

August 1, 2014

Dear Council Members:

Synod 2014 was a momentous event in the history of the CRC as we met simultaneously in Pella, Iowa, with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and celebrated the collaborative relationship that has been emerging between our two denominations. The commitment to a common mission of proclaiming the gospel, joint working sessions, combined worship services, and informative workshops allowed CRC delegates to share their local collaborative experiences with RCA delegates. By officially adopting a joint resolution, the synods committed to continuing to serve together for the cause of Christ. In addition, the delegates were grateful for the warm reception and exceptional hospitality provided by the Pella community.

The delegates worked many hours to address a variety of matters brought to the assembly by the CRC's various standing and study committees and by its ministries and boards. Among these matters were the above-mentioned joint resolution between the CRC and the RCA, a report by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture, a clarification and continuation of the role of ethnic (and other) advisers to synod, and the expansion of ecumenical relationships, to name a few. Overtures to synod placed additional matters before the assembly, regarding, for example, the formation of a new classis, editorial freedom of *The Banner*, and support of Christian Reformed World missionaries. To assist you, our office has summarized (below) decisions of Synod 2014 that are of special importance for CRC churches. Please take time to review these highlights at your upcoming 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-nine* new candidates were approved! What a blessing to witness a standing ovation of the more than 200 delegates and advisers, expressing their gratitude for these candidates' commitment to the ministry of the CRC. In addition, synod gave special recognition to *forty-three* ministerial 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 2014* has been posted on the CRC website (www.crcna.org/SynodResources). The printed version will arrive in mailboxes toward the end of August. The *Acts* includes a complete record of the decisions of synod, including any supplementary reports to the *Agenda*.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I want to extend our sincere appreciation to all who served synod as delegates and advisers. These individuals selflessly gave their time and energy for more than a week. The spirit of unity, even in diversity, was evident all around.

Yours faithfully,



Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director

Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2014

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Summary of Decisions of Synod 2014 for the Churches

1. A highlight of the synod week was the opportunity to worship and meet with the delegates to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, and together to adopt the **Resolution on the Relationship between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America: Past, Present, and Future**.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

That synod adopt the “Resolution on the Relationship between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America: Past, Present, and Future,” prepared for the CRC synod and the RCA general synod.

Grounds:

1. This provides an overarching statement that will serve as a mutually supported agreement between the CRC and RCA.
2. Though this resolution is not intended to serve as groundwork for merger, it will serve as a guiding principle in the journey that longs for healing and reconciliation.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 500)

Note: The joint resolution was also adopted in joint session with the RCA on Saturday, June 14.

Resolution on the Relationship between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America: Past, Present, and Future

The Past

Recognizing that the history of our two denominations, since 1857, has been marked by division and often accompanied by mutual mistrust, judgmental attitudes toward one another, and an unholy distance in our fellowship; and

Acknowledging that our dispositions and actions toward one another often have been marred by sin and have fallen short of the mutual love and bonds of unity desired by God for the church of Jesus Christ; and

Realizing that the history of our broken relationship has caused pain and suffering throughout generations within families and between others divided by this separation, and has presented a distorted witness within society;

Therefore, we encourage our churches to reflect on the costs of the lack of faithfulness that have marked the history of separation between our two denominations, and to prayerfully ask for the healing of memories and wounds endured by many over the past 157 years.

The Present

Noting the significant growth in partnership and programmatic cooperation between our denominations, especially in the past two decades, encompassing a wide range of activities from starting new churches to combining health insurance programs; and

Affirming our relationship of full communion, the exchangeability of Ministers of Word and Sacrament between our congregations, and examples of new congregations belonging jointly to both our denominations; and

Welcoming the growth of trust and the greater effectiveness of ministry that has been the frequent result of our growing cooperation together;

Therefore, we celebrate the new realities being created through expanding initiatives of partnership between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and we give thanks to God for all those situations in which we are now working together for the sake of God's kingdom.

The Future

Believing that participation in God's mission calls all followers of Christ to deepen bonds of unity and to strengthen our common witness; and

Desiring to obey the persistent biblical call to seek the unity of Christ's body and the reconciliation of relationships with one another, even while we acknowledge long-standing differences remaining between us; and

Understanding that this particular relationship is part of the broader ecumenical journey which beckons us to make more manifest our unity in Christ, which is both God's gift and our obligation;

Therefore, as the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, we declare that 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"; and, further,

We jointly instruct the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church and the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, in looking to the future relationship between our two denominations, to be guided by this principle.

(Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 503-504)

2. The CRC approved the addition of three denominations to our list of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship: **the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile)**. Synod also instructed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to continue to assess the place of the **Belhar Confession** in the life and ministry of the CRC.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

3. That Synod 2014 instruct the EIRC to continue its assessment of the place of the Belhar Confession in the life and ministry of the CRC and report back to synod at appropriate times.
4. That synod approve the Memorandum of Understanding with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.
5. That synod, upon the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN), classify the relationship with the PCN beyond the category of a church in formal dialogue to that of a church in ecclesiastical fellowship.

Ground: Though recognizing the differences we have with the PCN on various issues—differences we also have with numerous other churches we are in relationship with through the WCRC—the thrust of our Ecumenical Charter leads us to have fellowship with a denomination with which we share much history and confessional unity.

(Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 564-65)

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

1. That Synod 2014 designate the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians to be a church in ecclesiastical fellowship (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 259-60).
2. That Synod 2014 designate the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile) to be a church in ecclesiastical fellowship (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 260).

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 566)

3. Synod had the privilege of ratifying the appointment of a **new Canadian ministries director, Dr. Darren C. Roorda**, interviewing **Dr. Steven R. Timmermans** for the position of **executive director of the CRCNA**, and interviewing **Ms. Sarah Schreiber** for the position of **assistant professor of Old Testament** at Calvin Theological Seminary. Delegates also celebrated the years of service of seminary professors **Rev. Carl J. Bosma** and **Dr. Ronald J. Nydam**.

Board of Trustees

That synod ratify the appointment of Dr. Darren C. Roorda as Canadian ministries director, effective August 4, 2014 (BOT Supplement section I, E).

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 437)

That synod appoint Dr. Steven R. Timmermans to the position of executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, effective June 30, 2014.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 556)

Calvin Theological Seminary

That synod approve the appointment of Ms. Sarah Schreiber as assistant professor of Old Testament, beginning in 2014-2015, and with some negotiated reduction from full workload in 2015-2018.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 571)

Calvin Theological Seminary

1. That synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Rev. Carl J. Bosma and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: Associate Professor of Old Testament, *emeritus*, effective August 31, 2014.
2. That synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Dr. Ronald J. Nydam and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: Professor of Pastoral Care, *emeritus*, effective August 31, 2014.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 543)

4. Synod adopted recommendations that define the **roles of the various advisers to synod**. After noting early in the week that the role of **ethnic advisers** had concluded, synod later adopted a recommendation to continue the practice of appointing ethnic advisers each year, as needed.

Officers of synod

F. The officers have reviewed the Rules for Synodical Procedure, section III, D, 1, a; p. 4, which states: "The position of ethnic adviser is continued as long as the number of ethnic

minority delegates is fewer than twenty-five, after which it shall be discontinued.” Because the number of ethnic minority delegates to Synod 2014 is greater than twenty-five, the role of ethnic adviser has concluded.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 500-501)

Note: Later in its week of deliberations, synod reinstated the practice of appointing ethnic advisers.

Board of Trustees

1. That synod adopt the following recommendations as found in the Role of Advisers to Synod Report:

- a. That synod acknowledge the importance of advisers in the work of synod and affirm the intent to select all future faculty advisers from a pool of qualified personnel. The primary criteria for the selection of all faculty advisers shall be their knowledge and expertise as it pertains to the issues on the agenda of a particular synod. In the case of ethnic and deacon advisers and young adult representatives, the pool of selection will, at least in part, depend on recommendations received from the churches and classes.

Note: Although the category of ethnic adviser is no longer applicable due to meeting the requirements set out by Synod 2005 (*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 681-84), the category is retained in the event that it will be reinstated in the future.

- b. That synod approve the following classifications of advisers:

- 1) *Faculty advisers* shall be selected from among the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary. The following general appointment procedures shall be followed:

- a) The executive director shall, in consultation with the Program Committee of synod, at the earliest possible date determine the theological expertise that will be needed for any given year, and in consultation with the administration of Calvin Theological Seminary, select faculty members with the particular expertise needed for that year. The administration of Calvin Theological Seminary shall, in consultation with the executive director of the CRCNA, identify the faculty members available to serve as advisers to synod in a particular year, depending on the needs of synod and the expertise of the faculty members. The number of faculty advisers shall ordinarily not be fewer than five.
- b) Advisers shall be assigned to an advisory committee by the Program Committee of synod as proposed by the executive director.
- c) The parameter of service of the adviser, in advisory committee or plenary session, is to be in keeping with the general regulations of synod.

- 2) *Note:* The Advisory Committee recommends retaining the following draft guidelines for ethnic advisers in the event that Ethnic Advisers are reinstated in the future.

Ethnic advisers are representative voices of ethnic minority communities in the membership of the CRC that are not adequately represented in the delegations by the classes. Up to seven such ethnic minority non-voting advisers may be appointed, subject to the selection rules as adopted by Synod 2005 (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, section III, D). The number of seven (or proportion of) such persons shall be appointed as long as the total number of ethnic minority delegates is less than twenty-five persons. The number of ethnic minority advisers appointed shall be less than seven if the number of voting delegates from ethnic-minority origin exceeds eighteen delegates. However, in no instance shall the appointment of ethnic minority advisers be less than two. In order to provide for an appropriate notification timeline for those appointed to serve, the number of ethnic minority advisers to be appointed shall be based on a previous three-year rolling average of diversity presence at synod.

- a) Advisers shall be assigned to an advisory committee as proposed by the executive director and approved by the Program Committee of synod.
 - b) The parameter of service of the adviser, in advisory committee or plenary session, is to be in keeping with the general regulations of synod.
- 3) *Deacon advisers* are the representative voice of the office of deacon within the CRC, which is not represented in the delegations by the classes. Up to seven deacons may be appointed as advisers to synod.
- a) Advisers shall be assigned to an advisory committee as proposed by the executive director and approved by the Program Committee of synod.
 - b) The parameter of service of the adviser, in advisory committee or plenary session, is to be in keeping with the general regulations of synod.
- 4) *Young adult representatives* are representative voices of the young adult membership (ages 18-26) within the CRC that are not represented in the delegations by the classes. Appointment of these representatives to synod is made according to the guidelines previously adopted by synod (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, section III, E).
- a) Young adult representatives shall be assigned to an advisory committee as proposed by the executive director and approved by the Program Committee of synod.
 - b) The parameter of service of the young adult representative, in advisory committee or plenary session, is to be in keeping with the general regulations of synod.
- 5) *Staff consultants* are members of the executive staff of the denomination serving in association with the office of the executive director and designated by the executive director, in consultation with the Program Committee of synod, to serve the assembly of synod. The following general procedures shall be followed:

- a) Procedural advice for all matters on synod's agenda shall be the responsibility of the executive director or his/her designee.
 - b) When the executive director assigns a staff consultant to serve an advisory committee, then a faculty adviser may not need to be assigned to the same advisory committee.
 - c) The parameter of service of the staff consultant is restricted to the particular area of their expertise. This provision shall apply to both serving in the advisory committee and in the plenary sessions of synod.
- 6) *Agency board representatives* (normally the agency board presidents and the agency directors) *and presidents of the educational institutions* shall have the privilege of access to the advisory committee of synod that deals with the report of the agency or institution they represent. In addition, they shall be granted the privilege of the floor at the plenary session of synod when their respective report is discussed. The presidents of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary are designated as advisers to synod with respect to issues that affect their respective institutions.
- 7) *Board of Trustees of the CRCNA representation* shall consist of the chair of the BOT, at least one other member of the BOT Executive Committee (ensuring representation from both Canada and the United States), the executive director of the CRCNA, and such other members of the denominational executive staff as are needed to serve synod and its advisory committees. They shall have the privilege of meeting with the advisory committees that address Board of Trustees agenda matters as well as the privilege of the floor when Board of Trustees matters are addressed in plenary session.
- c. That synod adopt regulations that apply to the role of all advisers to synod:
- 1) Advisers shall observe and honor the conditions of their appointment.
 - 2) Advisers shall normally be present for the duration of synod's meetings.
 - 3) Advisers shall normally have access only to the advisory committee to which they are assigned by the program committee. A request to speak to, or be present at, another advisory committee is to be processed through, and approval is at the discretion of, the chair and reporter of that advisory committee.
 - 4) Faculty advisers shall participate in synod's deliberations in plenary session to give advice and theological expertise.
 - 5) Ethnic and deacon advisers and young adult representatives may participate in synod's deliberations in plenary session, representing the voice of their advisory group to the issue being addressed.
- Note:* As previously noted in section I, C, 3, a, above, the category of ethnic adviser is retained in the event that it will be reinstated in the future.
- 6) Advisers may, within the normal rotation of discussion, speak to issues brought to the plenary sessions of synod by the advisory committees but

must do so in an advisory capacity and as a service to the delegates of synod in their deliberations.

- 7) Advisers are not allowed to vote in the advisory committees they serve nor in plenary sessions of synod.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 537-40)

Ethnic advisers to synod

That synod reinstate the practice of including ethnic advisers at synod as described in section 3, b, 2 of the Advisory Committee 1 report regarding the Role of Advisers to Synod Report (see *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 537-38).

Grounds:

- a. The makeup of one particular synod does not necessarily constitute a trend toward increased diversity in the CRCNA.
- b. Ensuring diversity in denominational leadership is an adopted goal in the denomination.
- c. The practice of appointing ethnic advisers allows the perspectives of ethnic minorities in the CRCNA to be expressed at synod.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 576)

5. Synod gave a standing ovation following the declaration of forty-nine **candidates for ministry of the Word**. Celebrate with us, give thanks, and pray for these individuals as opportunity affords.

Candidacy Committee

That synod declare the following as candidates for ministry of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church (**49 total**):

Bradley J. Bierma
Richard C. Boomsma
Richard J. Braaksma
Daniel S. De Graff
Adrian R. de Lange
Nevada L. DeLapp
Jonathan H. DeRuiter
Paul D. DeWeerd
Woodrow P. Dixon
Jun K. Eo
Joseph M. Groeneveld
Robert J. Gruessing
Patrick N. Guarracino
Byung Soo (Paul) Han
Gareth P. Harker
Ryan Hoogerbrugge
Erik W. Kamp
T. Brent Kladder
Joel H. Klingenberg
Michelle J. Kool
Jeremy D. Kreuze

Victor S. Laarman
Mark E. Langenbach
C. Gregg Lawson
Dae J. Lee
Ezra Lee
Samuel Y. Lee
Timothy Leferink
John C. Medendorp
Dena E. Meyerink
Cornelius M. Muasa
Brady Mulder
Michael D. Nanninga
Brent W. Pollema
David A. Reynolds
Kyle D. Sanford
Kurt C. Schaefer
Sarah E. Schreiber
Paula S. Seales
Eunchong (David) Shin
Evan D. Steensma
Jay E. Stringer

Lesli L. van Milligen
Cory L. Van Sloten
Dayna J. Vreeken
Albert K. Wu

Luke B. Wynja
Leo H. Yoon
Andrew D. Zylstra

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 465-66)

6. Councils are asked to take note of the importance of **serving as the “calling church”** for ministers of the Word in non-parish ministries.

Candidacy Committee

That synod remind classes and local congregations of both the responsibilities and the opportunities implicit in the role of serving as the calling church for the growing number of pastors serving in non-parish ministries.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 544)

7. Clarification was added to the Church Order with regard to the orderly exchange of ministers with the Reformed Church in America. In the event of a **termination of a call of an RCA pastor serving a CRC congregation**, the polity of the calling church shall be followed in consultation with the sending church.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

That Synod 2014 approve the following amendment to the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers with the RCA to be reflected in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 7 (proposed change indicated by *italics*):

Approval for extended service must be done in consultation with and with the concurrence of the sending body. (In the CRC, the sending body is the calling church council; in the RCA, it is the classis holding the pastor's membership.) The minister remains accountable to the sending body for continuation of ministerial status. *In the event of termination of a call, the polity of the calling church shall be followed, in consultation with the sending church.*

Grounds:

1. There have been situations recently in which clarification of procedure for a separation of an RCA pastor from a CRC congregation was needed.
2. The original 2005 Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers—Christian Reformed Church in North America and Reformed Church in America (*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 741-42) did not include provisions for separation in the orderly exchange between the CRC and the RCA.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 564-65)

8. Synod approved a revision to the **Judicial Code** (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c), to be published in the 2014 edition of the Church Order and Its Supplements. Until early fall, it is accessible in the *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 72-84.

Board of Trustees

That synod adopt the proposed revision of the Judicial Code (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) as found in Appendix E [of the BOT report].

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 569)

9. Councils are encouraged to engage in the content of the **preliminary report of the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon** in preparation for address of the final report and recommendations by Synod 2015 (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 323-50). The final report of the task force will be sent to church councils by November 1 for review and study.

Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon

That synod encourage the churches and classes to begin actively engaging with the content of this report prior to submission of the final report to Synod 2015.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 555)

10. Synod addressed the concerns expressed by way of overtures and communications about the editorial freedom of ***The Banner*** and the editor in chief and asked the BOT to conduct a review of the mandate of *The Banner* prior to Synod 2015.

Board of Trustees

That synod declare its lament regarding the publication in *The Banner* of two articles in June 2013 ("Tomorrow's Theology") and July 2013 ("Where Do We Draw the Line?").

Grounds:

- a. Synod has higher expectations of discernment, insight, clarity, and direction through difficult and complex issues in our time.
- b. While part of the mandate of *The Banner* is to challenge its readers, articles need to communicate truths from God's Word within the parameters of our creeds, confessions, and testimonies, helping us to dialogue with claims of secularism and unbelief.
- c. The two articles have caused harm and created confusion in regard to CRCNA positions on two complex issues in our culture today.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 572)

Board of Trustees

1. That synod affirm the work of the BOT in regard to this issue as providing appropriate first steps for addressing the editorial concerns raised by the publication of the two articles (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 31, 84-85).

Grounds:

- a. In light of personnel changes (executive director, etc.), restructuring efforts, and the ongoing nature of the work of the BOT, it would be premature to designate a complete resolution at this time.
 - b. Representatives of the BOT and the *Banner* editor have voiced confidence that this work-in-progress will end in a workable solution.
2. That synod take note of the newly adopted mandate of the *Banner* Advisory Council found in Appendix F.
 3. That synod reaffirm that the BOT is the body to which the *Banner* editor is accountable, until the reorganization process dictates otherwise.

Ground: Because of the dissolution of Faith Alive Christian Resources as an agency, there are different understandings regarding lines of authority and the placement of the *Banner* editor in the organizational structure.

4. That synod instruct the BOT to ensure a review of the 1998 mandate of *The Banner* and report to Synod 2015 with any proposed changes.

Grounds:

- a. There is confusion regarding expressions such as “stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part” included in the 1998 mandate.
- b. There is a need for clarity on how *The Banner* can challenge and stimulate critical thinking on contemporary issues while affirming Scripture and our confessions.
- c. It is appropriate to review mandates from time to time.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 573-74)

11. Synod commends to the churches the document ***Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom at Calvin College*** (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 136-76).

Calvin College

That synod receive for information and commend to the churches the document *Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom at Calvin College* (see Appendix), submitted in response to the instructions of Synods 2011 and 2012, as being faithful to and honoring synod’s own prior work on confessional subscription.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 542)

12. Synod heard a presentation by members of the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture regarding options for **structuring and aligning denominational boards and advisory committees** to better serve the church. The churches are asked to discuss and discern in the coming year the options being explored, prior to a final proposal to Synod 2015.

Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture

That synod recommend this report to the churches and, in particular, the “range of proposals” presented in section VII for further discussion and discernment within the church, its agencies, boards, and planning groups. This discussion and discernment will occur in the coming year, led by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture, and continuing to incorporate the Five Streams (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 375). A final proposal will be presented to Synod 2015.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 563)

13. Synod approved a new **ministry-share amount** of \$336.12 for the 2015 calendar year and recommends **special offerings for CRC ministries** on the designated days as listed below.

Board of Trustees

That synod receive the agencies and institutional unified budget as information and approve a ministry share of \$336.12 for calendar year 2015 (BOT Supplement sections II, B, 1-2).

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 437)

Board of Trustees

That synod approve the following requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2014:

1. That synod encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize the third Sunday in November and Ascension Day Sunday as significant opportunities to receive an offering for Back to God Ministries International (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 130).
2. That synod approve two offerings for Calvin Theological Seminary (the Facing Your Future program and the Distance Education program) (*Agenda*, p. 181).
3. That synod encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Easter Sunday and Reformation Day Sunday as significant opportunities to receive an offering for Christian Reformed Home Missions (*Agenda*, p. 192).
4. That synod along with the Board of Trustees encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Pentecost Sunday and the fourth Sunday of September 2014 as significant opportunities to pray for and to take an offering for Christian Reformed World Missions (*Agenda*, p. 204).
5. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support (*Agenda*, p. 218).

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 500-501)

14. Synod took note of the **newly adopted mandate for the Office of Disability Concerns** (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 36-37) and adopted several important strategies for the churches with respect to becoming **more inclusive of children and youth who have disabilities**.

Disability Concerns

- a. That synod take note of the new mandate for the Office of Disability Concerns (II, B, 5), adopted by the BOT in February 2014.
- b. That synod encourage the inclusion of, and engagement with, children and youth who have disabilities as an important part of congregational ministry and denominational youth ministry programs. Specifically, that synod encourage the following strategies:
 - 1) Identify and prioritize the inclusion of adolescents with disabilities in youth programs and ministries.
 - 2) Minister with children and youth who have disabilities and their families because families with teenagers who have disabilities face an often-challenging transition to adulthood.
 - 3) Include peers with disabilities in their leadership, worship, youth gatherings, Bible studies, and event planning.
 - 4) Build awareness and changing attitudes about physical, intellectual, behavioral, and other disabilities, and about mental illnesses, throughout their youth programs and especially within their leadership structures.

Grounds:

- a. All people are made in God's image; therefore, all people deserve respect and dignity.

- b. Baptized children and youth are members of the covenant; therefore, all baptized children and youth need to be nurtured in faith by the church and engaged in the ministry of the church.
 - c. Jesus' body, the church, has many parts but is one in Christ; therefore, each member of Christ's body (including each with a disability) is essential for the church to function in a healthy way (1 Cor. 12:12, 22).
 - d. All believers are called by God; therefore, each believer has a God-given mission to fulfill (Eph. 2:10).
 - e. All believers have spiritual gifts; therefore, each believer receives gifts to accomplish God's mission, and each fulfills an essential function in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).
 - f. Inviting children and youth who have disabilities to engage in ministry reflects the welcome our Lord gives to all people (Luke 14:15-24).
 - g. In healthy churches and ministries, everybody belongs and everybody serves (1 Pet. 4:8-10).
3. That synod encourage CRC churches, classes, and educational institutions to sponsor events to celebrate Disability Awareness Week, October 13-19, 2014, and Disability Awareness Sunday on October 19.

Grounds:

- a. Specific and intentional events that recognize the importance of breaking down barriers and including people with disabilities will remind God's people of the welcome our Lord gives to all of his people (Luke 14:15-24) and will encourage them to press on toward becoming a community in which every member knows that he or she is indispensable (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
- b. This date coincides with the CRC denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
- c. The RCA General Synod in 2006 designated the first Sunday in March as Disability Awareness Sunday. Moving this designation to the third Sunday in October would facilitate and enhance deeper collaboration between the Disability Concerns offices of the RCA and CRC. Further, moving the RCA date from March to October would eliminate a frequent conflict with the season of Lent while aligning with numerous organizations and agencies that highlight disability awareness in October.
- d. The Bible calls God's people to be a caring community as the covenant people of God. In 1985 the CRC committed itself as a denomination to eliminate barriers of architecture, communication, and attitude "in order to use the gifts of all people in our life together as God's family." Although our Lord Jesus calls all of his people to ministry in his church, the church has not always made it possible for people with disabilities to participate fully and sometimes has isolated them and their families.

(Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 557-59)

15. Synod strongly encourages all churches to take note of the critical **importance of developing a safe church policy**, especially if one is not yet implemented.

Safe Church Ministry

That synod again remind all churches in the denomination of the critical importance of documenting, developing, and implementing a safe church policy and remind all classes in the denomination of the vital importance of a safe church team. There are many resources available from the Office of Safe Church Ministry and on its website. The director informs us that only 22 of the 46 classes have formed safe church teams. A safe

church team is an important part of the pastoral care that the church offers to its members. Awareness and prevention, if given high priority, can minimize the risk of abuse and the damage it causes.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 559)

16. Finally, synod reminds that churches send **copies of their articles of incorporation and bylaws** to the CRC Archives. Synod also encourages the churches to **make use of the approved sermons vetted by the synodical Sermons for Reading Services Committee**, available on the CRC website.

Historical Committee

That synod instruct all churches and classes to send duplicates (photocopies, faxes, or email attachments) of their articles of incorporation and bylaws to the archives. Copies can be sent to Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402; or by fax: 616-526-7689; or by email: crcarchives@calvin.edu.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 555)

Sermons for Reading Services Committee

That synod recognize the challenges that the Sermons for Reading Services Committee faces, approve the work of the committee, and encourage the churches to avail themselves of the sermons for reading services on the CRCNA website.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 554)