

Two Reformed churches agree to work more closely

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In a historic joint session following decades of division and rancor, delegates of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church buried the hatchet.

CRC and RCA delegates voted unanimously on June 14 in Pella, Iowa, to declare “the principle that guides us, and the intention that motivates us, is to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately.”

The resolution instructed the CRC’s Board of Trustees and the General Synod Council of the RCA that the two denominations must be guided by this principle, according to a news release from the joint session.

The Reformed Church in America was established in 1628 by early Dutch settlers in New York, but dissenters seceded in 1857 under the name Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The division occurred over differences held so strongly that Pillar Church in Holland, Michigan, defended itself against the opposing group by arming its members with hatchets and axes, according to Wes Granberg-Michaelson, former RCA general secretary and well-known ecumenist in the United States and abroad.

An improving religious climate today is gradually replacing the Reformed churches’ tortured past, said Granberg-Michaelson. “Pillar Church recently broke ground, becoming an RCA-CRC jointly affiliated congregation with a baptismal font supported by ax handles as a sign of reconciliation,” he said.

Asked to place the recent CRC-RCA joint session into the present scope of world Christianity, Granberg-Michaelson quoted Pope Francis: “Unity comes from the Holy Spirit and is born of the unity of the Trinity. Where does division come from? The devil! Division comes from the devil.”

The RCA generally has been regarded as relatively liberal because of its membership in the National and World Council of Churches. The CRC is a member of the National

Association of Evangelicals.

Two delegates—one a CRC delegate from Michigan and the other an RCA delegate from Iowa—together addressed the joint session on June 14. Both recalled hearing pejorative comments about the other denomination.

Brian Seifert recalled hearing a CRC pastor refer to an RCA pastor as “the great Satan.” Turning to his cospeaker, David Schut of the RCA, Seifert said, “On behalf of the CRC, I ask forgiveness.”