to afford opportunity for parents who find the cost prohibitive to still provide a quality Christian education for their children. It is unjust to have Christian day school education available only for the well-to-do.

The issue of public justice in education also has a broader dimension. The resistance to choice in education has the effect of creating a monopoly for state-controlled education. When alternatives to a public school monopoly are prohibitive (not to mention prohibited!) the very foundations of liberty and pluralism are threatened. The history of Reformed Christian education in the Netherlands of the nineteenth century is instructive here. As secular government authorities emptied day schools of all explicit religious teaching, orthodox Reformed believers attempted to start their own schools. While the law permitted such independent schools, bureaucratic obstacles as well as cost made establishing such schools very difficult. Abraham Kuyper's crusade for educational justice was not only out of concern for the children of Reformed Christian parents but also a matter of broader justice and religious freedom in the Dutch nation (see John Bolt, *A Free Church: A Holy Nation*, chap. 7). Kuyper realized that Christian schools, as free and voluntary institutions, provided a necessary counterweight to an intrusive state, particularly a secular state that was seeking to control the

education of all children. The very existence of Christian schools stands as a witness to the lordship of Christ and as a testimony to freedom and public justice. As we consider the importance of Christian day school education, this must not be forgotten.

Finally, it must also be pointed out that Christian learning is itself a communal activity. This is more obviously true at the college and university levels where Christians in similar academic disciplines pool knowledge and resources in order to provide Christian perspective. However, it is also true of education issues at other levels, for example, matters of pedagogy. So, while we honor the liberty of CRC members in terms of their desire to honor Christ in education, we would also insist that institutional Christian day school education is an essential component of our *communal* responsibility as Reformed people.

5. Conclusion

When we consider together the changes in education—the changes we noted in our culture, in our society and church, and in the variety of choices made by Christian Reformed Church members—our committee remains convinced of the need, perhaps now more than ever, for Reformed Christian day school education. Synod 2003 reaffirmed that commitment; however, it may have potentially confused the church when it did not pass Recommendation E of our original report that synod request the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA to assist all CRC agencies in the implementation of the denominational strategy of including “Christian day school education in a full-orbed CRCNA mission program” (BOT Minute 2592, 3).

Grounds:

- a. Reformed Christian day school education is important for equipping a leadership for the CRC that is committed to the Reformed faith.
- b. In view of the growing secularization of public schools, the Reformed tradition’s long practice of successful Christian education is an integral part of our Reformed kingdom witness and mission to our fellow citizens. This is one of our distinctive contributions to the growth of God’s kingdom in North America (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 361).

When synod defeated this recommendation it may not have been aware that it was in effect thereby rescinding a synodically approved denominational strategy and CRCNA Board of Trustees policy. We judge that synod will want to clarify this anomaly, reaffirm its own denominational strategy, and are therefore resubmitting this recommendation with this report, with one additional ground, a ground that anticipates our further discussion of Christian education and world missions in section VII, C, 3.

- c. There is a growing awareness among evangelicals in mission work globally that evangelism and missions in our world are incomplete without distinctly Christian education at all levels. (See the theme issue of *Mission Frontiers* [25/2, March April 2003]: “The Scandal and Promise of Global Christian Education.”)

This will help the church as a whole promote Christian education “so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17, NRSV). Having considered in broad strokes the *context* within which Christian education takes place, we now examine more specifically the current state of support for Reformed Christian day schools.

B. Rethinking support for Christian schools

Within the broad Christian school movement, the Christian schools organized by Dutch Reformed immigrants have always had a close association with the Christian Reformed Church. From its denominational beginnings in the 1850s and through the large waves of immigrants into the United States in the 1880s and into Canada after the Second World War, these immigrant groups typically formed a church almost immediately. Next, these same groups formed Christian day schools. Although some of the earliest schools were parochial, well before the turn of the century a new model, inspired by Abraham Kuyper, took hold. Christian Reformed groups formed societies or associations to elect school boards to govern the schools. The society members were often the same people who were members of the church, but the two institutions were governed differently.

Although some parents may have thought of the schools as protection agencies for their children against the secular influences of the general culture, the philosophical statements of these Reformed Christian schools typically reflected a Calvinistic and Kuyperian purpose for the schools. These were not just schools “of the Bible,” in the sense of pious practices of prayer and Bible reading; they sought to teach a worldview, a way of seeing all of life through “the spectacles of Scripture” (Calvin). These schools promised to help children learn in principle and practice the cultural mandate to be stewards of all of creation in Christ’s name and to bring the rule of Christ to bear in all of culture. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” was the theme song.

Throughout the history of Reformed Christian schools, CRC members who chose public schools for their children have claimed that the CRC’s aim for God’s people to be salt and light in the world extends to their children’s being witnesses for Christ in the public schools. These parents believed they were fulfilling the covenantal promises of Deuteronomy 6 through the Christian education they provided at home and in their church. These parents also claimed that public schools employed many Christian teachers who could guide their children when conflicting worldview claims drew their attention in school. Some parents also argued that they wanted their children to learn alongside children with different ethnic and racial backgrounds rather than with mainly Dutch kids in the local Christian schools. Earlier in our report (section III), we noted that isolation and separation could be unintended social consequences of Christian day schools. Here we would reiterate the point we made then: This unintended consequence should not be used to undermine support for Christian education but rather call the church and schools to actively pursue ways of encouraging interaction with the broader local civic communities of which they are a part.

Today, the CRC is more racially and ethnically diverse than it has ever been before. Christian schools are too. Some Christian schools, whose enrollments

were nearly 100 percent CRC members' children, now have fewer than 10 percent CRC children. Even in the communities that are still dominated by Dutch surnames, the parents who support the Christian school may represent many ethnic traditions and church affiliations. In large cities, the older Reformed Christian schools often retain governance in the hands of a minority of Reformed Christians while serving a majority of parents who want Christian education for their children but define that education as practice in piety, or moral values, or a safe environment in an unsafe culture. Now some Reformed Christian schools are considering enrolling children whose parents are not Christian but who desire a Christian education for their children.

Today, too, ecclesiastical cousins such as the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) are forming Christian schools across the United States. These schools are often parochial and clearly Reformed in perspective. As a denomination, the PCA has not emphasized Christian day schooling as has the CRC in its history. Susan Wise Bauer (*Heirs of the Covenant*) emphasizes the covenantal basis for Christian education but practically illustrates it by the church's Sunday ministry and homeschooling, passing off Christian schools as a third alternative for those who have the means for it.

1. The problem of inclusion

In the new millennium, the students within the Reformed Christian schools (most having membership in Christian Schools International, a support agency to these schools since 1920) come from many denominations and from independent community churches. Still, the number of children from ethnic and racial minority groups within the schools is certainly less than in the public schools nearby. Minority members of the CRC testify that their children do not always feel at home in the Reformed Christian schools—not charging overt racism but noting that the overwhelming majority of students still is Anglo. To many minority Christians, Reformed Christian schools still *seem* to be ethnically exclusive even if the schools make overt efforts to be inclusive.

The church and school must address all perceptions that create barriers to full inclusion of *all* members or students. It is not a sufficient or even appropriate response to say that these perceptions are wrong and should be corrected. Our concern in this report is the seeming decline in full support of Christian day school education within our CRC congregations. Finances have been cited as one reason for this decline, and our committee was given the assignment to seek out denominational ways of addressing the problems arising from the growing cost of Christian education. If there are perceptions that Reformed Christian schools are exclusive—whether true or not—the church is duty bound to address this barrier as well. We must do what we can to change perceptions by helping to change the reality that gives rise to the perception, not to demand that the perceptions be altered.

Are Reformed Christian day schools exclusive? Are they islands of ethnicity that make it difficult to learn that the world is multiethnic and Christ's kingdom is inclusive? They are certainly not exclusive in intent. Many welcome ethnic minorities and include the honoring of cultural diversity not only as a major goal of the school but also test for it. Most

Reformed Christian schools now have a service component in their curricula that teaches students to care for people unlike themselves and to seek justice and restoration within a broken and unjust world. In addition, there are Christian school districts, such as the Grand Rapids Christian School Association, that make a conscious effort to hire qualified minority persons and in addition provide scholarships for those who cannot afford tuition. While these scholarships are not intended only for, or restricted to, minority students, the demographic realities of the larger Grand Rapids urban area do bring about that effect. Synod 2003 encouraged congregations and groups of churches to initiate similar creative approaches that target students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools when it adopted Recommendation 8 (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 619):

That synod encourage CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race, ethnicity, special needs).
(*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 627)

2. Inclusion and evangelism

The objection that Christian schools erect barriers to becoming a more inclusive church has also been raised from a different angle. Questions are raised about whether church support for Christian day schools is a barrier to outreach by suggesting that Christian education is an essential ingredient of Reformed Christian discipleship. Does such an expectation ask new believers and members to accept a standard for membership that exceeds biblical and confessional requirements? Does the prominence of Christian education within our CRC communities create a psychological barrier for new converts or transfers from other denominations who do not have such an expectation as part of their own history? In addition, a concern for evangelistic outreach also gives rise to another concern—the issue of stewardship and priorities. Evangelistic outreach and a passion for the lost is said by some to be of greater importance for servant-stewardship than only serving our own children. We will not repeat here all our earlier observations about the relationship between missions and/or evangelism and education and our recommendation to the church not to elevate one at the expense of the other (Recommendation C) but only give a summary of the theological argument.

The church of Jesus Christ has been given a commission by its Lord to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). This command is issued by the one to whom has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth.” The church’s mission, therefore, is framed by the narrative of God’s covenant and kingdom. The royal authority given to Christ is the fruit of his finished work. As the apostle Paul says about himself, he was “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendent of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his

resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:1-4 NIV). What this means is that the commission given to the church by our Lord is not simply or only a royal proclamation of God’s kingdom that fulfills the covenant promises of the Old Testament. Rather, kingdom and covenant remain the foundation of *today’s* gospel mission. The church’s message of salvation still has covenant and kingdom as its content, a content that can be summarized something like this: Faithful to his covenantal promises to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3), God himself became incarnate in Jesus the Messiah who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation and ascended to send the Holy Spirit to empower the church for its mission. As the church acts in obedience to its Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes a participant in the grand narrative history of salvation. It does so as the undeserving recipient of divine grace (election) and as an active agent in God’s work of redemption as human history unfolds. In other words, fully recognizing that all salvation history is centered in Jesus the Christ, his visible presence in our world today is via his body, the church. The human Jesus is not with us but ascended (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 18). Yet, he indwells his temple-church through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). The church is Christ’s *bodily* presence on earth.

Covenant and kingdom, therefore, are inseparable. Together they create the frame of a narrative that spans the ages—the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. The church’s mission is to tell that story to the world and, through word and deed, to invite others into the continuing narrative of redemption and consummation. God’s covenant promises give that narrative a depth of assurance. For those who put their trust in God’s covenantal promises in Christ, the story has a happy—no, a glorious!—ending: eternal life in full fellowship with God in a new heaven and new earth where there is no suffering, pain, death, mourning, or tears. This confident hope in the certain glory of the salvation narrative’s outcome is a necessary encouragement for the church’s pilgrimage in the dramatic unfolding of that narrative. The ground of Christian hope is a confidence in the covenantal promises *because* Christ’s royal power and authority make it clear that he is not only *willing* to save (as his voluntary suffering and death make clear) but also *able* to save. Our loving Father *is* Almighty God (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 9). From a Reformed point of view, covenant and kingdom are the two divine realities that form the basis for and the content of all Christian education. As the CRC’s *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* puts it (paragraph 50): “In education we seek to acknowledge the Lord by promoting schools and teaching in which the light of his Word shines in all learning, where students, of whatever ability, are treated as persons who bear God’s image and have a place in his plan.” Thus, together, in their own distinctive ways, church and school seek to draw the sinful and lost human beings away from the life-scripts that lead to death and into the covenantal narrative of God’s kingdom, a story that reaches its conclusion in glorious eternal life.

3. Christian schools are necessary for the church's mission

Focusing more on practical questions, the church's mission is to bring lost people to Christ and to nurture them in a life of Christian discipleship. A Reformed vision of discipleship is full-orbed; it acknowledges the reality of calling in all vocations not just the gospel ministry. It was in this spirit that when Synod 1997 adopted a new Vision and Mission statement for the church it set forth the following goal under the rubric of kingdom extension:

By the year 2002, the CRC will have developed a deeper understanding of and response to God's claim to obedience in all areas of our lives (business, labor, government, media, health, education, justice, peace, affluence, pursuit of pleasure, earth keeping, racial relationships, etc.).

(Agenda for Synod 1997, p. 61)

This goal flows from a thoroughly Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship. It also requires training for church leaders that cannot be done by the official, institutional church itself. It is training that can only be done through Christian education in Christian schools at all levels. The official church (institute) does not have the mandate or the resources to teach disciples of Christ the fine points of earth-keeping or global political strategy. To import these teaching goals into the church's education program runs the risk of politicizing the church. We acknowledge that the call to be obedient to Christ's lordship in all of life means that the church's nurture of Christian faith and discipleship must be global in its scope because the gospel is wide. At the same time, the church also realizes the limits of its specific mission and acknowledges that it needs the Christian school for its own mission, particularly in training successive generations for effective leadership in the church that is committed to the Reformed faith. The church also needs the school to equip its members for broader kingdom service in the wide range of human vocations. It is the school, not the church that prepares Christians for discipleship in politics, science, art, medicine, and law. The church has no mandate or competence to teach mathematics or economics; the school does. Reciprocally, the school needs Reformed churches that will proclaim this cosmic vision of Christian discipleship and support the school with its prayers and its offerings.

The perception that evangelism and discipleship are separate goals in the church is therefore a false dichotomy in our judgment. Being forced to choose one over the other overlooks the missiological significance of the school itself as a public testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is precisely this global vision of Christ's kingdom that attracts many evangelicals to the Reformed faith and to Reformed Christian schools. In addition, many Reformed Christian schools have as part of their mission statement that children will learn to become "responsible disciples of Christ." The Reformed Christian schools have served the Christian Reformed Church as the agency that the church uses to teach its children what discipleship means, what faith in Christ has to do with the world, and what following the Lord to extend his rule in the world means. Prior to the time when Christian Reformed churches had full-time, trained youth ministers, and

still today in places where youth ministry is done by volunteers on an ad hoc basis, the Christian school functions as a very effective youth group.

4. Inclusion and the problem of finances

We must still face the troubling questions raised earlier in this section. No one will deny that racial injustice, snobbery, elitism, selfishness, and materialism afflict Reformed Christian school communities, as they do the CRC itself. Also, the disparity in income in the CRC, sometimes within the same congregation, is perhaps greater now than thirty years ago. In addition, the CRC now includes congregations that are ethnically diverse and congregations that are predominantly one ethnic or racial minority. Add to these disparities the different foci in alternative Christian schools, e.g., one school emphasizing personal piety and character development while another centers its purpose on students' learning and putting into practice a Reformed worldview, and we can see that CRC parents face an array of challenging and sometimes painful choices. It was in recognition of the need of guidance for members of the CRC that our committee was appointed by synod.

However, it is not the matter of choice as much as the inequities among CRC parents' ability to pay tuition for Reformed Christian schools that threatens the continuation of strong churchwide support for Reformed Christian schools. Furthermore, the trend for invested parents to pay a higher percentage of the cost of Christian education has decreased the percentage of CRC parents using these schools. When the CRC last endorsed Christian day school education in the 1950s, the parents paid less than two-thirds of the total cost, with the nonvested parents of the churches covering one-third of the cost. Today most Reformed Christian schools expect more than 90 percent of their revenue from tuition. In Canada, most schools charge tuition by *family*, with the same charge for parents with one participating child as with five or more. In the United States, many schools now charge tuition by the child. That means that with a yearly tuition of \$3,500 per child on the average, the one-child family only pays that amount while the four-child family pays four times that amount.

As the CRC looks to the future to fulfill the congregation's vows at baptism, it must consider specific means of financial help so that *all* the church's children may learn a Reformed Christian pattern of discipleship in the home, church, and Christian day school. What kind of just means should the CRC endorse? It seems to us that the following features ought to be part of any plan that a congregation chooses to provide financial assistance so that all its children have the possibility of receiving a Reformed Christian education:

- Provide access for every covenant school-age child, regardless of the financial ability of the parents.
- Include Christian day school support as an essential part of the church's general budget, just as it does line items for youth ministry, pastors' salaries, and evangelism.

- Teach all members that financially supporting Christian day school education is part of the covenantal vow made by the congregation when the church’s children are baptized.
- Encourage all parents to make use of Reformed Christian schools.
- Provide financial support to all children, regardless of the parents’ need, and encourage all members to be the stewards of their resources for all of the church’s ministries. Decide the amount of support for every child based on the cost of education in local Reformed Christian schools and the ability of the whole congregation to pay.

5. Homeschooling

At this point, we also need to consider the new (since 1955) phenomenon of homeschooling. Synod 1955 (*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199) did not even consider this possibility. It simply stated as a self-evident truth that “formal schooling as we know it today has become a necessity in the complex society of the modern day. Parents cannot fulfill their God-given mandate in our culture and civilization without calling upon others to assist them in their task.” The synodical statement goes on to link parents’ entrusting their covenant obligations to others by appealing to the traditional baptismal liturgy that states “and cause them to be instructed therein. . . .” Still, today some CRC parents believe that the best way to carry out their covenantal obligations is to instruct them at home. Certainly the CRC must respect the choices these parents make to conduct schooling of the heart and mind at home, with themselves as the prime teachers. The church ought to support them with prayer and with encouragement to teach a Reformed view of the world. Where Christian day schools are available, the church needs to encourage a spirit of good will and cooperation between those who homeschool and those who send their children to Christian day schools. Where no Christian day school exists, parents should be encouraged to work toward establishing one, and, in the meanwhile, the church has a responsibility to be supportive of parents who homeschool.

However, in the same way that parents who send their children to a Christian day school have a covenantal obligation to be supportive of those who homeschool, so should homeschoolers support Christian day school education. Christian education of all the children in a congregation is a communal task. The church’s first responsibility is to see to it that it is possible for all the church’s children to receive a Reformed education in a Christian school. We believe that in a school, children see a Christian worldview from different angles, test that worldview in a safe place, and learn from others the nuances of practicing that faith in a fallen world. Learning in a Christian school in a broader community than the home helps children both broaden and deepen their understanding while also giving them both the opportunity and the responsibility to give their learning to others. Learning the truth in community underscores the covenantal promise made by the congregation at the baptism of every child to contribute to every child’s education, when we say together, “we do, God helping us.”

At this point, we also need to add the caution given earlier about possible *unintended* negative consequences of homeschooling. The same danger of separation and isolation applies as it does to separate Christian day schools. Parents who homeschool are sensitive to this and often join organizations of homeschooling parents to coordinate activities and provide significant social settings for their children. However, the risk of separation from local civic communities is as real for separate homeschool organizations as it is for Christian schools. The format and structure are different but the unintended consequence may be the same. The social antidote is also the same: Encouragement to significantly interact with local civic communities.

In addition to the commitment of such parents to accept full responsibility for their children's upbringing, there are often elements of protest targeted at specific local Christian schools. Here we also call on CRC members who support Reformed Christian day schools to listen carefully to the reasons parents give for homeschooling. To take communal covenantal accountability seriously, Christian school supporters, parents, teachers, administrators, and board members need to pay attention to the concerns and critique expressed by brothers and sisters in Christ. Honoring diversity does not mean silent criticism but involves speaking the truth in love. Here, too, we see how integrally the communal life of the congregation is tied to the education of its children in the home, the church, and also in the formal education of the daily classroom. No system for decreasing the financial injustice of access to Reformed Christian schools will on its own make either the church or the school more ethnically or racially diverse. However, if the CRC provides financial assistance to all the church's children so that they can receive a full-orbed Christian worldview education, it will demonstrate that the vows the congregation makes at baptism are real and really essential for the CRC to carry out its mission in the world, to extend the rule of Christ through the Christian education of its children in all three agencies of faith nurture—home, church, and Christian school.

FAQ 9.1: Our child is just not comfortable in our local Christian school. She just has not been included in the activities of her classmates but made to feel unwelcome.

A. Stories like yours are heart wrenching, and how we wish it just wasn't so and pray it won't stay so. Unfortunately, it does happen that children who for a variety of reasons do not feel that they fit in (did not grow up in the community, did not go to the main "feeder" school of a local Christian high school, are of a different race or ethnic background, of a different class and level of wealth, and so forth) are not treated with the kind of love and acceptance that our Lord expects of us in any community of believers. That is a tragedy and calls for self-examination and repentance followed by conversion of practice. Our Christian schools need gifts and contributions that a diverse student body brings. Schools benefit from the fuller fabric of human diversity, and we pray that you will be able to find other parents who share your concerns and

that you and your child will have the courage to stick it out and call the school community to be true to itself as an inclusive Christian community. (Also, see Recommendation I.)

6. What the CRC now thinks about Christian education

With the assistance of Dr. Rodger Rice, former director of the Calvin College Center for Social Research, our committee prepared two survey questionnaires, one for CRC councils and another for CRC pastors. A detailed executive summary of each survey can be found in Appendices A and B. The complete survey data will be available to the synodical advisory committee that considers this report. In this section of our report, we will highlight some of the features of the surveys that were striking to the committee.

First, a few observations about the survey process. The surveys were sent to all *active* pastors in the CRC and to all councils of organized and emerging churches. The return rate for the pastor's survey was 57 percent (493/864) and for the council survey 66 percent (655/989). The committee is grateful for the cooperation of pastors and councils for this good rate of return. All forty-seven classes were represented in the survey as well as a good range of differently sized churches, though there was a small overrepresentation, when compared with denominational statistics, of churches in the 301-600 member range as well as an underrepresentation of small churches (1-150 members). We also need to caution that the exact figures in the survey summaries are still only the *perceptions* of the respondents and not hard data. We shall first consider the council survey and then the pastors' survey.

The council survey indicates an encouragingly high level of committed support for Christian day school education. Churches are believed to have positive relationships with their local Christian schools (94 percent), are largely united in their support for it (71 percent), and a high percentage report pulpit support (79 percent) and strong elder support (73 percent) for Christian schooling. In addition, 75 percent say that their church encourages its young people to attend a Christian college. At the same time, there are contradictory results that are less encouraging.

Notwithstanding the high level of encouragement to young people to attend a Christian college, the estimated median percentage of students who actually do attend one is reported as only 23 percent. If this figure is correct, we consider this a matter of concern, especially when combined with the estimated mean figure of 60 percent of children attending Christian day schools. The latter figure was estimated to be 67 percent fifteen years ago and suggests a decline in support for Christian education. What we can say with confidence, therefore, is that the churches report that only one-half of their children attend a Christian day school. Furthermore, of the churches that report that their children attend a Christian school, 31 percent report that none of their children attend a Reformed Christian school. As a committee, we wonder if these data reflect a growing lack of awareness of Reformed identity and concern about Reformed identity with all its implications for Christian discipleship. If so, this is a trend that has

profound implications for the future membership and leadership of the Christian Reformed Church.

There are other conflicting signals in the survey data. Although a high percentage of councils report that they support Christian education and even 77 percent say they encourage parents to have their children instructed in Christian day schools, 75 percent also say that officebearers are not necessarily expected to send their children to Christian schools. What is of special concern to us is the high percentage (63 percent) of councils who disagree that the baptismal vows require parents to send their children to Christian schools and who also disagree that the baptismal vow implies congregational financial support for parents of school age children. In effect, this means that Church Order Article 71 is effectively disregarded by 75 percent of our churches. When it comes to the promotion and financial support of Christian day school education, the results defy easy characterization or pattern. It is not clear to the churches who has the primary responsibility for promoting Christian education. Financial support is the most commonly cited means of promotion, though 29 percent of the churches report providing no financial support. Where financial assistance is provided, it is based on need and given after a review of family finances. We judge that, while there is support for Christian education in our churches, there is little creative or coordinated promotion or planning for congregational financial support.

Here we also need to report that financial need is the most commonly (71 percent) cited reason by parents for not sending children to a Christian school. Though the results of the pastors' survey show some variations with the council survey, the general perception of their church's relationship to Christian education is very similar. Pastors, too, report a high level of support for Christian education, a good working relationship between church and school, and significant unity in their churches in support of Christian education. Pastors also indicate that there is a lack of coordinated strategy for promoting and financially supporting Christian education. Finally, pastors also give the cost of tuition as the chief reason why some parents do not send their children to Christian schools. Nonetheless, conflicts and contradictions are found in the pastors' survey as well.

First, we note a key difference with the council survey. While 75 percent of the councils report that there is no expectation that officebearers send their children to Christian day schools, 63 percent of pastors report that they are expected to send their children. This is an interesting difference, but the reason is quite apparent: Pastors experience pressure to send their children even when councils do not explicitly require it.

For the committee, the question that concerns us the most is Q. 9h in which 69 percent of pastors disagree that baptismal vows by parents require them to send their children to Christian day schools. Perhaps the word *require* is the stumbling block here. If the question were formulated something like: "Is sending children to a Christian day school a legitimate implication of the baptismal vow?" perhaps the figures would have been different. Still, the fact remains that 63 percent of councils and 69 percent of pastors who responded disagree with the traditional CRC understanding

that the baptismal vow is necessarily linked to Christian day school education.

Here again there is also countervailing positive response. In response to the question about the arguments and reasons pastors give to promote Christian education (Q. 10) some 160 gave “worldview issues” as a primary reason and used phrases such as “lordship of Christ over all areas of life,” “Reformed perspective,” “integration of faith and learning,” “cultural mandate,” and “Kuyperian worldview.” Some 100 did relate Christian education to baptismal vows and the responsibility of parents to fulfill their covenantal obligations. This indicates that covenant and kingdom remain key elements in the theological grounding of Christian education for Christian Reformed pastors. It may also indicate a shift in that kingdom emphases are slightly more prominent than covenantal ones.

Our final comment deals with a troubling issue in our CRC communities. At the same time that ethnic and racial minorities in the CRC raise concerns about not being fully included in our Reformed Christian schools (see above) both the council survey (87 percent) and the pastors’ survey (68 percent) report that the ethnic minority members of their churches feel comfortable attending Christian day schools. Whatever the reality, perceptions clearly differ. It is a Christian imperative that all CRC members, including ethnic minority members, carefully examine their perceptions. At the same time, the burden is on the majority culture in the CRC to do all that is in its power to make our communities welcome and safe places that encourage diversity.

Parents whose children attend Christian day schools and CRC members who support these schools need to stay informed and be vigilant in helping their schools be truly inclusive communities where diversity does not create unnecessary barriers to any student’s full involvement in the life of the school.

VII. Special circumstances and considerations

A. *Congregational conflict*

In our historical sections, we pointed out that conflict in the CRC about Christian education is not new to our time. Levels of enthusiasm have varied from community to community and church to church. On occasion, such as the *Banner* discussions in the 1930s between editor Rev. H.J. Kuiper and Rev. J. Vander Mey, disagreements about how essential Christian day school education was for maintaining a Reformed identity and vision in the CRC were publicly aired with considerable passion. As we address the matter of contemporary conflicts about Christian education in our church and congregations today, we should not make the mistake of feeling overwhelmed by wholly new and unprecedented obstacles but recognize that in some respects the challenges remain the same while in other respects they are different. Because of that, we may be confident that many of the resources available to generations past are also available to us. At the same time, we also are provided with wonderful new opportunities not available to generations past.

Synod 2003 asked our committee, to consider in greater detail “the nature of divisions and brokenness in churches, where not all families have equal resources, commitments, and sensitivities regarding Christian day school education” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 631). This is an expansion of our original mandate (from Synod 2001), which had only asked us to address the first issue—finances—in this list. It is not clear to us what else we can say about churches where not all families have equal resources. We spent a significant amount of time addressing this issue in our original (2003) report and judge that if churches widely follow the guidelines we presented there and now again in section VII, D as well as section VIII, creative ways can be found to make Christian day school education a reality for any child whose parents are willing to make it a top priority (indeed, this is often the case already).

Dealing with brokenness, divisions, and wide variations in commitments and sensitivities and their impact on our ability to find common ground with respect to Christian day school education, seems to us a more difficult issue that deserves separate reflection in this report. It is also a more primary issue than the resources issue. History is replete with examples of people and groups who accomplished seemingly impossible tasks with limited resources because they were united in their mission, single-mindedly committed to accomplishing it, and collectively willing to sacrifice for it. So, in spite of the fact that financial barriers are very real, we do not want to lose sight of the possibility that there are many ways to gather resources for Christian day school education if everyone involved agrees that this is a high priority.

We also want to make two other points that relate to this. The first is that it is unwise to artificially separate out commitments and sensitivities from resource issues because the process of struggling communally with limited resources both requires sensitivity and commitment and contributes to development. Most likely, it was precisely this kind of virtuous circle that blessed the impoverished immigrants who started the Reformed Christian day school movement in North America more than a century ago. Thus, we do not want to be paternalistic and assume that it is all but impossible for small or poor communities to start or send their children to a Christian school. Indeed, the success of the home-school movement is a testimony that schools with as few as one student can achieve remarkable results. We judge therefore that the new circumstances of the CRC in 2005—greater diversity, new members, and new churches—should be viewed not as a problem but as a wonderful opportunity to build community and bear witness to the Reformed vision of an integral Christian education.

The second point, which flows from the first, is that authentic Christian education can only emerge out of communities that are making tough decisions about resources. We judge that Christian schools that serve only the financially self-sufficient will not ultimately be successful at Reformed Christian education. Neither, however, is poverty a virtue with respect to Christian education. Both poverty and wealth pose dangers that need to be counterbalanced by a rich sense of community and commitment. So, we would argue that no church whose poor, middle class, or wealthy congregants have a long list of *wants* that are more important than God-centered education

for the children of the church (and the denomination) has the right expect a full measure of God's blessing on their endeavors.

1. A pastoral response

How then should churches pastorally respond to situations of conflict arising from inequity of resources or competing visions and commitments? If neutrality is not possible, then neither is it possible to satisfy the sensitivities of all members. For example, a passionate endorsement of Christian education may ruffle the sensitivities of public school supporters. At the same time, a lukewarm, unenthusiastic acceptance of Christian education as one valid option will offend Christian school teachers and supporters. It cannot be the primary concern of the church in such contexts to avoid offending everyone. Dancing around a subject is but one of a number of ineffective strategies for dealing with conflict that has plagued our congregations.

As CRC parents face increasing numbers of choices, CRC church leaders must provide pastoral guidance to such parents by clearly, vigorously, and enthusiastically proclaiming the cosmic vision of the Reformed faith. Not all Christian schools are alike. The urgency of our times requires that CRC congregations be guided by God's Word as articulated in the Reformed confessional and theological heritage. A decreased level of support for Christian education in CRC pulpits would be an unhealthy sign of a loss of Reformed identity and diminished allegiance to the Reformed confessions. The church and the school stand together in mutual support of a Reformed witness to our world. In addition to this, churches must identify and sort out the specific (and likely complex) underlying causes of conflict in their midst and move in the right direction, irrespective of their starting point.

2. Sources of brokenness and conflict

Congregations and their leaders cannot begin to deal with brokenness unless they are honest about its sources. At the broadest level, this involves secularism, individualism, and materialism that, even in the absence of significant social and cultural differences, will result in widely different ways of seeing the world within a single congregation and make it difficult to maintain community. Each of these will in its own way promote a divergence in commitments to a Reformed perspective, thus increasing theological differences within Reformed thinking and diverging views of the importance of Christian education and what it means to be communally responsible for our children's education. In such a cultural environment, differing ideas of the strengths and weaknesses of a specific Christian school, local community or public school, or home school will either be suppressed or expressed in a way that confirms the lack of community. Busy schedules and higher priorities will make discussions of other important issues, such as wide variations in financial situations within the church or the communal financing of education almost impossible.

Many other things also undermine community and contribute to the inability of church members to agree on how they should respond to Reformed Christian day school education. We are not referring here to differences that stem from the diversity of gifts that strengthen the body of Christ but to differences rooted in the sin and brokenness of people's lives

that cloud our vision, distort our priorities, cause us to confuse uniformity with unity, and blind us to processes for reconciliation. Sin, or brokenness, also permeates individual lives and is at the root of fragmented families, racial tension, selfishness, and moral compromise. It leads to structural injustices, unwise decisions, and overwhelming personal or family problems that together sabotage relationships and overwhelm our ability to cope with the complexities and challenges of modern life. It results in our inability or unwillingness to carry out our offices effectively or obediently (parenting, giving, mentoring, preaching, and so forth) and creates tensions among young people in the church (also related to their spiritual and relational immaturity). Perhaps most importantly, it leads to a migration of our hearts as modern stresses (e.g., the demands of two full-time jobs, child rearing, school commitments) and stress relievers (e.g., TV, movies, sports) deprive the church of much of our time, talents, and energy.

Unchecked over time by intentional efforts to build the body of Christ, these same forces are likely to obscure both the true causes and the potential methods for resolving conflict. Church members will carry on for long periods of time with little understanding of the damage done by unresolved conflict or the benefits of well-managed conflict. Preoccupied by other less important things, they will neglect the hard work of identifying problems, clarifying goals, increasing love, building fellowship, communicating effectively, and so forth. They will overlook the importance of identifying and equipping congregants who have conflict-resolution gifts, or of using Scripture and the accumulated wisdom of conflict resolution specialists to reduce and manage conflict. Thankfully, the kind of Christian education that attempts to bring God's word to bear on all areas of life holds promise as a powerful antidote to this fragmentation. It can prepare and equip congregations to ferret out and address the above-mentioned sources and manifestations of conflict far more thoroughly than we can in this report.

Our focus must remain on the church's role in dealing with brokenness and differing sensitivities and commitments. It is called to disciple all members in all aspects of Reformed doctrine and life; Christian education is a part of that. Recognition that parents do have responsibility and liberty means that their spiritually guided and biblically informed choices must be respected. They must, however, also be challenged on occasion; that, too, is the hallmark of responsible biblical pastoral guidance in preaching and teaching. Without this kind of challenge and the right goals and creative strategies, some of our churches may very well remain for decades in precisely the kind of conflict quagmire that precipitated this additional mandate to our committee. Each congregation, council, and pastor, however, must know where a particular congregation is at with respect to Christian education and apply these guidelines to their situations and specific circumstances.

3. Goals, strategies, and conflict resolution

To that end, synod should encourage churches to develop goals, strategies, and conflict-resolution recommendations for all Christian Reformed Churches. First, we believe all congregations should emphasize that healthy

differences are evidence that the body is as it should be (diverse) and should plan for ongoing opportunities to strengthen the body by using the diversity of gifts to teach each other and build one another up. In doing so, however, we must emphasize that our Christian liberty is bounded by God's law and by our church communities and authorities. Within this environment of constrained diversity, a congregation should work toward enthusiastic congregational endorsement of Christian day school education, especially from pastors and church leaders. That has been our historic position and was endorsed by Synod 2003. Support for Christian day schools flows very naturally from our doctrine and our convictions about covenant, kingdom, and mission (see later in this report). Christian education is a hallmark of Christian Reformed identity, and there should be no need to apologize for our enthusiastic support. It should be our goal that all members of the congregation eventually (over the decades) catch this vision, even if they choose alternative forms of education for their children.

To make this a reality, each church should put a continuously evolving strategy in place that holds pastors accountable to address key subjects from the pulpit (see also our comments in section VI, A, 2). At the least, this should include sources of conflict and brokenness; the critical importance of combating worldliness and community breakdown in the church; covenant, kingdom, and mission as foundations for Christian education; prophetic advice to congregants on their role as society members and parents in calling Christian schools to obedience and justice; and financial stewardship and the use of resources in community. They should also use stories to call attention to Reformed spiritual forebears who were neither Dutch nor CRC, draw parallels between past immigrant communities, on the one hand, and present inner-city or small-town communities, on the other, in their struggles to establish Christian schools (e.g., Sussex and Lawndale). Follow-up on these important issues could be done through adult education programs.

In addition, each congregation should adopt a formal plan for building community that includes making sure the church community is afforded adequate time in people's schedules to effectively carry out its task (e.g., replacing outside activities with church activities promoting fellowship, simpler lifestyles, or inter-generational contact). This should include conscious attempts to break down barriers between Christian and public school students, perhaps in the form of annual meetings between Christian school representatives and representatives from supporting congregations to discuss why the church should continue to support the school and to seek insights from church members on the impact that the school is having on churches and families. To build a common mind, congregations will need to develop new membership and adult education classes that connect the concepts of covenant, kingdom, and mission to Christian education and also institute plans for cost sharing to make it obvious that the church and/or denomination cares about Christian education for the children of all families.

Building community also means recognizing that different subgroups within a community may have different sets of priorities and ways of relating to each other. If one wants to distinguish between people who are

task oriented and those who are more concerned about building relationships, then it is fair to say that traditional, ethnically Dutch CRC communities are closer to the task oriented end of the spectrum. In communities where proponents of Christian education lack significant time in their schedules to get together with others to build relationships and only to get together to perform tasks, it is likely to be more difficult to generate congregational support for Christian day school education with persons and families who are relationship oriented. In our diversity, we need to know our own cultural predispositions. For example, when indirect communication patterns or the use of shame are persistent in the cultural roots of some church members and groups, reconciliation can be very difficult to achieve.

Finally, we need to address the process of conflict resolution. Goals will not be reached and strategies will be ineffective without action steps to accomplish their intended purpose. So, we recommend that churches identify people with the gifts and respect to resolve conflicts. Then, we recommend that churches invest in these people so they can guide orderly discussions about the role of churches in promoting Christian day school education. This way, assumptions are honestly examined, differences are accepted, serious attempts are made to view problems from various angles, problems are attacked instead of people, resolution replaces justification, and people look forward (opportunity) rather than backward (blaming) and covenant with each other to follow the chosen alternative. These leaders should not avoid conflict (thereby dooming both the goals and the relationships), try to achieve goals at the expense of relationships, give up goals to preserve relationships, or compromise along the lines of the world. Rather, they must recognize in faith, that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to reach difficult goals while simultaneously building up the body of Christ. Over time, our congregations will be blessed by increasing numbers of leaders skilled enough at conflict resolution to ensure that dialog (rather than debate) takes place by bringing people (not just spokespersons) with differing opinions together in a safe place to share information, express their feelings honestly, listen carefully, withhold judgment, admit their doubts, and seek understanding. These leaders will also look for concrete measures of progress in community building and conflict resolution and use lack of success relative to these measures, if necessary, to change strategies.

Perhaps most importantly, these leaders will echo what the congregation is hearing from the pulpit by calling repeated attention to a finite number of clear biblical directives on communication patterns (Prov. 18:13; Eph. 4:15, 29; Phil. 2:14-16; James 1:19), humility (Matt. 7:3-5, Eph. 4:2, Phil. 2:1-4), submission (Eph. 5:21, Heb. 13:17), face-to-face contact (Matt. 18:15-20), reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24), and unity (John 17:20-23, Eph. 4:3-6, Col. 3:12-17) that will become part of the vocabulary of the congregation. We believe that maintaining a focus on these kinds of passages (or entire chapters such as Ephesians 4 or Philippians 2) over an extended period of time, while also doing the hard work of hammering out what can and should be done educationally for the children of the church, will enable

congregations to experience, as never before, the joy, blessing, and fruit of authentic Christian community.

We conclude by noting that this is yet another example of the inseparable nature of the mission of church and school. The gospel in all its fullness must be preached, but turning head knowledge into healthy interpersonal habits and community building needs the day-to-day reinforcement of Christian teachers and schools. Likewise, the kinds of leaders so desperately needed in the church to resolve conflicts and promote reconciliation in Christlike ways are best prepared for this task in God-centered schools. In addition to prophetically calling attention to the sources of fragmentation in our churches, the CRCNA should encourage Christian schools and colleges to give more attention in their curricula to skills and strategies for ushering in shalom.

B. *Small churches*

1. Mandate

Synod 2003 gave our committee the additional mandate to explore:

The means by which small isolated churches can fulfill their baptismal vows as it relates to Christian day school education.

Grounds:

- 1) The current report was written primarily with clusters of churches as its context. However, many small and/or isolated churches may require different means to fulfill their baptismal vows.
- 2) The unique context and struggles of small isolated churches should be addressed by the denomination.

(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 631)

For several reasons, we did not want to presume that smaller churches necessarily faced more significant obstacles in meeting the church order expectation of Christian day school education. While it is true that our 2003 report, particularly as it addressed the question of finances, was indeed “written with clusters of churches as its context” (ground 1), the same cannot be said of Church Order Article 71 in general. Going back to the Synod of Dordt and throughout the CRC’s history, this article has stood as the church’s commitment regardless of circumstances or context. In addition, to the degree that some communities may face additional hurdles in establishing Christian day schools, this is not a new problem of our day. The extensive discussion carried on in the CRC during the 1920s and 1930s, highlighted by the ongoing journalistic debate between H.J. Kuiper and the Rev. J. Vander Mey, wrestled with the same issue. In communities where there are no Christian schools, how important does the ideal of Christian day school education remain? Should CRC folk who live in communities where there are good public schools be satisfied with that? The issue that synod asked us to address is not new.

It is also important to note that being small and having limited resources is not a sufficient reason for parents to be satisfied with education that does not fully honor the lordship of Jesus Christ. The remarkable rise of home schools in the last decade of the twentieth century, along with associations and organizations dedicated to assisting homeschooling parents do their

work better, bears ample testimony to the fact that motivation and determination rather than lots of money are the key ingredients to establishing alternative avenues and venues for the education of covenant children in ways that are in keeping with our Christian faith and the claims of Jesus Christ on our lives.

2. Information from churches

For these reasons, before making observations and dispensing advice, the committee gathered information by sending a survey to fifty of the small or isolated churches in the CRCNA, all under 150 members. Twenty-six churches responded to the survey. Eighteen of the churches indicated there was a Reformed Christian school or other Christian schools that parents could choose from. This suggests that though they were small they were not isolated. Two churches said that some parents in their congregations used home schools. Eighteen responses reported that a significant number of parents in their churches used the public schools. It is not apparent that this phenomenon is either more or less than would be the case in larger churches.

One survey question asked: What does your council and congregation do to implement Church Order Article 71 and the congregation's baptismal vow to help instruct these children in the faith? Twenty-three percent (6/23) said they do little or nothing. Forty-seven percent (11/26) thought they implemented Article 71 via church programs such as Sunday school, Gems, Cadets, youth groups, SERVE, and daily vacation Bible school. Others talked about encouraging the use of Christian schools and helping financially if possible.

Another question asked was: If there is no Christian school in your area, how do you integrate faith and learning? Those churches to whom this question applied responded, "nothing" or referred to the church youth programs that the CRCNA has endorsed. Several responses indicated a desire to receive helpful suggestions and identified things that would help them. The responses established a need for strong leadership at both the congregational and the denominational level. The councils appear to be open for direction as they diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools in which the biblical, Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over creation is clearly taught.

3. Observations and advice

The most important advice that synod can give to small churches is no different from that given to all the churches of the CRC: Encourage parents to establish good Reformed Christian schools whenever possible and send your children to those schools. For small churches that are in proximity to a Reformed Christian school but run into additional financial restraints because of size, we repeat Recommendations 7 and 8, adopted by Synod 2003:

7. That synod urge CRC church councils to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education. Congregations should seek professional legal and tax accounting advice when drafting such plans.

Grounds:

- a. Christian day school education is both a communal, church responsibility and a parental obligation.
 - b. A covenantal intergenerational financial support plan for the Christian day school education of all the children in a congregation is a fitting response to the vow made by the congregation when a child is baptized.
 - c. This flows naturally from the mutual stewardship and accountability that characterizes healthy congregations.
 - d. Financial difficulty should not be a barrier that prevents church members from sending their children to a Christian day school.
8. That synod encourage CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race, ethnicity, special needs).

Ground: This is consistent with the CRC's commitment to greater diversity as reflected in synod's adoption of the study committee report from the Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God. (See *Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 595-619.)

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 626, 627)

We call attention to these two recommendations to highlight two important principles that should govern our stewardship of Christian day school education:

- a. Financial support for Christian day school education is a communal responsibility, both locally and regionally. This principle deserves to be applied in individual congregations and in larger areas (classes) involving multiple congregations.
- b. It is a healthy perspective to consider small churches as an important part of our denominational diversity. Whether these be new church plants in suburbs, inner-city ethnic and racially diverse churches in large urban areas, long-standing Native congregations, isolated Midwestern rural congregations, or whatever, this variety enriches the CRC as a denomination and our covenant together links us spiritually and brings with it obligations of financial cooperation and assistance. In sum, we do not suggest any direct correlation between small churches and racial or ethnic diversity, though there may be some overlap, but rather that it is constructive for us to regard all small churches as an important ingredient of our denominational diversity whatever the racial and/or ethnic makeup.

Here we would also highlight an example of a creative, stewardly address to financially needy churches in a regional manner. Classis Grand Rapids East in May 2004, after discussing a thorough analysis of Christian school participation and tuition costs for children in every church in the classis, "agreed to establish a committee to develop a proposal for a program and fund for providing financial assistance to congregations facing unusually difficult financial situations relative to Christian School tuition" (Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East, 12.4). In Classis Grand Rapids East's context, this is a

direct response to the challenge of promoting greater diversity and at the same time addressing financial need.

We also observe that many small churches struggle with implementing Church Order Article 71. We have some concern about the churches that responded to our survey question by answering that they do nothing to implement Church Order Article 71 as well as those who, having no Christian school available, said they do nothing to help the children of their church integrate their Reformed faith with their schooling. At the same time, we are encouraged by the sincere efforts of many to provide Christian nurture for the church's children through traditional types of church programming (church school, Gems, Cadets). In addition, most of the recommendations we now present were developed from suggestions received from our survey of the small churches.

We believe, with respect to Church Order Article 71 and Christian day school education, that churches would be well-advised by the following:

- That councils of small churches continue to encourage preaching that is consistent with the Reformed world-and-life view and that recognizes and promotes Christ's lordship over all areas of life as articulated in *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.
- That councils of small churches urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with the Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation. Where possible, councils shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools.
- That councils encourage parents who need to supplement the day school education with faith-based materials, or parents who home school, to consider publications from organizations that produce excellent curricular materials that support the Reformed vision of Christian education such as Christian Schools International (CSI), Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC), Prairie Association of Christian Schools (PACS), or Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS).
- That churches be encouraged to intentionally use Faith Alive Publications' curriculum and materials based on a Reformed vision for as many of its youth and adult educational programs as possible.
- That churches encourage their youth to attend Reformed Christian colleges and universities via scholarships, campus visits, and other ways (Recommendation 14, *Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 629).
- That those responsible for adult education in the churches promote the Reformed vision of Christian education by (1) encouraging the discussion of books and articles supporting this vision, (2) inviting speakers who are insightful advocates of Christian education to lead workshops, and (3) including materials on Christian education in their libraries.

The various parts of this advice envision a continuing use and possible strengthening of excellent resources that are already available to churches and to parents. In addition to that, we believe that the CRC denomination through its publications office, perhaps in cooperation with CRC Home Missions and/or CSI, could create a curriculum *for church use* in cases where parents are

unable to establish a Christian day school. Such a curriculum, purposefully designed to help students who are not able to attend Christian day schools to integrate their Reformed faith with their school lessons, could be used in after-school clubs, parent-led discussions in the home, or creatively used in already-scheduled church education classes.

C. Schools and evangelism

The first part of the additional mandate given to our committee by Synod 2003 was to explore in greater detail “the nature of the relationship between the churches’ commitment to Reformed Christian schools and the churches’ work of doing evangelism.” The mandate specified the following areas:

- 1) Reformed Christian day schools in the United States.
- 2) Reformed Christian day schools in Canada.
- 3) Reformed colleges and universities.
- 4) The role of Christian education in world missions.

Grounds:

1. The specific issue of how Christian schools and their support relate to the call to reach out evangelistically to gather God’s growing family is critical to the future of both the educational and evangelistic commitments of the church.
2. This issue (Ground 1) has not been directly addressed in the current report. While the important work of training church members for mission is included, the relationship between the churches’ commitments to missions and to Christian day schools has not been sufficiently explored.

(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 630)

In what follows, we will set forth some general principles that flow from what we have already stated in this report and then apply them directly to the specific areas as requested.

Earlier in our report (section V), we spelled out the theological reasons for keeping kingdom and covenant, on the one hand, and missions and evangelism, on the other as inseparable and coordinate obligations of the Christian community. Both the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:27-30 and the mission mandate (Great Commission) of Matthew 28:18-20 are rooted in the twin divine realities of kingdom and covenant. As we said in conclusion:

In both Genesis and Matthew, the Sovereign One royally commissions his representatives, gives them a task that involves establishing the king’s ‘dominion’ over the earth and people, and covenantally promises his blessing. However we understand the practical outworking of this in the life of God’s people, it is clear that theologically these two are inseparably linked in the providential purpose of God for his people, in his creation and redemption plan for their well-being. We ought, instead to look for a way theologically to unite them rather than set them over against each other.

The first principle that we would underscore here is, therefore, that which is articulated in our recommendation to synod that synod advise the members and churches of the CRC to consider the responsibilities they bear for Christian education and for doing evangelism as equally important and complementary

and declare that support for Christian education should never be used to undermine the work of evangelism and that evangelistic outreach should never be given as a ground for failing to support Christian day school education. Both of these tasks flow from a Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship rooted in the covenant and kingdom of God as well as the mission of God's people in the world. Consideration of this dual calling and recognizing the diversity of gifts and interests of Christian believers are the essential first steps in diffusing potential tension and conflict about Christian education within congregations.

Starting from the premise that evangelism and Christian education are twin responsibilities for Reformed Christians and that neither may be used to downgrade the importance of the other still leaves us with the question of how the church as the primary *institution* for evangelism, and the school can cooperate in doing the Lord's work while respecting each other's distinct task. Note that our report is directed to the church and does not propose to dictate to the school as to how it should fulfill its mission. Rather, we are simply suggesting some basic ground rules for how church and school together can do the Lord's work in his world. This brings us to the second presupposition that must inform our response to the synodical request: If Christian Reformed Churches and Reformed Christian day schools are to cooperate effectively in doing the Lord's work, they both need to be committed to an explicitly Reformed set of beliefs and worldview that is grounded in Scripture, shaped by the Reformed confessional and theological tradition, and cosmic in its scope. In other words, both church and school should have similar understanding of biblical truth and a common vision of Christian discipleship that, in the case of the Reformed tradition, is a cosmic vision rooted in the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation. We recommend that synod encourage churches to study, engage in self-examination, and then recommit themselves to the Reformed faith we profess to have in common. Reflection, self-examination, and covenant renewal are always valuable spiritual exercises. The occasion of the CRC's revisiting the question of Christian education is a great opportunity for the denomination to spend some quality time considering the meaning of our Reformed identity. It is thus our recommendation that synod encourage all the member churches of the CRC to dedicate significant time in the church calendar year 2005-2006 to explore what it means to be Reformed. Among the resources we would recommend for this purpose, in addition to our report, are the following: The BOT statement "What it means to be Reformed: An Identity Statement," available from CRC Publications; the Denominational Ministries Plan, adopted by Synod 2002, found in *Agenda for Synod 2002*, pp. 63-89; and *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* (Study Version).

From a common understanding of our Reformed faith and its implications for Christian discipleship in today's world, it is possible for us to begin to sort out different tasks and responsibilities where cooperation between church and school is helpful and necessary and where concerns for maintaining the distinct identity and task of each need to be emphasized. Specifically addressing our assignment to explore the nature of the relationship between the churches' commitment to Reformed Christian schools and the churches' work of doing evangelism, the first observation we make is that, in a Reformed view,

institutionally, evangelism is properly the task of the official church and not the school. This is important to emphasize from the outset because there are Christian schools, usually closely tied to specific congregations, who do see the task of the school primarily in terms of conversion. Christian teachers in Reformed Christian schools are rightly concerned about the souls and salvation of their students; that should go without saying. Although it is not their primary purpose, Christian schools are mission fields—places of refuge and tender learning whereby children, some of whom may have hard hearts or have never felt the Spirit spurring them to vibrant belief, will learn to become disciples before choosing to be one.

Furthermore, that Christian teachers in Reformed Christian day schools would encourage their students to be good witnesses in the world, evangelistically as well as vocationally, is also to be expected as a matter of course. God's call to a student about his or her life's calling may come early or late, be quite specific or very general, and place the student in the world next door or half a world away. Christian schools that have a mission mandate will persistently tell students, "Go!" These schools will demonstrate a passion for the world, have an urgency about the lost who are not hearing the full message of the gospel, and tune students' talents to be emissaries of light—as zookeepers, homemakers, pastors, pharmacists, or farmers.

The salvation of a child's soul or mission outreach to the nations is, however, not the *raison d'être* of a school in the Reformed understanding. Neither is catechesis or faith nurture. These are properly the responsibilities of home and church. Similarly, it is not the church's task to teach science and geography. Reminding the church's children that this is God's world, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and then encouraging them to pursue educational and vocational goals in which they can develop and use their God-given gifts to his glory and the fulfillment of his mission, is of course always important. It is a key way in which the church in its preaching and teaching ministry supports the cause of Christian education. Our point here is simple: A Reformed understanding of discipleship is a seamless web; Christ is Lord of all; and family, church, and school together serve the mission of God and his people.

Our specific mandate to examine the relationship between the church's evangelistic task and its commitment to Christian day school education can be considered from two related angles. First, is it appropriate for the church to make use of Christian day schools to achieve its own evangelistic purpose of gathering God's growing family? Conversely, recognizing that the school is not an evangelistic institution, does it nonetheless have a legitimate evangelistic task?

It may come just as much of a surprise to synod as it did to our committee to discover that this very same issue was fiercely debated in the CRC and at its synod some fifty years ago. A brief overview of that discussion and synodical decision is instructive for our consideration today. In 1950, synod appointed a study committee regarding mission policy with a mandate "to formulate the principles of indigenous mission work," to apply these principles to the church and its mission agencies "with special reference to finances, educational institutions and medical work on the mission field," and more specifi-

cally “to formulate the specific application of these principles to the Indian Mission Field” (see *Acts of Synod 1950*, pp. 79-80).

The committee reported to Synod 1952 with a majority and minority report. The key difference was in the answer given to the following question: “Is it proper and advantageous for the church to use schools, full-fledged schools, whether day schools or boarding schools, as an aid to evangelization” (*Acts of Synod 1952*, p. 209)? The majority answered in the affirmative, the minority dissented. While Synod 1952 approved the spirit and general content of the study committee’s principles, it asked the committee to continue and report to the 1953 assembly. Faced once again with a majority and minority report, Synod 1953 went with the minority report in its general conclusion only and not in its detailed statements. This general conclusion was taken to mean “that Education on the mission field be limited as much as possible to a literacy program in keeping with the performance of the evangelistic task—viz., the direct oral and written transmission of the Gospel, and the encouragement of native covenantal schools” (*Acts of Synod 1953*, p. 86). In its grounds for siding with the minority position, synod appealed to the principle of indigeneity while insisting that “it allows sufficient flexibility to cope with extraordinary situations” (*Acts of Synod 1953*, p. 87). Synod also excepted the Indian Mission field from the principle it had just adopted.

Your committee has recognized that the Indian field is extraordinary, in that it is a Heathen Mission within our borders; that it has a long history of Educational Missions; that Synod in the past has made certain pronouncements which are in conflict with principles now adopted; and that it has special problems with respect to language, competition in the field, etc. Hence a strict application of indigenous mission principles is not at present possible in all details. However, your committee does believe that a determined effort ought to be made to apply these principles.

(*Acts of Synod 1953*, p. 88)

We do well to note that concern about indigeneity and independence, along with sphere-sovereignty arguments, were not taken absolutely even by those who held to the minority position that was adopted by synod. They were concerned about an important principle but freely acknowledged that special circumstances might arise in which the failure to establish schools was a greater evil than the violation of pure principle. One of the key architects and spokesmen for the minority position, Dr. Harry Boer, set forth the case in a *Reformed Journal* article, “The Place of the School on the Mission Field” (May 1952, pp. 8-9). Boer is firmly convinced of the importance of Christian day schools and insists “that at the earliest opportunity [Christian] schools should be brought into being and that they should form a major factor in molding the life of the Christian community and in undergirding the church.” Because the gospel brought by the missionary is the gospel of the kingdom, Christian education is its natural implicate and “the missionary will encourage and the parents will desire Christian education for their children.” The result is the triple cord that is not easily broken—church, home, school.

However, Boer also observes, “it is altogether possible that when the Christian community comes to the point where Christian schools are needed,” that indigenous resources might be altogether lacking. In such cases, “the

church may do on the mission field what it often does at home—it extends temporary assistance.” On the domestic front, this may take the form of financial aid, on the mission field it may require many other resources as well—trained personnel, facilities, organizational and administrative assistance, and so forth. It is worth pointing out that missionary Harry Boer, a lifelong tireless advocate for increasing mission and evangelistic effort by the CRC, passionately believed that proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom would lead to the establishment of Christian day schools; they were the natural implicate of the gospel of the kingdom. Also important for our purposes in this report is the conviction by this dedicated missionary that home, church, and school are a seamless communal web; they all need and support each other.

With the help of this historical perspective and ecclesiastical precedent, we can come to the following conclusions with respect to the church and the use of educational institutions for evangelistic purposes:

1. Church and school need to safeguard their distinct identity and task. It is wrong to fault churches for not establishing Christian day schools or schools for not being evangelistic. The Christian school is properly an extension of the covenantal home and has as its task the nurture and training of covenant children to become active participants in the story of God and his people in the world.
2. There are times in mission situations where it is appropriate and an act of obedience for the official church to directly establish and support schools. The CRC did this, for example, in the New Mexico mission field. To avoid creating dependence and in the hope of establishing healthy independent indigenous churches, such direct [denominational] control of Christian day school education should be seen as exceptional, and the goal of indigenous ownership should be the highest priority.
3. What is appropriate in mission contexts overseas is also legitimate in North American mission situations, especially in cases of great need.
4. Where direct involvement in educational work as a means of evangelism is not called for, the church should still encourage missionary personnel to consider domestic or overseas teaching opportunities as avenues for evangelization. (See section on world missions below.)

There are many areas of the world where direct church-based or parachurch-based mission activity is difficult or impossible and where educators in primary, secondary, or university-level schools can teach English as a second language as well as other subjects. This is an important area of mission opportunity today, and our consideration of the question of how to relate missions to education must take it into account.

We are a committee of the church and our message is for the official church, the Christian Reformed denomination, and not directly for the Christian day school. Yet, in answer to the question of whether or not independently established schools may be considered to have an evangelistic task, we once again borrow from the majority report of the 1952 Synodical Study Committee on Mission Principles and Education. The majority insisted that it was appropri-

ate for the church in its work “to use any means which is congenial to the Gospel”; that “schools can be and are a great help to the Gospel”; that “it is not improper for the Church to maintain and conduct such schools”; and that this vision “fits with the Christian concept of the Gospel” (*Acts of Synod 1952*, 211-16, *passim*). In speaking of the appropriately evangelistic task of the Christian school teacher, the majority said:

There is nothing incongruous, as we see it, in the Christian educator aiming at leading his pupils to the Lord. . . . As a Christian, he has not only the right but the duty to point his pupils to the Lord. To tell him that he may only teach his subjects but may not influence his pupils to choose definitely for the service of God, is to ask the impossible of him as a Christian educator and to cripple him in an unwarranted manner in the performance of his task. If he does make it his aim so to influence his students, along with the proper teaching of his courses, he is not deviating from his proper task as an educator, he is just being a good Christian educator. How could he do otherwise and be a real Christian teacher?” (*Acts of Synod 1952*, p. 216-17)

In conclusion, the majority insisted: “We do not feel the force of the argument — Let education be education and not be used for conversion. We feel that the two, education in the Christian sense and conversion, are so closely related that they can very well be combined in a Mission school as an aid to the Gospel” (*Acts of Synod 1952*, p. 217).

The majority then set forth in skeletal form key principles that should govern schools in mission situations, principles that are still valuable for us today:

1. *Their Character*

These schools are to be part of the whole Mission program. They are not to stand by themselves, much less to overshadow the evangelistic program or take the place of the preaching of the Gospel. And they are not to be confused with parental, covenantal schools to be established after a Christian community has come into being.

2. *Their Aims*

- a. To develop the knowledge and capacities and personalities of the pupils;
- b. To instill a Christian world and life view into the pupils;
- c. To break down heathen beliefs and attitudes and superstitions in the pupils;
- d. To supplement the teaching given by the evangelistic agencies;
- e. To help bring the child to the Lord, without falling into “Child Evangelism”;
- f. To provide roots for an intelligent native church membership.

3. *Their Curricula*

- a. A thorough academic training is to be a given, comparable to that in corresponding public schools, but with a Christian approach;
- b. To this are to be added thorough Bible courses;
- c. There should be personal guidance as much as possible;
- d. The native language and history and customs and lore should be used as much as possible.

Finally, the study committee recommends the principles of native style of building, native control and use of physical equipment, use of native talent, and eventual native (parental) financial self-sufficiency and full administrative management through a Christian school society (*Acts of Synod 1952*, pp. 217-18).

Making use of the school as an indirect means of reaching out beyond the Christian community also takes place in mission contexts apart from the Native ministry in New Mexico. Here it may be helpful to call attention to one example of a school that consciously altered its enrollment policy in order to reach out evangelistically to its community: the Calvin Christian School Association of Grandville, Michigan. The association's admission policy revision was inspired by the earlier version of this report and its emphasis on mission evangelism. New student applicants are admitted to the Calvin Christian schools as transfers from other CSI schools and in situations where believing grandparents desire a Christian education for their grandchildren. Children are accepted whose parents are members of an "evangelical Bible-believing Christian church where Christ is preached as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' and the Lord of every aspect of our lives." In such cases, parents must be in agreement with the school association's Statement of Belief and Mission Statement and provide a home that gives moral and religious training to children with a willingness to support the school's programs morally and financially.

However, the revised admission policy also makes allowance in the event a non-Christian family applies for admission. In such cases "the applications will be reviewed by a committee which may grant and/or require an interview with the family." This committee consists of "the Superintendent, the principal of the school children would attend, the Board President or Vice-President, the Education Committee chair, *and the pastoral advisor*" (emphasis added). This committee is to ascertain the level of parental support, the legitimacy of the desire for a Christian education, and whether there is "a plan to familiarize the family with Christianity and encourage church attendance."

We believe that the preceding is a model illustration of church-school cooperation in an evangelistic mission. The school remains a school; its task is education. Yet, it enlists the advice and support of the church and provides the same in return to the church as together they reach out with the grace and love of Christ to enfold lost and seeking people into the way of Christ. The school and church are partners in the commission given by our Lord to disciple the nations and teach them all he commanded. We suggest that such cooperation is especially appropriate for Reformed Christians and Reformed congregations and communities. We reach out, disciple, and teach. Church and school are not competitors but partners in the mission of God and his people in the world. Full recognition must be made here for the limits of such evangelistic outreach because the character of the school as a Reformed Christian school could be jeopardized by a critical mass of students who lacked full commitment to Christ's lordship. In the remainder of this section, we shall summarize the implications of these principles for the CRC in North America, for Reformed colleges and universities, and for world missions.

1. North America

Our mandate specified that we examine the relationship between our twin commitments to mission evangelism and Christian education in the United States, in Canada, for Reformed colleges and universities, and for world missions. As a committee, we recognize the significant differences between the CRC's situation in the United States and in Canada, notably in

the fact that many Canadian provincial governments provide varying levels of assistance to Christian day schools while there is no support in the United States. However, in our judgment, on the particular question before us—the relationship between evangelism and Christian education—there seems to be very little difference either in principle or in practice. We have chosen, therefore, to consider our two nations under one continental heading in keeping with our denomination's name, the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The first observation we make is that North America is a mission field. The obligation to reach out to the lost in our near midst has always been with us, but the imperative to do so becomes even more clear in our day when the growth of secularism, renewed paganism, and the active presence of all the world's major religions is on our own doorstep. In that context, we note that the mere presence of Christian day schools in our public square is itself an evangelistic witness to the power of the gospel of the kingdom. Good Christian schools that are publicly recognized *as Christian schools* remind a secular and pagan world that Jesus Christ is Lord of life, that religion is all-encompassing, and that faith cannot be relegated to a strictly personal and private sphere of human subjectivity. We must not forget that our witness as Christians has an institutional component to it. The existence of Christian day schools should be celebrated and their mission encouraged.

Indirect, institutional witness, however, is secondary to intentional, explicit proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. We share the concerns of the 1950 study committee reports referenced earlier in this section that the school remain a school and not become a church and that the church not become a school. Institutionally, day school education is not the responsibility of the official church; evangelism is not the responsibility of the Christian school. At the same time, *in missionary situations*, especially in cases of great need, we affirm the legitimacy of church-initiated educational efforts, bearing in mind the appropriate cautions that these are extraordinary and should be temporary and not permanent. The goal should be to strive as soon as possible toward indigenous ownership and governance. For example, there seems to us no good principle reason why an inner-city mission congregation should not initiate the establishment of a Christian day school, even providing resources of finance, personnel, and space. New church plants might even begin with a core group establishing a Christian school and then nurturing a new church fellowship from the base of the established school. It is worth noting that some post-World War II immigrant communities in Canada built facilities for Christian day schools first, using them for worship on Sundays, and only later built specific worship facilities. In other cases, church facilities were used for many years to house the Christian day school. Synod should not suggest rules here but encourage creative, local initiative. What synod should encourage is that its members and congregations think *integrally* about the comprehensive witness of our Reformed faith in our world. CRC mission activity in North America is to be guided by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship with a view toward establishing solid families and communities and Christian day schools as well as worshipping congrega-

tions. Integral thinking, visioning, and planning means that our missiological and evangelistic efforts need to keep the goal of Christian day school education in mind when planting new churches or reviving old ones. This is the historic position of the CRC and remains part of the denominational vision and mission statement adopted by Synod 1997. The BOT's denominational strategy statement put this into the following operational terms:

By the year 2002, the CRC will have developed a deeper understanding of and response to God's claim to obedience in all areas of our lives (business, labor, government, media, health, education, justice, peace, affluence, pursuit of pleasure, earth keeping, racial relationships, etc.

(*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 61)

From this, we believe it is appropriate for synod to encourage CRC members who are actively involved in Christian education to consider their calling to be evangelists in a threefold sense: (1) In their personal lives and conduct as teachers to demonstrate their own personal commitment to Jesus Christ and use all appropriate means to nurture the faith and spiritual development of their students. (2) To pursue their vocations as a means of testifying to the lordship of Jesus Christ and in their subject areas bear witness to this world. (3) To pursue creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic, either in specific mission situations (e.g., teaching English as a second language) or by encouraging the schools in which they work to be creative in reaching out to the lost with the good news of the gospel.

2. Reformed colleges and universities

Most of what has already been said about the church's mission in North America is applicable to our Reformed colleges and universities. They are, after all, integral parts of our Reformed witness on the North American scene. Thus, their very existence is also an evangelistic witness in an increasingly secular society, a testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ; their existence is to be celebrated and their mission and work encouraged. College faculty and staff, too, have opportunities for teaching in mission situations where church and parachurch opportunities are limited or nonexistent. Colleges and universities, however, also have additional institutional opportunities that are worth noting. For one thing, they are involved in global networks as well as North American ones. Institutional links with small third-world schools in mission situations are an invaluable means of making resources available for education and evangelism alike. Here we would call attention to a potential risk among Christian educators as we move up the ladder of educational accomplishment. In the advancement of learning from kindergarten to university, it is generally true that the increasing complexity of the subject means that teachers are required to spend more of their energy on the subject and, because of normal human finitude, less on the student. The *academic* requirements of college and university teaching are heavy, and the risk is that concern for and attention to the personal, spiritual dimension and needs of students becomes secondary and eventually unimportant. The school is a school and not a family or a church. That is indeed true, but using that slogan too cavalierly

puts educators in the risky position of becoming indifferent to the spiritual and yes, evangelistic, component of their calling. Reformed Christian colleges and universities need make no apology for their reputations as academically excellent institutions. On the contrary; that, too, is witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ over the human mind. Academic excellence can, nonetheless, become a spiritual snare, diverting our attention from the integral vision of Christian discipleship we have tried to sketch and defend in this report.

Reformed colleges and universities, should, therefore, be encouraged to see themselves as being in a global mission context and be urged to guide their work by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship in which academic concerns do not overshadow the spiritual and evangelistic components of the educator's task.

In addition, CRC members who are actively involved in teaching at the college and university level should be encouraged to consider their calling to be evangelists in a threefold sense: (1) In their personal lives and conduct as teachers to demonstrate their own personal commitment to Jesus Christ and use all appropriate means to nurture the faith and spiritual development of their students. (2) To pursue their vocations as a means of testifying to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in that way bear witness to the world. (3) To pursue creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic, either in specific mission situations (e.g., teaching English as a second language), or, in the case of those teaching at our Reformed colleges and universities, by encouraging the schools in which they work to be creative in reaching out to the lost with the good news of the gospel.

In connection with Reformed universities and colleges in North America, we note that synod gave our committee no specific instruction about Calvin Theological Seminary and training for ministry in the CRC. Perhaps this was understandable because a synodical study committee was in the midst of coming with a plan for alternate routes into CRC ministry. Now that synod has made the decision to establish a Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee (SMCC) "to encourage the development of pastoral leadership, to propose standards for synod, and to oversee the processes leading to candidacy" (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 616), we recommend that synod also require explicit instruction in and agreement with the CRC's stance on Christian day school education in the standards for all CRC ministry candidacy. This report could serve as part of the basic essential required reading for ministry candidates.

3. World missions

There is very little to add here other than to reaffirm the points made earlier. Educational mission work is an important, perhaps one of the most important, means of reaching many otherwise personally unreachable people with the gospel. We only note here that CRWM has recognized this and has made educational missions an important part of its ministry. CRWM presently does support the educational work of missionaries in a variety of places such as Academia Los Pinares, Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Christian Acadameny in Japan, Tokyo, Japan; Faith Academy, Manila, The

Philippines; Hillcrest Christian School, Jos, Nigeria; Lithuania Christian Academy, Klaipeda, Lithuania; Nicaraguan Christian Academy, Managua, Nicaragua; Quisqueya Christian School, Port au Prince, Haiti; Santiago Christian School, Santiago, Dominican Republic; and Sarospatak Academy, Sarospatak, Hungary. It should be noted that in some of these instances schools were established initially to provide Christian education for the children of missionaries though their outreach has now extended beyond that mission. We also take note of the work done by Worldwide Christian Schools, which partners with churches and other organizations to establish locally run Christian schools but does so with clear mission and evangelistic as well as educational intention. Synod should acknowledge this and give appropriate thanks to God for the visionary leadership of CRWM in developing a strong educational mission ministry around the world and for the many missionaries who have served our Lord and his church so well in diverse educational settings in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific and dedicate a time of prayer asking the Lord for increased opportunities for educational mission service, for missionaries to supply new posts, and for the financial resources to send them.

We also call the church's attention to an important mission development and the missiological discussion about it in the U.S. Center for World Missions journal, *Mission Frontiers* (25/2 [March-April 2003]), "The Scandal and Promise of Global Christian Education." Calvin College Provost Joel Carpenter ("The New Evangelical Universities: A Dynamic New Element in Mission Lands") takes note of the unexpected and exciting fact that among the mission churches outside of North America and Europe born in revivalist Christianity—especially Pentecostal and charismatic churches—there have arisen in recent years a significant number of institutions of Christian higher education beyond the training of church leaders. A great hunger exists in these emerging churches for a broader vision of Christian discipleship beyond soul saving alone. In the words of Stephen Noll, vice-chancellor of Uganda Christian University, "A new generation is seeking reality in their faith in the context of a revived and developing society" with a goal of nurturing leadership to develop "stable, godly nations" (p. 7). Among the foremost of these institutions is Daystar University of Nairobi, Kenya, a university that has developed close relationships with some North American Christian liberal arts colleges, including Wheaton and Calvin.

Beyond the *fact* of these new institutions of Christian higher learning in a global mission context, two writers in this journal issue insist upon Christian higher education as a *mission strategy* for the worldwide church. Educator Paul Scotchmer ("Christian Universities as a Mission Strategy: Recovering the Lost Vision") observes that nineteenth-century mission movements saw Christian higher education as a means of evangelization but that, for a variety of reasons, twentieth-century churches and mission boards dropped this strategy. He judges this to be a grave mistake, especially now in an age of globalization. "The real value of a Christian college lies in its unique ability to affirm the fundamental unity of all truth, in ways that serve the deepest needs of the human person." With the explosion of higher education, thanks to a "growing aspiration around the world for knowledge and skills that

open the door [to] the meaningful participation in the global economy," it is imperative that the church help lead the way to instill humane values in the new global village. Noting that the church played a major role in increasing the literacy levels of the developing world, Scotchmer asks: "Having done so much to prepare the soil for higher education in the developing world, the question before us today is whether the church is prepared to turn over the entire field, or most of it, to others" (p. 9).

Finally, missiologist Ralph Winter ("What's Wrong with 4,000 Pastoral Training Schools Worldwide?") reinforces the preceding by arguing that [evangelical] seminaries and Bible schools are not properly preparing the missionaries and church leaders that are needed to help the church grow around the world in the next century. Specifically, he indicts them for failing to be intellectually rigorous and thorough and for failing to be contextually sensitive to culture and language; in short for restricting their attention too much to Bible studies and not enough to broader liberal arts that are taught from a clear Christian worldview perspective. He observes:

Fifteen of every seventeen Evangelical students is totally untouched by any Christian grade school, high school, or college. At the very moment they study materials that have been secularized, whether American history or sociology or psychology or whatever, that is the time they need additional materials to round out and perhaps correct the picture. Furthermore, they cannot effectively study issues in secular books and only later find out the true picture. If this is the plight of those in the pew, it is all the more true of those who are diverted into alternative Bible Schools.

(*Mission Frontiers* [25/2 (March-April 2003)])

None of this is surprising or new to Reformed ears. What needs to be underscored here is that the push for integral Christian education at all levels, and especially at the college and university level, is being pleaded for *on missiological grounds* and by numerous educators and missionaries who are not necessarily from the Reformed tradition. This is a striking development and a good reminder to the Christian Reformed Church that its more than a century of strong commitment to Reformed Christian day school education at all levels is strategically important *also* for considered missiological reasons. A proper stewardship of our rich tradition demands of us a generous willingness to share it for the sake of the worldwide mission of the church and, when and where possible, to provide assistance and leadership both theologically and practically.

Therefore, CRC mission activity around the world also should be guided by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship with a view toward establishing solid families and communities and Christian day schools as well as worshiping congregations. This would mean that CRWM be encouraged to seek out allies and avenues in encouraging Christian higher education opportunities in its mission fields outside North America.

Finally, CRC members who are actively involved in Christian education should be encouraged to consider their calling to be evangelists on the world scene by pursuing creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic in global contexts (e.g., teaching English as a second language).

D. Finances

CRC parents who choose Christian day schools for their children but cannot afford the total tuition have two means for help: (1) financial aid from the Christian school itself or (2) contributions from their church. In the first means, the school itself solicits funds and distributes them to help parents meet their tuition obligation. In the second, the parents' church provides tuition assistance either through its benevolent fund or through a Christian education committee. In the first model, Christian schools most often receive revenue for their tuition assistance fund from one or more of these sources: private donations, supporting churches' collections, and proceeds from their school's foundation or endowment. Christian school societies in both the United States and Canada use this model, with the total amount available each year being only a minuscule percentage of the operating budget, usually under one percent.

In distribution, the majority of the money available goes to parents who are not members of supporting churches to the Christian school. The number of families who benefit is few. Most schools set a limit of paying no more than half of the tuition charge. Almost all schools use the finance committee of the board and its senior staff person to make decisions regarding a single means of determining need and/or some form of an application for aid. To ascertain need, more and more schools use an objective service rather than their own knowledge of need.

In the second model, churches receive donations and provide tuition assistance to its members' children either on the basis of need or a grant-in-aid regardless of need. For both bases, the church establishes in its budget the amount it expects to receive to match the expected expense. If the church distributes aid based on financial need, usually the deacons or an education committee has the parents who are seeking aid fill out an application and submit to an interview; the interview may even include submission of tax forms.

There are interesting instances of churches and Christian schools working together to decide financial aid for parents who have significant need. For example, two CRC churches in the Midwest cooperate with the local Christian school in interviewing parents. A deacon from the church and a Christian school board member meet with applying parents, hear the same answers to questions, and then make a joint recommendation on need to both the church committee and the school committee for appropriating any aid at all, the total amount of the aid, and which part of that amount each institution will supply. In over a hundred CRC churches, the church has adopted what has been called the Covenant Giving Plan in which the church pays the entire tuition amount for all families in the church who desire Christian day school for their children.

These models help CRC congregations to carry out the decision of Synod 2003 that CRC church councils should "develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 626). Synod 2003 also decided to "encourage CRC congregations and groups of churches (e.g., a classis) to assist students who will contribute to a greater and richer diversity in Christian schools (in economic status, class, race,

ethnicity, special needs)" (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 627). Two examples will illustrate how this might be done.

In one instance, a group of Christian school-supporting families, tuition-aided by their CRC congregation, left the congregation to begin a CRC home missions' church. A private Christian foundation offered to supply the same tuition aid to the departing families as they received in their former congregation for the first year, a lesser amount the second year, and none at all by the fourth year, with all agreeing by that time that the new church could provide its own aid.

Another means of a group of churches working together is through their classis. Classis Grand Rapids East in May 2004, after discussing a thorough analysis of Christian school participation and tuition costs for children in every church in the classis, "agreed to establish a committee to develop a proposal for a program and fund for providing financial assistance to congregations facing unusually difficult financial situations relative to Christian School tuition" (Minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East, 12.4). This action is one way for whole communities of churches to remove a financial barrier to full access to Christian education for churches with many children but with very limited financial resources.

VIII. A vision for the future

In sections IV and V of our report, we considered the biblical-theological reasons why the CRC has historically as a denomination strongly supported Christian day school education. Consistently, as CRC synods wrestled with this question, the church followed the lead of the Dordt-based church order (now Church Order Article 71) and appealed to the responsibilities of both parents and community as grounded in the biblical reality of the covenant. The baptismal vow, so CRC synods affirmed and reaffirmed, places upon parents and the congregation a sacred obligation to bring up the church's children according to the demands of the covenant. In recent years, the congregation has also customarily taken a public vow to do so; it is CRC conviction and practice that the entire church community has a covenantal stake in and obligation to Christian day school education.

Thanks to the influence of Abraham Kuyper and Dutch Neo-Calvinism on the CRC, Christian education received an additional theological ground—the kingdom of God. Because Christ is Lord over the entire cosmos, and formal education is necessary preparation for a life of discipleship in God's world, Christ must also be Lord of the school. This emphasis on the kingdom of God also influences the content of Christian day school education. As the 1955 report stated: "no area of thinking and living may be divorced from God and his Christ for the covenant child" (*Acts of Synod 1955*, p. 199).

We also observed that though covenant and kingdom remain essential pillars for grounding Christian day school education, they are no longer sufficient. Without betraying its covenantal and royal kingdom vision, the CRC has also been challenged to reach out beyond itself to the lost of our world and in so doing stretch itself to become more diverse. Consequently, so we contended in earlier sections of this report, *evangelism* or *mission* should be a third theological ground for the CRC as a denomination that supports

Christian day school education. No less than our baptismal vow of commitment to the children of our church family, Christian education is also an integral part of the evangelistic and discipling ministry of a church that is committed to the Reformed faith.

We concluded by suggesting that an eschatological emphasis on the grand narrative of salvation history, on God's redemptive plan to renew all things in Christ, brings all three themes together. The task of a Reformed Christian day school is to nurture children in a Reformed Christian worldview so that they can be active participants in and contributors to the plot of God's providential narrative. To state that in different words: The task of a Christian day school is to equip students for their roles as citizens of God's kingdom. Hence, we judge this conclusion to be obvious: Christian day school education is an essential ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.

In addition to providing biblical-theological reasons for this conclusion, we have also shown that this denominational commitment to Christian education is not a radically new idea. Practically from the beginning of its now nearly one-hundred-and-fifty-year history, CRC synods have repeatedly and consistently been ardent proponents and supporters of Christian day schools. However, during the course of that history, the burden of financing these schools and this education has increasingly moved away from church support to parental tuition. Now, we propose returning to the earlier pattern; though we recognize that we must do so in a way that meets the needs of our far-different age. While the matter of financing is no small matter today, considering the growing costs of Christian day school education, we wish to emphasize that finances are not the first and primary reason for returning to the older vision of active church support. The fundamental reason is a biblical-confessional one. Christian day school education is an essential component of our Reformed witness. For the CRC to be true to its Reformed vision of discipleship in our complex and sometimes hostile world, it will need leaders who are committed to this vision and skilled in its implementation in the many areas and various vocations of our modern world.

In support of this perspective, we once again call the church and synod's attention to the CRC's Vision and Mission Statement, approved by Synod 1997 (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 630). Under the rubric of Kingdom Extension, synod adopted the following goal:

By the year 2002, the CRC will have developed a deeper understanding of and response to God's claim to obedience in all areas of our lives (business, labor, government, media, health, education, justice, peace, affluence, pursuit of pleasure, earthkeeping, racial relationships etc.).

(*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 61)

This goal flows from a thoroughly Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship; "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (Abraham Kuyper). It seems clear to our committee that it is impossible to achieve such a goal without a significant role for Christian day school education. It seems to us an impossible task without them. So then, there are sound and compelling biblical-theological reasons, a well-established historical

precedent, and a current commitment to a Reformed vision of discipleship that support the idea of active church (i.e., denominational and congregational) support for Christian day school education. (As an aside, we also note that with the growing secularization and deterioration of public schools, a close identification with Christian education may be a drawing card for evangelism and church growth, especially in our efforts to demonstrate solidarity with the poor and promote diversity. At the very least, it provides golden opportunities for clear testimony to the character and heart of Reformed Christianity.)

How would such a commitment work out in practice? The implications of a covenantal, communal commitment to Christian education directly involve matters of Christian stewardship. If the nurture of our children is a common concern, then financial support should also be a common concern. This is particularly true for families with lower incomes and for whom the growing cost of Christian school tuition is burdensome. It seems to us that a common concern is also a matter of common support, a matter of community stewardship. This is not a new idea; most CRC churches that are closely linked to community Christian schools already have some form of church support for those who need assistance in paying tuition for their children. Such assistance ranges from considering it as a matter of diaconal benevolence to commitments on the part of the church to the school that promise full tuition payment for all the congregation's children in Christian schools.

There are two problematic issues with a system of only providing diaconal support. First, treating community support for Christian education as a matter of benevolence is potentially demeaning—it amounts to asking for a handout. We contend that our confessional and historical practice as a denomination implies that community support for Christian day school is a matter of stewardship and not a matter of benevolence. Communal obligation is not a matter of charity but a matter of financial commitment by the entire body. The other problem is the lack of consistency among our churches that results in considerable confusion, especially, but not only, with respect to the tax laws of both Canada and the United States. Hence, we propose the outlines of a model plan that can be used by all congregations and is sufficiently flexible to meet the individual needs of specific congregations.

Beginning with the fundamental principle that the Christian education of a congregation is a common responsibility and thus a matter of stewardship, we propose that support for Christian day schools become a part of every congregation's annual budget. We do not recommend a particular plan because churches need flexibility to develop plans that take into account their local circumstances and the legal and tax situations that apply to them. Churches can choose to support an amount that reflects their local situation and circumstances in both church and school. Flexibility also means that a number of churches could create a common fund through a ministry shares type of plan to support members who send their children to Christian day schools.

As a church develops its plan, it should take the following steps:

1. The congregation should engage in a self-study, accompanied by a study of the biblical requirements of covenant responsibility as well as stewardship.

Only if a congregation is clearly committed to sharing the cost of Christian education should a church continue with subsequent steps.

2. On the basis of stewardship discussions and presuming a clear commitment, develop a specific plan and decide at what level the congregation will support Christian day school education (e.g., 100 percent, 80 percent, 50 percent, 25 percent, 10 percent), and place it on the church's general budget. This report and its appendixes can serve as a guide for the church's use. In addition, congregations should seek professional legal and tax-accounting advice when drafting their plans.
3. The church issues charitable receipts to all its members based on each person's *total* contribution (i.e., no separation of the funds for Christian education).

The legal and tax situations in the United States and Canada are different, with more flexibility in the United States. Some churches have used a covenant plan whereby the church pays up to 100 percent of the tuition for children of the congregation. The church is legally able to provide a full receipt for contributions to the church if the plan is in compliance with IRS ruling 83-104. The plan must be structured in such a way that there is no existence of *quid pro quo*. Appendix C contains a report from Deloitte and Touche that describes the features of such a plan.

IX. Recommendations

Note: (1) Recommendations relating to this report that were adopted by Synod 2003 can be found in the *Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 619-20, 626, 627-30. (2) The parenthetical reference after each recommendation indicates the relevant section of the report where extended discussion of the issue can be found.

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dan Vander Ark, chair, and John Bolt, reporter.
- B. That synod declare that the purpose of all Christian education, in the home, in the church, and in the school, is to tell the story of God, his people, and his world, with the goal that children become active participants in that story and accept as their own the mission of God's people in his world (section III).
- C. That synod advise the members and churches of the CRC to consider the responsibilities they bear for Christian education and for doing evangelism as equally important and complementary and declare that support for Christian education should never be used to undermine the work of evangelism and that evangelistic outreach should never be given as a ground for failing to support Christian day school education (sections III, IV).

Grounds:

1. Both tasks flow from a Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship rooted in the covenant and kingdom of God as well as the mission of God's people in the world.

2. Both tasks are callings placed before the CRC, its congregations, and through its officebearers to its members by the Church Order Articles 71, and 73-77.
3. Consideration of this dual calling and recognition of the diversity of gifts and interests of Christian believers are the essential first steps in diffusing potential tension and conflict in congregations regarding Christian education.

D. That synod give thanks to God for bringing the CRC *anno domini* 2005 to new circumstances of greater diversity thanks to new churches and members and declare this to be a wonderful opportunity to bear witness to the Reformed vision of an integral Christian education wherever it takes place—in the home, school, or church. That synod also urge all the members and churches of the CRC to give leadership to the many other Christians who are increasingly opting for some kind of Christian education (section IV, A, 4).

E. That synod encourage all the member churches of the CRCNA to commit themselves in the church calendar year 2005-2006 to study, reflection, and self-examination as to the Reformed identity of their faith and practice as individual believers and as congregations. Use of denominational statements and study guides available from CRC Publications is recommended (section VII, C).

Grounds:

1. The occasion of significant discussion about Christian education is a great opportunity to consider the meaning of our Reformed identity and the nature of a Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship in our world.
2. Our Reformed confessional heritage is a gift from God and we are called to be good stewards of the Reformed biblical worldview of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation, which is a needed message in our religiously confused times.
3. There are concerns in the CRCNA about the strength of our Reformed identity, our understanding of it, and our commitment to it.

F. That synod urge all parents, as they face an increasing number of options for educating their children, to examine carefully and prayerfully whether the schools they are considering are in harmony with the Reformed Christian vision of life where the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation is clearly taught (section VI, A, 2).

Ground: This consistent vision of Christian education is set forth in Church Order Article 71.

G. That synod urge parents whose children attend Reformed Christian day schools, and CRC members who support these schools, to stay informed and be vigilant in helping such schools retain their Reformed identity and character (section VI, A, 1).

Ground: This consistent vision of Christian education is set forth in Church Order Article 71.

H. That synod urge parents whose children attend Christian day schools and CRC members who support these schools, to stay informed and be vigilant in helping their schools be truly inclusive communities where diversity does not create unnecessary barriers to any student's full involvement in the life of the school (section VI, B, 1, 2, 6).

Ground: This is a mandate of the gospel (James 2) and an implication of the CRC's commitment to becoming a more diverse community.

I. That synod request the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA to assist all CRC agencies in the implementation of the denominational strategy of including "Christian day school education in a full-orbed CRCNA mission program" (BOT Minute 2592, 3) (section VI, A, 5).

Grounds:

1. Reformed Christian day school education is important for equipping a leadership for the CRC that is committed to the Reformed faith.
2. In view of the growing secularization of public schools, the Reformed tradition's long practice of good Christian education is an integral part of our Reformed kingdom witness and mission to our fellow citizens. This is one of our distinctive contributions to the growth of God's kingdom in North America
3. There is a growing awareness among evangelicals in mission work globally that evangelism and missions in our world are incomplete without distinctly Christian education at all levels. (See the theme issue of *Mission Frontiers* [25/2, March April 2003]: "The Scandal and Promise of Global Christian Education.")

J. That synod provide the following advice to small churches with respect to Church Order Article 71 and Christian day school education (section VII, B):

1. That councils of small churches continue to encourage preaching that is consistent with the Reformed world-and-life view and that recognizes and promotes Christ's lordship over all areas of life as articulated in *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.
2. That councils of small churches urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with the Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation. Where possible, councils shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools.
3. That councils encourage parents who need to supplement the day school education with faith-based materials, or parents who homeschool, to consider publications from organizations that produce excellent curricular materials that support the Reformed vision of Christian education such as Christian Schools International (CSI), Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC), Prairie Association of Christian Schools (PACS), or Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS).

4. That churches be encouraged to intentionally use Faith Alive Publications' curriculum and materials based on a Reformed vision for as many of its youth and adult educational programs as possible.
 5. That churches encourage their youth to attend Reformed Christian colleges and universities via scholarships, campus visits, and other ways. (See Recommendation 14, *Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 629.)
 6. That those responsible for adult education in the churches promote the Reformed vision of Christian education by (1) encouraging the discussion of books and articles supporting this vision, (2) inviting speakers who are insightful advocates of Christian education to lead workshops, and (3) including materials on Christian education in their libraries
- K. That synod request CRC Publications (if possible, in cooperation with CRC Home Missions and Christian school organizations) to investigate the prospect of producing a curriculum to be used by churches, Christian parents, or youth leaders to help integrate faith and learning.

Ground: This would help to ensure that the "Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation" (Church Order Art. 71) could be more clearly taught to the youth and more clearly understood by all involved in giving leadership to the youth of the church.

L. That synod instruct Denominational Services to develop a best-practices resource file for small churches, enabling the sharing of insights and programs that creatively implement the intentions of Article 71 (section VII, B).

M. That synod declare the following statements to be the Christian Reformed Church's understanding of the relationship between our commitment to Reformed Christian day schools and the church's work of doing evangelism in North America (section VII, C, 1):

1. The very presence of Reformed Christian day schools in our increasingly secular public square is itself an evangelistic witness, a testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ; their existence is to be celebrated and their mission to be encouraged.
2. Institutionally, Christian day school education is not the responsibility of the official church. In mission situations, especially in cases of great need, it may be necessary for the church to engage in such activities as education (and medical care) as part of its larger diaconal ministry. Such activity should be ad hoc and temporary in nature and should strive toward indigenous ownership and governance.
3. CRC mission activity in North America is to be guided by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship with a view toward establishing solid families and communities and Christian day schools as well as worshiping congregations.

Ground: This is in keeping with the BOT's denominational strategy statement.

By the year 2002, the CRC will have developed a deeper understanding of and response to God's claim to obedience in all areas of our lives (business, labor, government, media, health, education, justice, peace, affluence, pursuit of pleasure, earthkeeping, racial relationships etc.).

(*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 61)

4. CRC members who are actively involved in Christian education are encouraged to consider their calling to be evangelists in a threefold sense:

- a. In their personal lives and conduct as teachers to demonstrate their own personal commitment to Jesus Christ and use all appropriate means to nurture the faith and spiritual development of their students.
- b. To pursue their vocations as a means of testifying to the lordship of Jesus Christ and in that way bear witness to the world.
- c. To pursue creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic, either in specific mission situations (e.g., teaching English as a second language) or by encouraging the schools in which they work to be creative in reaching out to the lost with the good news of the gospel.

N. That synod declare the following statements to be the Christian Reformed Church's understanding of the relationship between our commitment to Reformed colleges and universities and the church's work of doing evangelism in North America (section VII, C, 2):

1. The very presence of Reformed colleges and universities in our increasingly secular public square is itself an evangelistic witness, a testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ; their existence is to be celebrated and their mission and work encouraged.
2. Reformed colleges and universities are encouraged to see themselves as being in a global mission context and are urged to guide their work by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship in which academic concerns do not overshadow the spiritual and evangelistic components of the educator's task.
3. CRC members who are actively involved in teaching at the college and university level are encouraged to consider their calling to be evangelists in a threefold sense:
 - a. In their personal lives and conduct as teachers to demonstrate their own personal commitment to Jesus Christ and use all appropriate means to nurture the faith and spiritual development of their students.
 - b. To pursue their vocations as a means of testifying to the lordship of Jesus Christ and in that way bear witness to the world.
 - c. To pursue creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic, either in specific mission situations (eg., teaching English as a second language), or, in the case of those teaching at our Reformed colleges and universities, by encouraging the schools in which they

work to be creative in reaching out to the lost with the good news of the gospel.

O. That synod declare the following statements to be the Christian Reformed Church's understanding of the relationship between our commitment to Reformed Christian day schools and the church's work of world missions (section VII, C, 3):

1. Although establishing Christian day schools is not, in the first place, the task of the official church, in mission situations, especially in cases of great need, it may be necessary for the church to engage in such activities as education (and medical care) as part of its larger diaconal ministry. Such activity should be ad hoc and temporary in nature and should strive toward indigenous ownership and governance.
2. CRC mission activity around the world is to be guided by an *integral* vision of Christian discipleship with a view toward establishing solid families and communities and Christian day school as well as worshipping congregations.

Ground: This is in keeping with the BOT's denominational strategy statement.

By the year 2002, the CRC will have developed a deeper understanding of and response to God's claim to obedience in all areas of our lives (business, labor, government, media, health, education, justice, peace, affluence, pursuit of pleasure, earthkeeping, racial relationships etc.).

(*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 61)

3. That CRWM be encouraged to seek out allies and avenues in encouraging Christian higher education opportunities in its mission fields outside North America.

Grounds:

- a. This is consistent with, and a complement to Recommendation O, 2 above.
 - b. From the strength of our theology and practice, the CRC has a golden opportunity today to provide needed assistance to and leadership for the global church and its mission work around the world.
4. CRC members who are actively involved in Christian education are encouraged to consider their calling to be evangelists on the world scene by pursuing creative ways of using their gifts as educators to be *directly* evangelistic in global contexts (e.g., teaching English as a second language).

P. That synod give thanks to God for the visionary leadership of CRWM in developing a strong educational mission ministry around the world; for the many missionaries who have served our Lord and his church so well in diverse educational settings in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific; and dedicate a time of prayer asking the Lord for increased opportunities for educational mission service, for missionaries to supply new posts, and for the financial resources to send them (section VII, C, 3).

Q. That synod encourage all its member churches to develop goals, strategies, and processes toward the healthy resolution of differences and conflicts (section VII, A).

Grounds:

1. The changes and cultural pressures underscored in this report make it clear that building authentic community needs to be a high priority for the church at this point in its history.
2. Christ's high priestly prayer makes it clear that disunity in the church undermines the gospel message (John 17:20-23).

R. That synod instruct the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee to include a specific unit (module) of instruction regarding the CRC's position on Christian day school education for all candidates to CRC ministry. This report could serve as part of the required reading for ministry candidates (section VII, C, 2).

S. That synod commend this report to the churches for study and discussion.

T. That synod declare the work of the committee completed and dismiss the committee.

Committee to Study Christian
Day School Education

John Bolt, reporter
David Engelhard, ex officio
Karen Gerritsma
James Jones
Herman Proper
Sherry Ten Clay
Ildefonso Torres
Dan Vander Ark, chair
Marion Van Soelen
John Visser

Appendix A Council Survey

Survey Process

All *councils* of organized and emerging churches were invited to return a completed questionnaire. The General Secretary's office managed the mailing of the survey. A cover letter, together with the questionnaire, was sent to the "Clerk of Council." Six hundred fifty-five church councils are represented by their returned questionnaire in this survey of 989 churches; the return rate is 66%. First mailing of the questionnaire went out in January, and a second mailing to nonresponding councils was sent in February. April 10, 2002, was the date the last questionnaire was received and included in the data set. All 47 classes are represented among the returned questionnaires.

Note: In many cases, the data presented reflect only the personal estimates or perceptions of the people completing the survey.

Results

The tables of this report are based on the 655 returned questionnaires. Tables are named by the questions as they appear in the questionnaire. Results of each question are summarized in the order they appear in the questionnaire. Percentages are usually taken from the "valid percent" column of the tables. Median average is the estimated value at which 50% of the churches fall below and 50% above (the "cumulative percent" column can be used to find the median category in which the median value falls). Median average was used in this report except in Q.1-Q.4 where the mean average was considered to be more accurate.

In an attempt to be as accurate as possible, the results in Q.1-Q.4 below have been adjusted to reflect the fact that: (1) different churches have different numbers of school-aged children, and (2) the size distribution of churches that returned questionnaires was slightly different from the size distribution of churches in the denomination.

School Information

Q.1. The mean average number of school-age children (K-12) per congregation is 61. Only 2% or 20 congregations report having no school-age children.

Q.2. What percentage of these school-age children attends a Christian day school? The mean average among the churches is 60% (59% in the U.S. and 62% in Canada). Eleven percent of the churches report no children in Christian day schools.

Q.3. Council representatives were asked to estimate the percentage of school-aged children attending Christian schools fifteen years ago. Obviously this estimate is subject to error from several sources, including the knowledge of the respondent, the possibility that some churches are less than fifteen years old, and changes in the size and number of children in the churches. Nevertheless, if 15% of the churches that didn't exist fifteen years ago are dropped from our sample, and it is assumed that the number of school-aged children in each of the remaining churches remained more-or-less the same over this period, the mean average percentage estimate of school-aged children in Christian schools fifteen years ago is 67% (68% in the United States and 65% in Canada). Comparing these percentages with those in Q.2 gives an *estimated* drop of 9 percentage points in the United States and 3 percentage points in Canada.

Q.4. Of the children attending Christian day schools, what percentage is attending Reformed, Christian schools? The mean average is 78%. Therefore, 47% of school-aged children attend Reformed Christian schools (78% of the 60% who attend Christian day schools). Thirty-one percent of the churches report no children attending Reformed Christian day schools.

Q.5. The median average number of school-age children in each church who are being homeschooled is 2. There were no homeschooled children in 47% of the churches. Among the

53% of the churches who report children being homeschooled, the median average number is 10 or less.

Q.6 & Q.6a. Ninety-seven percent of the churches are in locations where a Christian day school is available (although we did not ask specifically about what grade levels were available). Seventy-eight percent of the churches are near a Reformed, Christian school.

Promoting Christian Day Schools

Q.7a-e. Who in the churches takes primary responsibility for promoting Christian schools? The most common answer is that this responsibility is not defined in the church (39%). Among other possible answers, the next most common is council (28% say this), then pastor(s) (12%), followed by Christian school finance committee (9%) and the education or Christian education committee (7%). Eleven percent of the churches report some "other" person or group takes on this responsibility.

Q.8a-e. Financial support (74%) is the most commonly used method by churches to promote the local Christian school(s). Next is distribution of school literature (53%), then preaching (45%) and personal visits (19%). Fourteen percent of the churches say certain other methods are used as well.

Q.9. Are office-bearers or staff (e.g., pastor, elder, deacon) expected to send their children to Christian day schools? Seventy-five percent of the churches say no; 25% say yes.

Q.10a. Seventy-seven percent of the churches say (strongly agree or agree) that their councils diligently encourage parents to have their children instructed in Christian day schools.

Q.10b. Ninety-four percent of the churches say they have a good working relationship with the local Christian day school(s).

Q.10c. Seventy-one percent of the churches say their congregations are united in their support of Christian day schools.

Q.10d. Seventy-six percent say their classis responsibly inquires of them whether or not they diligently promote the cause of Christian education at all levels.

Q.10e. Eighty-seven percent of the churches say ethnic minority members of their church feel comfortable attending Christian day school. Fifty-one percent of the churches say this situation doesn't apply to them.

Q.10f. Seventy-nine percent of them report that their pastor(s) strongly supports Christian education from the pulpit through prayer and preaching.

Q.10g. Seventy-three percent say their elders strongly support Christian education through prayer, conversation, and family visiting.

Q.10h. Sixty-three percent of the churches disagree that baptism vows by parents requires them to provide a Christian day school education for their children.

Q.10i. Sixty-three percent of them disagree that baptism vows by the congregation require the church to provide financial assistance so that parents can provide a Christian day school education for their children.

Q.10j. Seventy-five percent say their church encourages its young people to attend a Christian college.

Financial Support of Christian Day Schools

Q.11. What percentage of families that send their children to Christian day schools receives financial support from their church? Among 39% of the churches, none of the families receive financial support, and among 33%, less than 25% of the families do. The median average among all reporting churches is 8% of the families receive financial support.

Q.12a-e. How is financial need determined by those churches giving financial assistance? In response to this question, 29% of the churches say they do not provide financial support. Among the churches, the most commonly used method is determining need by reviewing the family's financial records (36%), followed by giving whatever a family requests (12%), then giving the same amount to everyone (9%) and providing full tuition cost (6%). Twenty-five percent of the churches wrote in "other" methods used to determine financial need.

Q.13a-e. What means for raising monies have been used by the churches? The most commonly used method is offerings (60%), followed by general budget (16%), then pledge giving (13%), and the Covenant Giving Plan (a.k.a. the Kuyser's Plan or the Milwaukee Plan) (9%). Eighteen percent wrote in "other" methods used to raise monies.

Q.14 & Q.14a. What is the average tuition per child of the local Christian school(s)? In the United States, median average tuition per child by school level is as follows: elementary school, \$3,787; middle school, \$4,101; and high school, \$4,685. In Canada, median average tuition per child is: elementary school, \$6,023; middle school, \$5,000 (note: in many locations in Canada, Christian schools charge a per-family tuition and there is no middle school but K-8 is combined); and high school, \$6,461.

Q.15a-e. What reason do parents most often give for not sending their children to Christian schools? The most common reason is cost of tuition (71%). The next most common reason is wanting to be a witness in public school (16%), followed by too far to travel (12%) and lack of cultural/ethnic sensitivity (3%). Twenty-one percent supplied "other" reasons.

Q.16. How has the church benefited from the Christian day school(s)? Two benefits were requested. 65% of the churches wrote in two or more benefits, 19% wrote in one, and 17% checked that their church has received no benefits.

Supporting Christian Higher Education

Q.17. What percentage of college and university students from the churches attends a Reformed Christian institution of higher education? Median average is 23%. Thirteen percent of the churches say none attend.

Q.18. Twelve percent of the churches say they provide financial support for Christian college tuition. *Note:* Some checked yes and wrote in "indirectly, through ministry shares."

Q.19. How has the church benefited from Reformed Christian colleges? Two benefits were requested. Fifty-three percent of the churches wrote in two or more benefits, 29% wrote in one, and 19% checked that their church has received no benefits.

About the Responding Churches

Q.20. Who are the people who completed the questionnaire? By position, the largest percentage of the questionnaires was completed by the clerk or assistant clerk (46%) of the church council. Next most common position is minister/pastor, other minister/pastor/professional staff, evangelist, or church planter/missionary pastor (18% combined). (Note: there is some overlap of respondents to the council and pastor surveys. We can still conclude, nevertheless, that the two surveys express the voice of different populations.) Eight percent of respondents to the council survey are elders or chairs of the elders (team); 5% are presidents, vice presidents, or chairs of council; 5% are administrative assistants, office administrators, secretaries, or financial assistants; and 3% are deacons or chairs/secretaries of deacons. One percent is completed by councils. Fourteen percent are completed by others.

Q.21. What is the country of location of the churches? Seventy-four percent are located in the United States and 26% in Canada.

Q.22. What is the average yearly income of member households in the churches? Median average in the United States is \$44,074 and in Canada \$47,173 (for these estimates, responses to Q.22 were sorted by nation).

Q.23. What is the type of area in which the churches are located? Twenty percent of the churches are located in a large city (750,000 or more population) or its suburbs, 19% in a medium-sized city (150,000-749,000 population) or its suburbs, 14% in a small city (50,000-149,000), 12% in a large town (10,000-49,000), 24% in a small town (less than 10,000), and 10% in open country and/or farming area.

Appendix B

Pastor Survey

Survey Process

All *active pastors* were invited to return a completed questionnaire. The general secretary's office managed the mailing of the survey. A cover letter, together with the questionnaire, was sent to each pastor. Four hundred ninety-three pastors are represented by their returned questionnaire in this survey of 864 active pastors; the return rate is 57%. The first and only mailing of the questionnaire went out in January. April 10, 2002, was the date the last questionnaire was received and included in the data set. All 47 classes are represented among the returned questionnaires.

Note: The data presented reflect the personal estimates or perceptions of the pastor completing the survey.

Results

The tables of this report are based on the 493 returned questionnaires. Tables are named by the questions as they appear in the questionnaire. Results of each question are summarized in the order they appear in the questionnaire. Percentages are usually taken from the "valid percent" column of the tables. Median average is the estimated value at which 50% of the pastors fall below and 50% above (the "cumulative percent" column can be used to find the median category in which the median value falls).

School Information

Q.1. How many school age children (K-12) do pastors have at home? Forty-seven percent say they have no school age children at home. Median average number of school age children at home for all pastors is less than one (0.3, if you can imagine this). Among the 53% who say they have school age children at home, the median average number is 1.7 children.

Q.2. Do pastors send their school age children to Christian day schools? Forty-six percent say they have no school age children at home. Forty-five percent say yes and 10% say no (two saying because there is no Christian school for them and one saying because they home-school). Among only those pastors with school age children, 82% send their children to Christian day schools and 18% do not.

Q.3. In past years, did the pastors send their school age children to Christian day schools? Thirteen percent say they had no school age children at home then. Eighty-one percent say yes they did and 6% say no. Among only those pastors who had school age children then, 94% say they sent their children then and 6% say no they didn't.

Q.4. Sixty-three percent of the pastors say their church expects them to send their children to Christian day schools and 34% say they do not expect them. About 2% say not sure or something like "yes and no; some do and some don't."

Q.5. Do churches have policies to provide its pastors with special compensation assistance so that their children can attend Christian day schools? Sixteen percent report yes, 83% no, and 1% not sure.

Promoting Christian Day Schools

Q.6a-e. Who in the pastors' churches takes primary responsibility for promoting Christian schools? The most common answer is that this responsibility is not defined in the church (44%). Among other possible answers, the next most common is pastor(s) (20% say this), then council (19%), followed by Christian school finance committee (15%) and the education or Christian education committee (2%). Eleven percent of the pastors report some "other" person or group takes on this responsibility.

Q.7. Responding to this open-ended question, pastors describe in their own words what they do to nurture and maintain a good working relationship with their local Christian day

schools. Ninety-three percent describe their activities; the comments of 7% seem to indicate no activity.

Q.8. What issues regarding Christian day schools affect the way pastors preach about and/or promote them in their congregations? Responding to this open-ended question, 92% give comments that seem to identify the issues, and the comments of 8% seem to indicate there are no issues.

Q.9a. Eighty-one percent of the pastors say (strongly agree or agree) they diligently encourage parents to have their children instructed in Christian day schools.

Q.9b. Ninety-four percent of the pastors say they have a good working relationship with the local Christian day school(s).

Q.9c. Sixty-three percent of the pastors say their congregations are united in their support of Christian day schools.

Q.9d. Fifty-eight percent say their classis responsibly inquires of their churches whether they diligently promoted the cause of Christian education at all levels.

Q.9e. Sixty-eight percent of the pastors say ethnic minority members of their church feel comfortable attending Christian day school. Forty-six percent of the pastors say this situation doesn't apply to their church.

Q.9f. Sixty-nine percent of the pastors report that they strongly support Christian education from the pulpit through prayer and preaching.

Q.9g. Fifty-seven percent say their elders strongly support Christian education through prayer, conversation, and family visiting.

Q.9h. Sixty-nine percent of the pastors disagree that baptism vows by parents requires them to provide a Christian day school education for their children.

Q.9i. Forty-six percent of them disagree that baptism vows by the congregation require the church to provide financial assistance so that parents can provide a Christian day school education for their children.

Q.9j. Ninety-five percent say they encourage the church's young people to attend a Christian college.

Q.10. In supporting and promoting Christian day schools in their congregations, what arguments and reasons do pastors use, in preaching and teaching, to convince parents of the importance of sending their children to Christian day schools? Ninety-two percent of the pastors give reasons and 8% do not in their written comments.

Q.10a. If they do not support or promote Christian day schools in their congregations, what arguments and reasons have convinced the pastors of this position? This does not apply to 65% of the pastors. Among the pastors who wrote comments, 98% seem to include reasons and 2% do not.

Q.11a-e. What reason do parents most often give for not sending their children to Christian schools? The most common reason is cost of tuition (70%). Next most common reason is wanting to be a witness in public school (25%), followed by too far to travel (9%) and lack of cultural/ethnic sensitivity (7%). Twenty-eight percent supplied "other" reasons.

Q.12. How has the church benefited from the Christian day school(s)? Two benefits were requested. Seventy-two percent of the pastors wrote in two or more benefits, 17% wrote in one, and 11% checked that their church has received no benefits.

Supporting Christian Higher Education

Q.13a-e. What means do pastors use to encourage the young people of their church to attend a Christian college? Eleven percent say they don't encourage them to attend. The most common mean that pastors use is working with their youth group (46%), followed by doing career counseling (18%), then bringing in college representatives (11%) and writing letters to young people (7%). Fifty-four percent give other means, such as one-on-one informal meetings.

Q.14. What percentage of college and university students from the churches attends a Reformed Christian institution of higher education? Median average is 33%. Nine percent of the pastors say none attend from their church.

Q.15. How has the church benefited from Reformed Christian colleges? Two benefits were requested. Sixty-six percent of the pastors wrote in two or more benefits, 21% wrote in one, and 12% checked that their church has received no benefits.

About the Responding Pastors

Q.16a-e. What schools have the pastors attended? Seventy-seven percent say they attended a Christian elementary school, 61% attended a Christian middle school, 63% a Christian high school, 92% a Christian college, and 99% a seminary. Less than 1% had attended none of them.

Q.17. Who are the people who completed the questionnaire? By position, the largest percentage of the questionnaires was completed by a lead, sole, or senior minister/pastor (88%).

Q.18. What is the country of location of the pastors' congregation? Seventy-six percent are located in the United States and 24% in Canada.

Appendix C

Reports on Educational Funding Plans for the CRC in the United States and Canada by Deloitte & Touche

What follows are the reports provided to our committee by the accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche. Appendix C-1 is the Memorandum/Executive Summary (United States) provided to our committee on August 19, 2002; Appendix C-2 is the full, extended report as provided on April 1, 2002 (United States); Appendix C-3 is the report provided by Deloitte & Touche (Canada) to the committee on October 10, 2002.

Note: In addition to consulting these reports, each congregation should obtain professional legal and accounting advice in drawing up their plan.

Appendix C-1: Technical Memorandum/Executive Summary (United States)

Appendix C-2: Full Report (United States)

Appendix C-3: Report (Canada)

Appendix C-1: Technical Memorandum/Executive Summary (United States)

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Memo

**Deloitte
& Touche**

Date: August 19, 2002
To: The Files
From: Mary E. Rauschenberg
Scott L. Hirsch
Erica A. Lazzo
Subject: Charitable Receiving Requirements for a Church Providing Direct Support of Members' Children's Christian Education

This memorandum is a summary discussion and is limited to the described facts. It is not intended to be a formal opinion of tax consequences, and, thus, may not contain a full description of all the facts or a complete exposition and analysis of all relevant tax authorities. The conclusions and recommendations contained in this memorandum are based on our understanding of the facts, assumptions, information, and documents referenced herein and current tax laws and published tax authorities in effect as of the date of this memorandum, which are subject to change. If the facts and assumptions are incorrect or change or the tax laws change, the conclusions and recommendations would likewise be subject to change. Deloitte & Touche LLP assumes no obligation to update the memorandum for any future changes in tax law, regulations, or other interpretations and does not intend to do so. Unless otherwise specified, all section references are to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 ("IRC") or the regulations thereunder, both as amended through the date of this memorandum.

This memorandum is not binding on the IRS or the courts and should not be considered a representation, warranty, or guarantee that the IRS or the courts will concur with our conclusions. Only the specific tax issues and tax consequences described herein are covered by this memorandum; no other federal, state, or local laws of any kind were considered and are beyond the scope of this memorandum.

FACTS

The Christian Reformed Church ("CRC") is a Protestant denomination of about 950 churches and 280,000 members in North America. One of the primary tenets of CRC theology is Christian education. Christian day schools, organized as separate legal entities from CRC churches, serve the CRC and other conservative Protestant denominations. However, control of the schools is often vested with CRC congregation members. Over the years, the CRC churches have maintained a close relationship with the Christian day schools. As part of this relationship, the CRC churches have provided financial assistance to the schools. This assistance includes Sunday collections and fundraisers that appeal to all members of the CRC congregations. However, the majority of the funding for CRC sponsored Christian day schools

Deloitte
Touche

Erica A. Lazzo
Date: August 19, 2002

comes from tuition. Some CRC churches pay the tuition for all members' children. Other CRC churches provide no tuition assistance to their members' children. The CRC has not adopted a uniform methodology for use by its churches in determining whether and/or how to fund the Christian education of their members' children.

Recently, the CRC Synod 2000 appointed a committee to study Christian day school education ("the Committee") whose purpose is to determine whether the denomination should reaffirm its theological support of Christian education (this was last done in the 1950's). It is our understanding that The Committee has concluded that the CRC ought to reaffirm this support. As part of its mandate, the Committee is developing a recommendation for the funding of the Christian education of CRC members' children that the individual congregations may adopt.

The CRC views the Christian education of youth as fundamental to its religious beliefs. At a child's baptism, the entire congregation makes an oral commitment to support the Christian education of that child. The Committee will recommend that the CRC churches assume responsibility for funding at least a portion of its members' children's education, to fulfill the congregation's obligation to support the Christian education of CRC youth. It will recommend that individual CRC churches pay part or all of the tuition for its members' children enrolled in the Christian day schools directly from its general operating budget. The funding of the tuition of the congregation's children will one of the programs the church sponsors each year. The churches will not solicit or require specific contributions from members with school age children. There will be no additional pressure to give placed on these members. Instead, the funding of the education of the congregation's children should be part of the church's general obligations, funded through operating budget, the same as other programs sponsored by the church. The CRC expects that its members will practice the principles of Christian stewardship. The principle is the belief that those who have been blessed with extraordinary resources are expected to donate not only more dollars to the church, but probably a higher percentage of their income than those who have less financial capacity. In other words, of those to whom much has been given, much is expected.

ISSUE

Assuming the CRC churches adopt the committee's recommendation, should the charitable receipts issued by the CRC churches include a quid pro quo for the value of the education subsidy provided to members' children?

CONCLUSION

If a CRC church adopts the committee's recommendation, the CRC church does not need to disclose quid pro quo in the charitable receipts issued to members who have no children receiving subsidized education. Additionally, the CRC church arguably should not need to disclose any quid pro quo in the charitable receipts issued to members whose children receive subsidized education. It is possible that based upon the facts of a given church, the IRS could question this treatment.

This conclusion was reached based upon certain key criteria being in existence and the lack of certain other key criteria as follows:

FACTS AND ACTIONS INDICATE QUID PRO QUO DOES NOT EXIST	FACTS AND ACTIONS THAT WOULD INDICATE QUID PRO QUO EXISTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A congregation formally resolves that funding part or all of its member's children's tuition is an obligation of the church. This obligation is assumed as a general obligation of the church. • Payments of tuition to the Christian day schools are made from each CRC church's general operating funds. The school bills the church directly. • The portion of tuition subsidized by the church becomes a church liability. If the church is not able to pay, this liability does not revert to the parent. • Any portion of tuition not subsidized by the church is paid by the parent directly to the school. • Church member contributions are based upon each member's conscience and ability to pay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CRC churches solicit and/or require specific contributions from members with children in any way that is different from other members. • A church requests, orally or written, that the families with children in school give their tuition savings to the church. • A church creates a separate education fund for support of the Christian schools, and/or sets aside specific contributions from families with children in school that go directly to the school. • A church creates the expectation, whether documented or implicit, that its members with children are expected to contribute more money to the church than other members. • A church creates any documentation, promotional material, or correspondence that specifically allocates the cost of the school to only the members with children in the school.

DISCUSSION

The general rules for charitable contribution deductions are codified within Internal Revenue Code Section (IRC §)170. IRC §170(f)(8) requires that to be deductible, any contribution in excess of \$250 must be substantiated with a contemporaneous written acknowledgement from the donee organization. The acknowledgement must contain the following:

1. The amount of cash contributed or a description (but not value) of any property contributed;
2. A statement disclosing whether the donee organization provided any goods or services in exchange for the contributed money or property; and
3. A description and good faith estimate of the value of any goods or services provided in exchange for contributions, or a statement that the contributions were made in exchange for intangible religious benefit. Intangible religious benefit is defined as any intangible religious benefit that is provided by

an organization organized exclusively for religious purposes and which is generally not sold in a commercial transaction outside the donative context.

The acknowledgement must also be contemporaneous, which means that the acknowledgement must be received by the donor before the earlier of the due date of the donor's tax return or the date the donor files the tax return.

Thus, every member who makes a contribution greater than \$250 to a CRC Church is required to receive a receipt in order to claim a charitable contribution deduction on his or her individual tax return. In order to issue the receipt, the church must determine whether the member has received quid pro quo. In the case of CRC members with no children enrolled in Christian day schools, it would appear they receive no tuition benefit and, therefore, no quid pro quo. This conclusion is not as clear in the case of the members with children enrolled in the Christian day schools and whose tuition is subsidized by the church. Several cases and rulings over the past few decades have examined the issue of the deductibility of contributions to a church that funds education of the contributor's children. In other words, whether the tuition benefit was deemed to be quid pro quo. The cases and rulings are discussed below along with an analysis of their application to CRC's facts.

In *Haak vs. U.S.*¹, members of a Christian Reformed Church made payments to the church and deducted them as charitable contributions. The church then paid the taxpayer's children's tuition to a Christian day school. The IRS disallowed a portion of the taxpayer's contributions to the church as non-deductible tuition expenses. The District court upheld the IRS's position, stating that if a transfer is made with the expectation of receiving a benefit, and such benefit is received, that transfer is not a charitable contribution. In this case, the church engaged in specific actions that indicated that the taxpayers were making these contributions to the church in lieu of paying tuition. The church sent members "Guidelines for Contributions" twice a year. These "Guidelines" broke down the per-family costs to the church for various church expenses such as tuition, school building expense, etc. This cost was then broken into weekly contributions for each family. Additionally, four times per year, the Consistory sent church members a letter indicating the financial obligations assumed by the church for each family and what the family's contribution had been. The amounts of education cost varied for each family based on how many children were enrolled in the school. Families with no children in the school were not allocated any of this cost. Though no legal obligation existed between the families and the church, these communications between the church and the families led the court to conclude that the church expected the parents to fund the cost of their children's tuition. Likewise, it concluded that the parents had an expectation of receiving education for their children in exchange for the contributions.

The CRC's proposal expects all members to give what they can afford to support the church, without any extra burden or pressure borne by those families with children in school. The key factor behind the CRC's proposal is the entire congregation's support of Christian education for the children of the church, not the redirecting of the funds paid by families for the schooling of their children.

In *Fausner v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*,² the plaintiff, Donald W. Fausner, made payments to his church and claimed these as deductible charitable donations on his tax return. However, the checks were endorsed for deposit by the parochial school his children were attending. The IRS deemed these

¹ 451 F. Supp. 1087

² T.C. Memo 1971-277

Date: August 19, 2002

payments tuition payments and the Tax Court agreed with the IRS's position. *Fausner* clearly does not apply to the CRC proposal. Under the CRC proposal, contributions by members are made directly to the general fund of the church. The church, as part of its ministry will fund some or all of its members' children's tuition to Christian day schools.

In *Winters v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*,³ the church had established a particular fund to support its related schools. From this fund it paid tuition for its members' children who attended Christian day school. The parents were encouraged to sign pledge cards indicating the amount of contribution they expected to make to the education fund. However, they were not required to contribute in order for the fund to pay their children's tuition. Tax Court disallowed the taxpayers charitable deduction and the Court of Appeals affirmed this decision.

The CRC recommendation is distinguishable from *Winters*. All payments to the schools will be made from the church's general fund. Parents will not be encouraged to give more than other congregation members. All congregation members will be encouraged to give as much as they can afford and their conscience dictates.

In *Dejong v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*,⁴ a tax-exempt corporation was organized solely to maintain a school in which students could obtain religious as well as general instruction. No tuition was charged, parents of the students were encouraged to contribute to the school. No written or oral agreements existed documenting the amounts that the parents would give. However, the parents and school had the mutual understanding that those families that could afford to contribute to the school would contribute at a minimum the cost of educating their children. Thus, the Tax Court ruled that the payments to the school were not deductible and the Appellate Court affirmed that decision. The recommendation is distinguishable from *Dejong*.

Revenue Ruling 83-104⁵ states the position of the Internal Revenue Service ("IRS") regarding the deductibility of contributions made by parents who have children enrolled in private school. The revenue ruling holds that to be deductible, the payments must be made voluntarily and with no expectation of obtaining a corresponding benefit. It is very important that the contribution must not be made pursuant to a plan (express or implied) to convert nondeductible tuition expenses into charitable contributions, and that the receipt of the schooling benefits not be dependent on the making of the payment.

Revenue Ruling 83-104 explains six examples where the donee organization operates a private school that is an organization described in IRC §170. The donor is a parent of a child who attends the school and makes a contribution to the organization. The sixth example described is of a church that operates a school providing secular and religious education that is attended by children of parents who are members and nonmembers of the church. The church receives contributions from all its members, which are placed in its general operating fund and used to support all church activities. Most members of the church do not have children in the school and a major portion of the churches expenses (supported by the general fund) are attributable to its non-school functions. The church solicits contributions from church members with children in the school in the same manner as members without children in the school. No members with children in the school are asked to donate an amount equivalent to the cost of tuition or asked to sign a

³ 468 F.2d. 778

⁴ 309 F.2d 373

⁵ 1983-2 CB 46

Date: August 19, 2002

pledge to secure future donations. Also, most contributors to the church were not parents of children enrolled in the school. The IRS concluded that the parent-member's contributions to the church were deductible because, among other factors, most contributors were not parents, and parent-members did not contribute more than other members did.

The CRC recommendation should follow the treatment in the sixth example from Revenue Ruling 83-104. The CRC is upholding one of the basic tenets of its denomination, the importance of the Christian education. The CRC congregations will fund Christian education consistent with each of the congregation's other programs. Additionally, it is expected that more established members of the congregation will donate more than the younger members, because of their typically stronger financial position. If this trend holds true, it strengthens the argument for similarity to Revenue Ruling 83-104.

Private Letter Ruling ("PLR") 9004030 clarified the issue of the deductibility of certain contributions to a church made by parents of students enrolled in a Christian day school. In this ruling, the practice of the church was to pay the tuition of all children of member families that are enrolled in its school. Many members of this church follow the practice of tithing or very generous giving. In this particular case, there was a considerable imbalance of donations in favor of families with children in the school. The church requested that families benefiting from this tuition support increase their contributions in the amount that they would otherwise pay as tuition. There was no formal arrangement between the church and the school. The school held the parents responsible for the tuition payments.

IRS stated in PLR 9004030, although no single factor is determinative, it took into consideration a combination of several of the following factors to indicate that a payment was not a charitable contribution:

- The absence of a significant tuition charge
- Substantial or unusual pressure to contribute applied to parents of children attending the school
- Contribution appeals made as part of the admissions or enrollment process
- The absence of contributions by people other than parents of children attending the school
- Other factors suggesting that a contribution policy has been created as a means of avoiding the characterization of payments as tuition

In the situation described in the PLR, parents were entirely relieved of paying tuition out of their own pockets. Parents were also aware that the church would be unable to continue paying tuition expenses without large contributions from the parents. The records of the church also show that the contributions of parents increased or decreased as the number of children enrolled in the school changed. The contributions of parents of students drop off significantly in the summer months when the school was not in session. IRS concluded one purpose of the plan was tax avoidance; enabling parents to deduct as charitable contributions their previously nondeductible tuition payments. The IRS identified these factors as the reasons the payments to the church should be characterized as non-deductible tuition payments than deductible charitable contributions.

The CRC recommendation is distinguishable from the PLR because each CRC congregation will assume the responsibility of increased giving to support the members' children's tuition to the Christian schools. The proposal calls for all members of the congregation to give what they can to the church to support all

programs of the church. The churches will not suggest that the parents of students enrolled in the schools give more to the church while their children are in school. The CRC's focus on support of Christian education as a responsibility of the entire congregation differentiates it from PLR 9004030.

Mary E. Rauschenberg
Scott L. Hirsch
Erica A. Lazzo

Appendix C-2: Full Report (United States)

Christian Reformed Church

Recommended Education Funding Model

April 1, 2002

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Presented by:

Mary E. Rauschenberg
Scott L. Hirsch

1 Scope of project

We understand that one of the tenets of the Christian Reformed Church (“CRC”) is the support of a Christian education for the children of its members. The CRC support of Christian education historically has been strong and remains so today. One way this support is demonstrated is through the support of Christian day schools. Concurrent with our project, the CRC Synod 2000 appointed a committee to study Christian day school education (“the Committee”). The Committee’s mandate includes the study of the CRC’s financial support for Christian day schooling.

As we understand it, there are currently a number of practices being used to support the day schools. These practices vary from a congregation sponsoring and funding tuition for children of members from special collections but no direct support of member’s children’s tuition to support of a member’s child’s tuition where there is a family need. There does not appear to be any single model that is used consistently by a majority of the Churches.

One of the goals of the Committee is to develop a recommended model for use by the CRC congregations that wish to fund Christian education for their congregation’s children. The recommended model will provide an education funding that meshes well with and implements CRC doctrines.

Our role during the project included the following:

- Compiling background information regarding how other organizations (i.e. the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church) fund their elementary and secondary schools;
- Participating in visits to CRC sponsored schools to learn the background regarding current funding practices;
- Providing advice on tax and other business implications of the proposed model;
- Preparing a report with our recommendations to the Committee at the completion of the project; and
- Preparing a technical memorandum discussing the tax implications of the proposed funding model.

2 Executive Summary

Throughout the CRC's history, it has supported Christian education for its youth through Christian day schools. Its strong belief in the importance of Christian education is one of the key factors that resulted of the formation of the CRC denomination in the mid-1800s. Even today, CRC congregations reaffirm their dedication to the Christian education of their children at the baptism of every child in a congregation, by orally committing to supporting the Christian education of that child. Beyond that, its church order says that the church will "diligently encourage" its members to establish and maintain good Christian schools and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools. Clearly, the CRC has included Christian education as a fundamental part of the church's ministry.

However, changes in the economics of sending children to Christian day school have forced the CRC to review its views regarding Christian education. Specifically, younger families are having difficulty with the financial burden of funding a Christian education for their children. Some of these families are choosing not to send their children to Christian schools or are even leaving the CRC denomination. The CRC must find a way to support its families with children while addressing the concerns of families without children and without causing significant cutbacks in other congregation programs.

To achieve these objectives, the Committee recommends that each CRC congregation fund a percentage of the Christian day school tuition for its member children as part of the general ministry of the church. The percentage will be determined by each congregation based upon the economics of the particular church and the level of need of its member families. By providing flexibility in the model, all CRC congregations can adopt some form of economic support for Christian education.

If the CRC adopts the Committee's proposal, the CRC churches should not need to treat the value of a child's education as quid pro quo for the children's parents. This conclusion is based upon very specific criteria that are discussed later in the report and the attached technical memorandum.

3 Procedures

During November, December and January, we visited the following individuals and organizations:

- Mr. Ronald Holwerda – Lansing Christian School;
- Mr. Peter Boonstra – Illiana Christian High School;
- Mr. Scott Helming – Trinity Evangelical Church and School;
- Rev. Cal Hoogendorn – Bethel Christian Reformed Church;
- Mr. Wayne Schneider – Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese;
- Mr. Bob Freymark – Lutheran Schools – Missouri Synod;
- Mr. Robert Buikema – Brookfield Christian School; and
- Mr. Clifford Buelow – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) College.

Our meetings focused on gathering the following information:

1. What are the denomination's core beliefs regarding education and schools?
2. How are the schools organized? What is their relationship with the associated church(es)?
3. Do the schools admit students from other denominations?
4. What are the primary sources of financial support for the school?
5. Does the school or denomination offer any financial aid or support to its students' families?

We gathered additional information relating to the CRC's beliefs and support of Christian education through various books, pamphlets and our discussions with CRC church members.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian education of CRC children is an important tenet of the CRC denomination. • In an essay written by John Bolt, entitled "The CRC and Support for Christian Education," Mr. Bolt presents the history of the CRC's support of Christian education and convincing arguments for continued CRC support of Christian schools. • The emphasis on Christian day school education is deeply woven into the fabric of the CRC as a denomination. • CRC officials, when visiting local congregations, always ask if the congregation has been promoting Christian day school education to its members. • At a baby's baptism, the entire CRC congregation verbally makes the commitment to help instruct the baby in the Christian faith. • Christian education is actively promoted in CRC congregations. Christian education is often the subject of Pastors' sermons. • Though the support for Christian education is strong throughout the entire community, because of the financial burden more families are choosing not to send their children to Christian day schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Catholic Church supports Christian education as part of the general ministry of its parishes. • As a general rule, education is not a specific focus in sermons or through the traditions of the Catholic mass. • Families send their children to Catholic schools based upon their desire for a Catholic education and ability to finance the education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LCMS feels that the Lutheran education of its children is the responsibility of the entire congregation. • Generally, LCMS pastors support Lutheran education and schools through the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They send their children to the schools; • They support Lutheran education during their prayers in services; • They speak generally in support of the schools; and • They may touch on Lutheran education during their sermons. • The LCMS supports and encourages Lutheran education, but does not pressure its members to send their children to the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are a fundamental component of a WELS parish. • Pastors do not specifically promote the WELS schools during services. However, when a new family joins a WELS parish, the family is visited by the pastor, school principal, and appropriate teachers to encourage sending the children to the WELS school.
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2. How are the schools organized? What is their relationship with the church?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Christian day schools are organized as separate legal entities from CRC churches. They do not have any overlapping board members. The church and the schools are legally independent. • Typically, the majority of the board of a Christian day school consists of CRC members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic elementary schools are a part of the ministry of their related parish. They are not separate legal entities. • Catholic high schools are typically sponsored by several parishes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCMS schools are part of the ministry of their related parish. As a general rule, they are not separate legal entities. • High schools may be sponsored by several parishes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELS schools are part of the ministry of their related parish. As a general rule, they are not separate legal entities. • High schools may be sponsored by several parishes.
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generally provide financial support to the schools.			
3. Do the schools admit students from other denominations?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christian day schools admit children from any denominations as long as their values and beliefs coincide with the Christian values and curriculum of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholic schools admit students from other denominations. The families of the students must accept that their children will receive a Catholic education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCMS schools will admit students from outside the parish, as long as the families of those children are willing to actively participate in all activities of the school, including religious activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WELS schools will admit students from other denominations.
4. What are the primary sources of funding for the school?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of Christian day school funding is through tuition. Christian day schools receive some funding through alternate sources such as special collections from the associated churches and in some cases funding from a related foundation. Depending on the school and the associated churches, the families are personally responsible for tuition. Some congregations, such as the Brookfield CRC, fund 100% of its members' children's Christian day school tuition from the church's general fund. Other congregations, such as the Bethel CRC in Lansing, Illinois, fund none of the children's tuition. There are variations in between depending upon the congregation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholic schools used to be 100% funded by the parish. Due to changing cost structure and other economic pressures, most schools now charge tuition. Catholic schools are included as part of the ministry of the related parish, and thus the operating expenses for the schools are part of the annual budget for the related parish. As a general rule, a parish pays part of the costs of the schools and tuition paid by the families of children enrolled in the school funds the remainder of the budget. Non-parish member children pay a higher tuition than parish member children. In addition to church funds and tuition, parishes often sponsor fundraisers for the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LCMS schools are part of the parish. Thus, all expenses for the schools are part of the ministry of the parish and are funded by the parish. Generally, the LCMS churches encourage overall giving from their members, part of which will be used to fund the school. The LCMS schools charge tuition to the families enrolling students in the schools. Typically, the tuition is less for parish members' children. LCMS parishes also sponsor fundraisers and special collections to assist in the funding of the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WELS schools are part of the parish. Thus, all expenses for the schools are part of the ministry of the parish and are funded by the parish. As a general rule, WELS schools do not charge tuition to their parish members' children. WELS churches rely on special offerings from the congregation when the church budget falls short (because of school issues or other issues). WELS high schools charge tuition to all students. WELS members' children's tuition is subsidized by their congregation.
5. Does the school offer any financial aid or support to its students' families?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally, the Christian day schools associated with CRC congregations do not provide financial aid directly to students' families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial aid is handled on a case by case basis between the families and the parish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCMS will not refuse any child admission to their schools for financial reasons. The LCMS parish will fund the child's education if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WELS schools provide financial aid to high school students.

5 Recommended Education Funding Model

A. Recommendation

Determining the most effective method of funding religious education has been an issue for the Christian denominations sponsoring schools for many years. As noted above, the Catholic Church and Lutheran synods have funded or subsidized their schools through the general ministry of the church for a number of years. However, changes in society over the years have necessitated the Catholics and Lutherans to reform their models for supporting and funding education. Recently, the same has become true for the CRC.

The CRC has supported Christian day schools since the denomination was founded in the mid-1800s. In an essay written by Professor John Bolt, entitled "The CRC and Support for Christian Education," Professor Bolt describes the CRC's long history of involvement with Christian day schools. The importance of sponsoring a Christian education for its youth is one of the core values and beliefs that caused the formation of the CRC originally. The CRC has remained committed to supporting Christian education for its youth throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Even today, an entire CRC congregation, at the baptism of a member's child, orally reaffirms its commitment to assist with the Christian nurturing of the child in the church and beyond. However, changes within the CRC brought on by changes in American society have caused the CRC to carefully review its theological and economic views on the support of Christian education both within the church and in Christian day schools.

The Committee is directly addressing the theological perspective of the CRC's continued support of Christian education and Christian day schools. The purpose of this report is to supplement that report with a discussion of the economic and financial issues facing the CRC's support of Christian education and to make a recommendation for the funding of Christian education going forward.

The economic diversity within the CRC is one issue currently affecting the support of Christian education. CRC congregations strongly encourage their members to send their children to Christian day school. Many of these congregations do not provide financial support thus placing a significant financial burden upon these families. Depending on a family's economic situation, and the number of school age children, a family may or may not be able to afford the cost of sending a child or children to a Christian day school. As the costs of education increase, the burden upon these families has continued to increase. Young families with numerous children especially feel the financial impact of sending children to Christian schools. In some cases, young families have left CRC congregations because they could not afford Christian day school education for their children and felt too much pressure from the congregation on the importance of a Christian education for their children. The future of the CRC is its children. It is important to the denomination that its children are raised with the CRC religious worldview. If families cannot afford Christian education for their children, the CRC will begin to see its future endangered as its children are educated in schools that do not focus on the same religious values taught to students in Christian day schools. The danger of losing the support of these children indicates that the CRC needs to assist its members with children in the financing of Christian day school education.

However, the overall financial well being of the congregations and their traditions need to be considered. If a congregation has not funded Christian education in the past, its other programs may be impacted by the demands on the church budget that a commitment to fund the tuition of its members' children education will create. The congregation members, especially those without children, may not be satisfied with promoting Christian day school education at the expense of the congregation's other programs. Based upon the general consensus of support for Christian day school education, it will be necessary for a broad segment of the congregation members to accept an additional financial commitment. If all of the members share the cost, the burden is spread among the entire Christian community in each church or group of churches. The effect will be to relieve some of the financial stress placed upon the younger families – a key issue raised during the course of the study.

Therefore, the recommendation of an education funding model must balance the concerns of the younger families, older members, and the financial well being of the congregations. Additionally, the economic and social diversity amongst the CRC congregations will impact the recommended education funding model. The model must include enough flexibility to meet the needs of the CRC's diverse group of congregations, or it will not serve the purpose for which it has been created.

To meet these objectives, we recommend that each CRC congregation fund a percentage (up to 100%) of the Christian day school tuition for its member children as part of the general ministry of the church. The percentage will be determined based upon the congregation's commitment to Christian education and the financial resources of each church. Additionally, the model will allow a church to determine what level of financial commitment it would like the individual families to maintain to ensure they are committed to Christian education. This model will provide enough flexibility to each congregation to determine how significant of a commitment it wants to make to Christian education. At the same time, it affirms the CRC's overall commitment to provide some financial relief to its families with fewer financial resources.

6 Summary of Tax Implications of Recommended Education Funding Model

A. Summary of Tax Implications

If the CRC adopts the Committee's proposal, the CRC churches should not be required to report the value of a child's education as a quid pro quo to the members with children enrolled in the Christian day schools. Thus, the members' charitable donations may be deductible as charitable contributions pursuant to IRC §170. Revenue Ruling 83-104 provides guidance that states, under the proper facts, contributions to a church with children that attend a related school are deductible. To support this conclusion, the CRC and CRC churches need to monitor their actions to engage in the "Do's" listed below and avoid the "Don't's" listed below. The CRC should establish its program in a way that the facts closely resemble example six of Revenue Ruling 83-104 and that avoids the negative facts established in court cases and other IRS rulings. If the IRS were to challenge this position it would likely argue that parents with children receiving tuition benefits received quid pro quo in return for their contributions to the church. If the IRS were successful in this argument, the CRC church could be penalized for failing to properly disclose a quid pro quo contribution to its members. In addition, the contributions of individual members would likely be disallowed up to the subsidized amount. The attached technical memorandum (Exhibit 1) discusses the tax implications of the recommendation in more detail.

B. Do's

The following list summarizes facts and actions that support the members' position that the contributions to the church should be treated as charitable contributions and that there is no reportable quid pro quo:

- The congregation should formally resolve that funding part or all of its members' children's tuition is an obligation of the church. This obligation should be assumed as a general obligation of the church.
- Payments of tuition to the Christian day schools should be made from each CRC church's general operating funds. The school should bill the church directly.
- The portion of the tuition subsidized by the church becomes a church liability. If the church is unable to pay, the liability should not revert to the parent.
- Any portion of tuition not paid by the church should be paid by the parent directly to the school.
- Church members will contribute in accordance with the principles of stewardship as articulated within the CRC. The concept is if individuals accept the premise that they are not owners of the material blessings entrusted to them by God, but only stewards charged with the responsibility of using these gifts for kingdom purposes, then they will contribute in accordance with their financial abilities and their understanding of Christian stewardship.

C. Don'ts

The following list summarized actions and facts that the IRS may rely upon to argue that members' contributions are in actuality non-deductible tuition payments:

- The CRC congregations should not solicit nor require specific contributions from members with children in any way that is different from other members of the congregation
- A church should not request, orally or written, that the families with children in school give their tuition savings to the church.
- A church should not create a separate education fund for support of the Christian schools, nor set aside specific contributions from families with children in school to go directly to the schools.
- A church should not create the expectation, whether documented or implicit, that its members with children are expected to contribute more money to the church than other congregation members.
- A church should not create any documentation, promotional material, or correspondence that specifically allocates the cost of the school to only the members with children in the school.

Appendix C-3: Report (Canada)

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Memo

Date: October 10, 2002
To: The Files
From: Tony Ancimer, Michael Lepore, Lisa Pallisco
Subject: Funding of Christian Day Schools

FACTS

The Christian Reformed Church ("CRC") is a Protestant denomination of about 950 churches and 280,000 members in North America, including 243 churches and 82,000 members in Canada. One of the primary tenets of CRC theology is Christian education. Christian day schools, organized as separate legal entities from CRC churches, serve students and families who are members of the CRC and other denominations. Over the years, the CRC churches have maintained a close relationship with the Christian day schools. As part of this relationship, the CRC churches have provided financial assistance to the schools. This assistance includes Sunday collections and fundraisers that appeal to all members of the CRC congregations. However, significant sources of funding for CRC sponsored Christian day schools include tuition and government subsidies. The CRC has not adopted a uniform methodology for use by its churches in determining whether and/or how to fund the Christian education of their members' children.

Recently, the CRC Synod 2000 appointed a committee to study Christian day school education ("the Committee") whose purpose is to determine whether the denomination should reaffirm its theological support of Christian education (this was last done in the 1950's). The Committee has concluded that the CRC ought to reaffirm this support. As part of its mandate, the Committee has developed a recommendation for the funding of the Christian education of CRC members' children that the individual congregations may adopt.

The CRC views the Christian education of youth as fundamental to its religious beliefs. At a child's baptism, the entire congregation makes an oral commitment to support the Christian education of that child. In order to fulfill the congregation's obligation to support the Christian education of CRC youth, the Committee looked at various models for funding Christian day schools, including one model where all of the tuition for students attending day school is paid by the church. The Committee's final recommendation was for CRC church councils to develop and promote plans for congregational financial support of Reformed Christian day school education. The Committee recommended that the CRC church councils seek professional legal, tax, and accounting advice when drafting such plans.

Deloitte
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ISSUE

If CRC churches develop a plan that provides direct financial support to Christian schools and, as a result, the children of CRC members are provided with some subsidy for day school education, will contributions to the church by the parishioners be considered “gifts” for which a charitable receipt can be issued, thus enabling the parishioners to claim a tax credit?

CONCLUSION

If a CRC church adopts the model whereby tuition for students attending Christian day school is paid, in whole or in part, by the church the whole amount of the contributions made to the church by parents with children that receive a tuition subsidy would likely not be considered “gifts”, because these parents would be receiving consideration, in the form of the Christian education of their children, in return for their contributions. Therefore, no charitable receipt should be issued with respect to these contributions. This is supported by both case law and CCRA interpretations. It should be noted that it is the whole donation that is made by a parent that would be deemed not to be a gift. Therefore, where a parent donates an amount that is in excess of any tuition subsidy received by their children, it is the whole amount of the donation that does not qualify for a tax credit and not just the portion equal to the subsidy.

Donations by members who do not have children receiving a subsidized education should qualify as a gift, since they will not be receiving any form of consideration in return for their contribution. However, there is a risk that the CCRA could disagree with this conclusion with respect to donations made by members that are related to children attending the day school; i.e., donations by grandparents or siblings.

Therefore, the model that has been recommended for funding the Christian education of members’ children in the United States is not an ideal structure for Canada. There are other options available for funding the schools that may produce a more advantageous tax result for the donors. If desirable, these options could be explored.

DISCUSSION

Registered Charity

A registered charity is an independent body, resident in Canada, which has been registered as a “charitable organization”, a “public foundation” or a “private foundation”. A charitable organization is generally characterized as an initiator of charitable activities and is typically responsible for administering charitable programs through its own representatives. A public foundation on the other hand, funds the charitable activities of other registered organizations. Lastly, a private foundation can behave in the manner of either an organization or a foundation, the distinguishing characteristic is the degree to which it is privately controlled or funded. It is our understanding that both the individual CRC churches and the associated CRC schools are registered as charitable organizations.

Registered charities are exempt from taxation on their income and are entitled to issue donation receipts that entitle their recipients to a tax credit or a tax deduction. Gifts to registered charities qualify for tax credits if an individual makes the gift¹. The tax credit is a non-refundable and non-transferable federal tax credit that is deductible against regular income tax otherwise payable. The deduction from income tax

¹ A gift made by a corporation may qualify for a tax deduction. However, only the rules applicable to gifts made by an individual are discussed in this memo.

to the lesser of \$200 and the individual's total gift for the year. The tax credit for individual gifts in excess of \$200 is calculated using the highest federal income tax rate (currently 29%). Charitable gifts also qualify for a provincial tax credit that is available to offset provincial income tax that would otherwise be payable. Provincial tax credits vary from province to province. In Ontario, the tax credit is 6.2% of the first \$200 in donations, and 11.16% for donations in excess of \$200.

Gifts

As discussed above, in order to qualify for a tax credit, a contribution by an individual to a registered charity must be classified as a "gift" and the donor must receive an official charitable receipt. There is no definition of gift in the *Income Tax Act* (the "Act"). Therefore, courts applying the provisions of the Act dealing with credits for gifts apply the common law definition of the term. The common law definition is stated in *Friedberg v. MNR*:²

a gift is a voluntary transfer of property owned by a donor to a donee, in return for which no benefit or consideration flows to the donor.

CCRA's position on the meaning of "gift" is set out in Interpretation Bulletin 110R3 "Gifts and Official Donation Receipts". IT-110R3 defines a gift as follows:

A gift ... is a voluntary transfer of property without valuable consideration. Generally, a gift is made if all three of the conditions listed below are satisfied:

- (a) some property – usually cash – is transferred by a donor to a registered charity
- (b) the transfer is voluntary; and
- (c) the transfer is made without expectation of return. No benefit of any kind may be provided to the donor or to anyone designated by the donor, except where the benefit is of nominal value.³

In document number 9901985 "Tuition Fees and Gifts", CCRA provides further commentary on what it considers a gift by stating that:

"any obligation, contractual, moral or otherwise, on the donor would cause the transfer to lose its status as a gift. In order to be a gift, the transfer of property must be made without conditions, from a detached and disinterested generosity, out of affection, respect, charity or like impulse, and not made from the constraining forces of any moral or legal duty."

CCRA's definition of a gift is generally supported by the jurisprudence. The only difficult element of the definition is the prohibition against consideration being received by the donor. Several court cases over the past few decades have examined the issue of "consideration" with respect to contributions to a registered charity. The most important of these cases are discussed below together with an analysis of their application to CRC's facts.

² 89 DTC 5115; [1989] 1 CTC 274 (FCTD) varied 92 DTC 6031; 1992 1 CTC 1, (FCA)

³ A benefit is considered to have a nominal value where the fair market value does not exceed the lesser of \$50 or 10% of the amount of the gift. A benefit is not considered to have nominal value where its fair market value cannot be determined.

contributions to the church and received charitable donations receipts in exchange. The members could designate that part of their donations to the church were to be used to provide students of Mennonite school with bursaries. The Student Aid Committee of the church had determined that as policy matter every student who was member or child of a member of church that applied for bursary should receive one. Thus no student was denied enrolment at the school for failure to pay tuition fees. A very small percentage of the church congregation, all of whom were parents of children who obtained bursaries, donated a large part of the money contributed to the fund out of which the bursaries were paid. The court felt that the taxpayers made their contributions to the church with the anticipation that their children would be provided with a bursary. While a parent could theoretically not pay any money to the church for their child to receive a bursary, all parents would also presumably understand that if each and every parent refused to donate money to the church, there would be insufficient money available to provide students with bursaries. Further, a report by the Student Aid Committee stated that: "It is assumed that the student and/or parents will contribute as much as they are able to the fund." Thus, despite the fact that the contributions were voluntary, they were made with the anticipation of benefit or advantage of material nature; that benefit being the bursary for their children. Therefore, the donations were not gifts and the donors could not claim a tax credit.

The CRC proposal, like the First Mennonite Church, expects all members to give what they can afford to support the church, without any extra burden or pressure borne by those families with children in the school. All congregation members will be encouraged to give as much as they can afford and their conscience dictates. The recommendation is slightly distinguishable from Woolner, since all payments to the school will be made from the church's general fund. Thus, unlike the First Mennonite Church, parents would not designate that part of their donations to the church are to be used to provide students with bursaries. This distinguishing aspect however is arguably not overly significant. The classification of a donation to a registered charity as a gift hinges on the expectation of return. The fact that the donations are technically voluntary in nature would not impact this analysis. If CRC parishioners anticipate that, in return for their contributions to the church, their children would be provided with a Christian education, they have received consideration and their donations would not qualify as a gift. The consideration received does not have to be material in nature. If parents consider they have a primary duty to provide their children with a Christian education in a separate Christian school, and that this obligation is discharged by donations to the church, then the parents will have received consideration in the form of a release from their moral obligation. Thus, where there is a moral obligation involved, the courts have found that there is a per se *quid pro quo*. This could be true irrespective of whether parents are explicitly compelled to donate funds to the church or whether their donations were donated to the general fund or designated for student bursaries.

In *MNR v. Zandstra*⁵, the taxpayers treated \$200 per family of the total sum paid to their children's school (which was a registered charitable organization) as tuition fees and the balance as a gift. CCRA argued that \$200 per child attending the school should be treated as tuition fees and the balance as a gift. The court upheld CCRA's position, even after accepting that the payments to the school were voluntary and not pursuant to a contractual obligation. The court found that it was clear from the evidence presented that the parents had a primary duty to their own children to provide them with a Christian education in a separate Christian school and that this obligation was discharged by payments made to the school. Therefore, the parents received consideration, i.e. the Christian education of their children, in return for

⁴ *Woolner v. MNR* (1999), 99 DTC 5722; 2000 1 CTC 35 (FCA)

⁵ *MNR v Zandstra*, 74 DTC 6416; [1974] CTC 503

cannot be materially distinguished from the CRC proposal. CRC views the Christian education of youth as fundamental to its religious beliefs. Thus, CRC parishioners could be seen as having a moral duty to provide their children with a Christian education. This duty is fulfilled through donations to the church, which could be used to partially or fully fund the education of their children attending the schools. Once again, the courts found that a release from a moral obligation was sufficient to deem payments made to the church not to be gifts.

In the *Queen v. McBurney*⁶, the taxpayer paid amounts to three Christian religious schools attended by his children. Each school was a non-profit organization and a registered charity. Parents were requested to make financial contributions but no child was turned away because of financial hardship. CCRA took the position that the payments were on account of tuition fees and not gifts. Accordingly, they disallowed the deductions claimed by the taxpayer. The Federal Court of Appeal sided with CCRA and found that the payments were not gifts. The court determined that the taxpayer made payments "in pursuance of his perceived Christian duty to ensure his children received the kind of education these schools provided." Therefore, the court could not accept the argument that, since the parents were under no legal obligation to contribute, the payments should be considered as gifts. It further stated that:

The securing of the kind of education a parent desired for his/her child and the makings of the payments went hand in hand. Both grew out of the same sense of personal obligation, as a Christian parent, to ensure that for his/her child received a Christian education and, and in return, to pay money to the operating organizations according to... their means.

Therefore, the payments were not considered gifts. The facts in the McBurney case are similar to the CRC proposal. It would therefore be very difficult to argue that the CRC members' do not, at the very least, have a moral duty to ensure that their children receive a Christian education and that this duty is fulfilled through donations made to the church. As discussed above, once a moral obligation exists on the part of the donor, the transfer loses its status as a gift.

Donations to Secular and Religious Schools

As discussed above, tuition fees paid to an educational institution in Canada are not considered gifts; they are fees for value. As such, official receipts designated for charitable donations may not be issued for such tuition fees, even where the educational institution itself is a registered Canadian charitable organization. There are two exceptions to this general rule where a portion or the entire amount paid to an educational institution may be considered a gift. The two special circumstances are for schools that teach religion exclusively and those that operate in a dual capacity providing both secular and religious education. These exceptions are outlined by CCRA in Information Circular 75-23 "tuition fees and charitable donations paid to privately supported secular and religious schools". Further, it should be noted that, as a result of the Woolner⁷ case, these exceptions are now part of Canadian law and are not merely administrative concessions

If a school teaches religion exclusively and is a registered Canadian charitable organization, payments for students attending the school are not considered to be tuition fees. This is due to the fact that receiving religious education for one's children is not viewed by CCRA as receiving consideration even through this

⁶ *Queen v. McBurney*, 85 DTC 5433; [1985] 2 CTC 214

⁷ *Woolner v. MNR* (1999), 99 DTC 5722; 2000 1 CTC 35 (FCA)

If a school is operating in a dual capacity providing both secular and religious education, charitable donation receipts may be issued for the portion of the amount paid to attend the school relating to religious education. Currently, there are two methods of calculating the portion of donations that relates to religious education depending on how the school maintains its accounting records.

The most favorable treatment is received where a school segregates the cost of operating the secular portion of the school and the cost of providing religious training. The net cost of operating the secular portion of the school is to be prorated over the number of pupils enrolled during the school year to determine a "cost per pupil" for the secular training. An official receipt can be issued for that portion of a payment, which is in excess of the pro-rated "cost-per-pupil".

If the school cannot separate the cost of operating the secular portion of the school and the cost of providing religious training, a donation receipt can be issued for that part of the payment that is in excess of the net operating "cost per pupil" of the whole school for a school year.

The full contribution to such a school by a person who is neither the parent nor guardian of a pupil attending the school should qualify as a gift for which an official receipt can be issued.

c: Peter Borgdorf, Christian Reformed Church Foundation
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