



July 18, 2018

Dear CRC Council Members:

Synod 2018 delegates have, by way of recent decisions, provided new direction and a few requests for the church. This year, synod was well served by its delegates, in addition to seven young adult representative voices, in its work. Synod was graciously led by a gifted team of officers throughout the week of deliberations. This synod also spent time in joint sessions with the delegates to the Reformed Church in America General Synod, meeting concurrently on the Calvin College campus. There was a spirit of graciousness, gratitude, and exploration as these two synods worshiped and prayed together, attended workshops and advisory committee sessions together, and fellowshiped over meals and breaks together. The welcome and hospitality extended by the staff of Calvin College were also greatly appreciated. In all and through all, God was glorified in the work and decisions of all who gathered for Synod 2018.

Some of the matters addressed by the delegates to synod this year include proposed changes to Church Order Articles regarding commissioned pastor roles, the definition of *classis*, and the role of regional pastors; concerns about patterns of abuse of power; and speaking prophetically and pursuing justice and mercy in the public square. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for your council and church members, we have summarized the decisions of Synod 2018 on the following pages. Note that some decisions provide instruction for work yet to be done. **Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights at your next council meeting.**

We are always grateful for the opportunity at synod to honor and declare those presented as candidates for ministry of the Word within the CRC—*forty-three* new candidates were approved (see crcna.org/candidates)! It is a highlight for many to witness a standing ovation by more than 200 delegates and advisers, joined by family members of the candidates, and conclude a time of celebration with a prayer of gratitude for their commitment and preparation to service to the church in ministry. In addition, synod gave special recognition to *forty-six* ministerial and commissioned pastor retirees. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church and wish them God's grace as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

The electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2018* is posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. The printed version of the *Acts* will follow later in August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, I want to express our sincere appreciation to all who served the church as delegates and young adult representatives to Synod 2018. These individuals generously gave significant time and energy for a full week. "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

Yours faithfully,

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Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2018 for the Churches

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Summary of Decisions of Synod 2018 for the Churches

1. Addressing patterns of abuse; implementing safe church policies

Synod spent a significant amount of time addressing growing concerns about patterns of abuse in our society and particularly in our churches. Synod 2018 reaffirmed the action Synod 2010 took in response to the Abuse Victims Task Force Report (*Agenda for Synod 2010*, pp. 475-509; *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 862-66) and instructed the executive director to continue allocating resources to provide support for pastoral care and healing. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 474.)

Synod also reaffirmed the following five goals that were approved by Synod 2014 (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 237; *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 559-60) to guide the Safe Church Ministry:

- Each church has implemented a written Safe Church/abuse prevention policy.
- Each church includes abuse prevention in its church school and youth education. Programs such as Circle of Grace, which teach positive respect in relationships, are recommended.
- Each church has protocols in place for responding to misconduct and is aware of the recommended “Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader” approved by Synod 2010.
- Abuse is acknowledged as an important issue and can be freely discussed.
- Leadership at all levels is supportive of Safe Church Ministry, and each church is represented on a classis Safe Church team.

Synod lamented that some classes and congregations have yet to implement safe church practices, and synod encouraged all classes and congregations to learn from the best practices of others and to utilize the resources available through Safe Church Ministry. Safe Church Ministry will begin reporting annually through the Council of Delegates the number and names of classes with and without Safe Church teams, and the number of churches with and without Safe Church teams and policies. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 475-76.)

2. Social justice engagement

The advisory committee addressing three overtures regarding political advocacy shared the following observation: “In our calling to be prophetic, we acknowledge that there will not be unanimity and single-mindedness on all political issues and that differences of opinions will arise. We are called to gospel-centered relationships that hold unity as a high value. We are called to the preservation and restoration of unity as the body of Christ. We trust that when differences arise, our means of addressing them will give testimony to our unity in Christ.”

Synod responded to the matters related to political advocacy by

- Reminding our diverse binational church that we need to continue engaging in the social/political/economic layers of public life.
- Urging our churches to continue to pray for our nations for justice and mercy to prevail.
- Calling us to continue to pray for the CRCNA as we speak the gospel to the nations.
- Encouraging us to continue to pray for growth in wisdom as we speak prophetically and pursue mercy and justice.

It was noted that, in the significant majority of cases, it has been synod itself that has provided the initial instruction behind CRCNA social justice activity, as found in several examples provided in the *Acts of Synod*. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 524-26.)

3. Addressing unresolved conflict in the CRCNA and its effect on membership decline

An overture submitted by Classis Pacific Northwest continued the discussion about the decline of membership in the CRCNA addressed by Synod 2017. It highlighted unresolved conflict and the need to reconcile past hurts within the CRCNA and among people who have left the denomination.

Synod 2018 encouraged the process of reconciliation as follows:

- That the entire denomination be intentional in prayer for reconciled relationships among the members of the CRCNA, with special focus toward our brothers and sisters who have left the CRCNA for various reasons.
- That all church members and assemblies use Matthew 5:23-25 as a model, recognizing where hurt has been given and actively seeking to reconcile strained and broken relationships. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 472.)

4. Proposed Church Order changes related to commissioned pastor roles and to the process of calling ministers from other denominations—feedback invited

Synod 2018 is proposing to Synod 2019 recommended changes to Church Order Articles 23-24 for adoption (see *Agenda for Synod 2018*, p. 214).

Synod invites churches to respond with feedback to the draft Supplements to Church Order Articles 23-24, as presented in the *Agenda for Synod 2018* (pp. 219-21). Please send to the attention of the Candidacy Committee via dkoll@crcna.org by September 15, 2018. The final draft will be presented to Synod 2019 for approval.

The Candidacy Committee will present revisions to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f; and a newly formatted Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, as presented in the *Agenda for Synod 2018* (pp. 225-26), to Synod 2019 for adoption.

Churches are called to pray for wisdom amid the tensions and challenges related to expectations and processes required for ordained ministry, and to offer their own suggestions and thoughts regarding these matters either through communications with the Candidacy Committee or through overtures to synod. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 465-66.)

5. Assistance offered by Financial Shalom Project

Synod took note of the Christian Reformed Church Financial Shalom Project available to assist ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors. The Financial Shalom Project provides training and resources to improve the financial literacy of pastors and congregations. It also provides grants to help pastors meet immediate critical financial needs. Further information and applications are available on the CRCNA website (crcna.org). (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 458.)

6. CRC ministries commended for their work

Synod took special note of the work of the following CRC ministries:

- Congregations are encouraged to support and pray for **Resonate Global Mission** with the same faithfulness in which they supported Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions.
- Synod commended the work of **Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI)** and encourages congregations to use BTGMI media materials to support their own local ministries and outreach.
- The work of **Aboriginal Ministries (Canada)**, the **Committee for Contact with the Government/Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue**, the **Office of Race Relations**, and the **Office of Social Justice** are commended to the churches. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 451, 462-63.)

7. Encouraged use of CRC Loan Fund

Churches in the United States are encouraged to consider using the Loan Fund for their building projects. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 458.)

8. Timothy Leadership Training Institute/Combined Training Unit

Synod commended the Timothy Leadership Training Institute/Combined Training Unit in their work of equipping and empowering leaders in the church worldwide. Use of Timothy Leadership Training Institute materials for leadership development is encouraged. Churches are also encouraged to financially support this ministry and pray for direction, focus, and patience as Timothy Leadership Training Institute, Global Coffee Break, and Educational Care integrate under combined leadership. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 462.)

9. Offering support

Synod approved the following requests for special offerings for the agencies of the CRC:

- two offerings per year for Back to God Ministries International
- four offerings per year for Resonate Global Mission (formerly Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions – each previously on the list for two offerings per year)
- at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support for World Renew

Synod also approved the list of above-ministry share and specially designated offerings for the agencies and institutions of the CRC and denominationally related ministries. In addition, synod ratified the list of nondenominational agencies, previously accredited, for calendar year 2019. This list will be published in the back pages of the *Acts of Synod* and is available at crcna.org. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 448, 457, 463, for the above actions.)

10. Ministry share for 2019

Synod received the agencies and institutional unified budget as information and approved a ministry share amount of \$346.48 for calendar year 2019, an increase of \$7—the first increase since January 2016. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 457.)

11. 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort

In light of Synod 2018's joint sessions with the Reformed Church in America, local CRC congregations are invited to explore joint initiatives with RCA and other local Reformed congregations, highlighting the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort. The following initiatives are also being planned for the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort—the participation of churches is encouraged (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 469-70):

- Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary are planning a conference on the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort on September 14-15, 2018.
- Back to God Ministries International will commemorate this anniversary as a theme in an issue of the *Today* devotions in 2019.
- Dordt College's Andreas Center and the Lilly Fellows Network are hosting a conference on the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort, April 4-6, 2019.
- *The Banner*, in its *Faith Matters* section, will focus on the observance of the anniversary in its December 2018 issue.

12. Archiving church records

Synod validated the importance of archiving and instructed all churches to send duplicates (photocopies, faxes, or email attachments) of their constitutions and articles of incorporation to the denomination's archives. Copies can be sent via surface mail, fax, or email to Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402; fax: 616-526-7689; or crcarchives@calvin.edu. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 456.)