

July 24, 2019

Stated Clerks of Classes

Dear Friends:

Synod delegates, the much-appreciated young adult representatives, and the helpful faculty advisers to Synod 2019 participated in spirit-filled meetings that included some weighty agenda matters. The officers of synod led the meetings with much grace and diligence. There was a true spirit of unity and fellowship throughout the sessions. Nearly two hundred participants selflessly gave of their valuable time and inspiring leadership to the church. We are truly grateful for their commitment and service.

The decisions of synod are now recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2019*. We have been intently sorting through synod's many decisions, highlighting for the appropriate bodies any that would affect their specific work and ministry. A couple of important decisions affecting classes include (1) the need for all classes to develop training for church leadership about power dynamics, (2) the establishment of a classis counseling fund for abuse survivors, and (3) the establishment of a policy for remuneration to synodical delegates who are financially disadvantaged. These are but a few of several recommendations that will require some follow-up by your classis in the months ahead.

In addition to sending you a copy of the printed *Acts of Synod 2019* as soon as it is available in late August, we are enclosing a summary of synod's decisions, outlining matters that we believe to be specific to the classes and to your work. You can access the electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2019*, posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. Several "Stated Clerks Connect" video meetings are scheduled in late August and early September to review decisions of synod and to help answer questions you may have arising from the decisions. If you have not already signed up to join us for one of these meetings, please do so by writing Al Postma at apostma@crcna.org.

Thank you for carefully reviewing the attached summary of synod and for assisting your classis in processing and carrying out these decisions. If you have any questions as you read through the summary, or if we can be of further assistance in your work, please do not hesitate to call or write.

Yours faithfully,



Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA



Diane (Dee) S. Recker
Director of Synodical Services

Encl: Summary of Synod 2019 Decisions for Classes
Summary regarding Ministry Shares
Summary regarding Ecumenical Categories

Summary of Synod 2019 Decisions for Classes

1. Addressing abuse of power

In response to a directive of Synod 2018, a report addressing the abuse of power in our current culture was presented and considered. Many of synod's decisions on this matter instruct the Council of Delegates or the executive director of the CRCNA to carry out a task such as development of a code of conduct, review of current abuse policies, development of further practices for monitoring and recordkeeping, development of training on abuse of power, and development of a resource toolkit. Synod also decided that the Office of Safe Church Ministry needs to be strengthened to respond to emotional abuse.

Classes specifically are instructed "to develop a strategy to train officebearers and key church leaders to be alert to power dynamics within the communities they serve and to be equipped to prevent abuse of power. The goal of the strategy is to ensure that all officebearers receive initial training and refreshment through ongoing educational initiatives. An effective strategy will include the following:

- appropriate training resources
- reasonable time allocation for training
- acknowledgment and monitoring of completion of training."

The classes are encouraged "to monitor implementation of the training strategy and to consider adopting policies to include completion of training and safe church policies in the regular review of credentials or as a requirement for being seated at a classis meeting."

Classes must also ensure that survivors of abuse within their classis have access to appropriate counseling services. The annual report of each classis for the CRC *Yearbook* will now include information about a counseling fund or other arrangements to ensure access to counseling services for abuse survivors. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 794-99.)

2. Proposed changes to ministry-share system and current giving

Synod reviewed the Reimagining Ministry Shares report and responded positively by adopting a series of recommendations and the report itself *in principle*. Churches are encouraged to consider the proposed changes and respond in the usual manner by way of overture or communication to Synod 2020. Classes will take on more responsibility with the new system in gathering and reporting church pledges from within the classis membership. **Read more about what is being proposed for the new ministry-share system in the accompanying document "Synod Decision: Reimagining Ministry Shares."** (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 789-90.)

In the meantime, until the new system is approved and implemented in 2020, synod approved a ministry share per member amount of \$346.48 for calendar year 2020. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 754-55.)

3. New classis; definition and name of *classis*

Synod acceded to an overture to establish a new classis from the congregations and ministries within Classis Pacific Northwest. Churches in the northwestern region of Washington

state (U.S.) will form Classis North Cascades as of January 1, 2020. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 758.)

Synod 2019 adopted the changes proposed by Synod 2018 to Church Order Article 39 (with an expanded definition of *classis*) and to Articles 42-a and –d, as well as to the Supplement, Article 42-d (which better define the roll of a regional pastor). (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 757.)

The name *classis* will remain unchanged. You may recall that, in response to an overture, Synod 2018 tasked the Classis Renewal Advisory Team to explore whether a new name for the longstanding title *classis* is needed. Synod decided that “there was not significant support for a change” and that “the benefit of a name change would not merit the cost of implementation to be borne by the classes.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 759.)

4. Church Order changes related to office of commissioned pastor and “need”

In addition to the Church Order changes mentioned above, synod adopted other changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements, proposed by Synod 2018. The Church Order will be updated in the coming weeks—in the meantime a summary of the changes follows:

- Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements—the articles and supplements related to the office of commissioned pastor have been reformatted, and some sections have been incorporated into the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (updates soon to be available at crcna.org), including provision for the emeritation of commissioned pastors.
- Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f—with a new addition clarifying that the deposition of a commissioned pastor would require the approval of classis.
- Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F—including a requirement to conduct a colloquium doctum for ministers called from other denominations; and a review of the criteria for “need” offered in the Journey Toward Ordination document. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 783-84.)

5. Changes regarding “how we do synod”

Synod’s responses to the recommendations of the Synod Review Task Force will affect classes in several ways.

Synod decided to “encourage classes to develop and/or maintain policies through which the classis would provide remuneration to delegates who are financially disadvantaged through service to synod. Each classis can determine a fitting amount of remuneration on the basis of its location.”

Synod decided to “improve the connection between synod and classes and churches, using the following methods . . . :

- a. In addition to sending a summary of the *Acts of Synod* to classes and churches after synod, also send a summary of the *Agenda for Synod* prior to synod. These documents would be sent to the delegates to synod and to church council clerks with an encouragement to pass them on to church members.
- b. Offer an easy-to-read guide to the issues on synod’s agenda.

- c. Make executive summaries of study committee reports available in other languages (Korean, Spanish, others?).
- d. Strongly encourage classes to invite their synodical delegates to speak to the classis about their experience at synod.
- e. Offer classes and churches tips on how they can encourage and support delegates to synod.”

Synod now also encourages classes “to send one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years, if possible, to build continuity from synod to synod.” Further, synod encourages diversity in classical delegation to synod and recommends that each classis include at least one woman *or* one ethnic minority person in its delegation.

Other highlights of the decisions about how future synods will be conducted:

- A mentor will be provided for young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons.
- Synod will limit its agenda to not more than two major study reports in any given year.
- Clarification to parliamentary rules will be added to the Rules for Synodical Procedure.
- Synod will be served by a parliamentarian.
- Synod will include opportunity for purposeful dialogue.
- The length of speeches during deliberations at synod will be limited in general to three minutes.
- More training will be offered to delegates prior to synod.
- Delegates will receive orientation regarding power dynamics, helping synod to function in healthy ways and assisting with participation of all delegates and advisers at synod.
- Synod will meet in Grand Rapids, Michigan, or in another midwestern location nearby for three years in succession, followed by a meeting every fourth year s in another region in North America where CRC congregations are clustered.
- The Council of Delegates may recommend a plan for a “themed synod” that focuses on a visioning or leadership theme related to the health and growth of the denomination. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 801-17.)

6. Ecumenical categories of affiliation; Ecumenical Charter condensed for the churches

Synod 2019 considered and decided to recommend to Synod 2020 a number of changes to Church Order articles describing the way we affiliate ecumenically with other denominations. In this regard, as proposed by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, phrases in the Church Order and Its Supplements that refer to denominations or churches “*in ecclesiastical fellowship*” would change to refer to denominations or churches “*in communion*.”

In addition, synod agreed with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to change the terminology we use in referring to other churches and denominations as well. Churches and denominations that are now referred to as *churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecclesiastical relationships* would be referred to as *churches in cooperation*.

Congregations are invited to respond by way of overture or communication to Synod 2020 per the usual process. Also affected by these changes, if adopted by Synod 2020, will be a revised Ecumenical Charter and a condensed version of the charter for use by the churches. **Learn more about this proposal in the accompanying “Summary of Proposed Ecumenical Categories.”** (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 771-74.)

7. Guidance in assisting immigrant churches

Synod recognized ongoing work by the executive director and appropriate agencies related to enfolded immigrant churches (in response to a directive by Synod 2018), and commends the “Assisting Immigrant Churches” document (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 101-10) to the classes and churches. In addition, the executive director was instructed, in consultation with the appropriate CRC agencies, to identify and communicate appropriate legal and financial resources to assist churches and classes with the immigration of pastors and their families. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 777-78.)

8. Funding, support, and care for Resonate Global Mission missionaries

In response to Overture 11, which asked that classes take on support of Resonate Global Mission missionaries, synod did not accede. Synod did, however, “encourage classes to take a larger, more proactive role in supporting new and current missionaries, particularly missionaries who do not have significant long-term connections to individual congregations in the CRCNA.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 779.)

9. Kinism declared a heresy

Synod spoke very directly in response to Overture 7 asking that Kinism teaching be declared a heresy. Synod acceded to the overture’s sections XI, A-D, stating the following ground: “Kinist theology and practice is neither biblical nor Reformed. Rather, Kinism is a twisting of Reformed doctrine. The Bible makes clear that God’s ideal is a family of every tribe and nation being considered equal in every way. Kinist principles and praxis distort this truth.” In addition, synod sent a strong message that “Kinist teaching will not be tolerated in our churches” by admonishing “councils and classes to promote confessional fidelity and mutually to pursue special discipline of an officebearer who is found to hold views contrary to our standard.”

The deliberations concluded by acknowledging, “with lament, the historic tolerance and indifference within our Reformed theological tradition to perpetual hateful racial prejudice and the theological error of Kinism as well as the need to act as a prophetic voice on these matters in the present and future.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 818-19.)

10. Celebrating new ministry leaders and thanking those who have served

Two new ministry leaders were introduced to synod: Dr. Christopher Schoon, Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) team leader, and Ms. Sam Huizenga, Raise Up Global Ministries director. At the same time, synod thanked those completing service in the roles mentioned above—Dr. Syd Hielema has transitioned to a new role with Connections II, and Dr. Gary Bekker is preparing for retirement in the coming months. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 764-65, 775.)

Another cause for celebration is that Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) has been faithfully reaching the world with the gospel, discipling believers, and strengthening the churches for eighty years. Praise God! (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 774.)

11. Two synodical task forces mandated

Synod mandated two new synodical task forces to report to Synod 2021:

- a. The Consideration of Bivocationality Task Force—a response to the Bivocational Task Force report (Appendix A of COD Supplement)—will examine what it means to be a bivocational pastor today. The new task force will be mandated to give consideration to matters such as the following:

- create a definition of bivocationality
- give biblical support to bivocationality
- address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined “proper support”; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like
- classical oversight
- cultural differences
- Church Order implications (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 780, 823, 827.)

- b. The Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force—a response to Overture 14—will study the advisability, legality, and morality of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriage.

“The task force’s mandate shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- 1) Is it legal in the various states, provinces, and territories of Canada and the United States to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding ceremony?
- 2) What implications do the current CRCNA position on marriage and the Church Order have on ecclesiastical (non-civil) weddings and marriages?
- 3) Is it morally legitimate to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding in order to avoid the financial costs and obligations of a civil marriage?
- 4) If people are declared married in a non-civil ceremony in a home country outside of the United States or Canada, should that marriage be recognized by the CRCNA?
- 5) What are the implications for the church with regard to a specifically ecclesiastical marriage?
- 6) What are the implications of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages for senior citizens, including such matters as pensions and end-of-life care issues?
- 7) What, if anything, have other faith communities done with regard to this issue?

- 8) Consult with the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for insights that might be beneficial to this task force.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 791-92, 822-23, 827.)

12. Sunday worship practices

In response to Overture 9, requesting revision to Church Order Articles 51 and 54 with regard to Sunday worship services, synod spent significant time considering encouragement for holding a second worship service on Sunday. Synod’s advisory committee observed: “The second service has long proven to be a helpful discipline in fostering appropriate observance of the Lord’s Day, raising the level of biblical and doctrinal literacy in the church, and creating opportunity for deeper and richer fellowship.” To “bring the Church Order into harmony with the current practice of the vast majority of congregations” while yet affirming the rich tradition of the second service, synod proposed removing the requirement that churches assemble “ordinarily twice on the Lord’s Day,” proposed that Church Order Article 54-b be deleted, and proposed the following addition to the Church Order for consideration by the churches, classes, and Synod 2020:

“Each classis shall affirm the rich tradition of assembling a second time on the Lord’s Day for worship, learning, prayer, and fellowship by encouraging churches to include these items as part of a strategic ministry plan for the building up of the body of Christ.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 767-71.)