



July 27, 2020

Dear CRC Classes and Councils:

In this unusual year of adapting to changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to cancel Synod 2020 for the first time in the more than 160-year history of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Instead, the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA (COD) met on behalf of synod via teleconference to address matters that the Program Committee of synod (officers of the previous synod) judged could not wait until Synod 2021.

Over a period of four days—two days in advisory committees and two days of meeting in plenary sessions—the Council of Delegates took action on matters such as endorsing a new Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2025* for the denomination; appointing Colin P. Watson, Sr., as interim executive director of the CRCNA; and approving *thirty-six* candidates for ministry of the Word (see crcna.org/candidates). In addition, synod gave special recognition to *thirty* ministerial retirees and *twenty-five* commissioned pastors who concluded service in the past year. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church, and we wish them God's grace as they enter a new chapter in their lives. The Council of Delegates also included time in the schedule for a service of prayer and lament for our nations and world, and witnessed the presentation of candidates for ministry of the Word—a highlight for me personally each year. The presentation of candidates is available for viewing at vimeo.com/430176141.

Other matters addressed by the Council of Delegates in June included a training program for all ordained persons in the CRCNA with regard to abuse of power, recognition of the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in the CRC, a name change for Back to God Ministries International, and a new ministry-funding process. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for classis discussion, your council, and church members, we have summarized the decisions of this special meeting of the Council of Delegates on the following pages. **Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights during an upcoming meeting.**

The digital version of the *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2020* is posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. The printed version of this publication will follow later in August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I want to express our sincere appreciation to the members of the Council of Delegates for time selflessly given to the special meetings in June—which were not previously planned. “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (Prov. 16:3).

Yours faithfully,

Colin P. Watson, Sr.
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Summary of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2020

1. Endorsement of new Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2025*

The ministries and churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America have been guided by the Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020* for the past five years. The Council of Delegates, on behalf of synod, endorsed a new ministry plan to move us ahead as a denomination “in our shared mission to express the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide, while also striving toward specific goals that our congregations and leaders have identified.”

The Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2025*, developed after receiving input from hundreds of congregants, classes, and delegates to synod, includes the following:

“In our journey *with God, with each other, with our neighbors, and for mission*, we desire to be congregations/communities that

- **cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline**, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **listen to the voices of every generation**, shaping us for ministry together.
- **grow in diversity and unity** by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers.
- **share the gospel**, live it missionally, and plant new churches in our neighborhoods as we discover how to connect with our local and global ministry contexts.”

Read the full Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2025* in the *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2020*, pp. 421-23.

2. Servant leadership ministries evaluated and videos for use in worship/meetings

At the direction of Synod 2018, the COD adopted a policy to ensure continual evaluation of all agencies and ministries, including their comprehensive and strategic program goals, objectives, and annual outcomes over a four-year cycle according to the five ministry priorities. The Servant Leadership ministries group (Calvin Theological Seminary, Candidacy, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Leadership Diversity, Pastor Church Resources, and Raise Up Global Ministries) provided evaluation reports, which the COD approved on behalf of synod. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 420.)

We also share with you three special videos prepared for presentation at Synod 2020—with focus on the CRC’s servant leadership ministries. Because synod was unable to meet, we encourage churches and classes to make use of these brief videos during a church offering, as a ministry highlight during an educational class, or during the fall classis meeting. Thank you for your consideration in incorporating these videos into your services or meetings:

Calvin Theological Seminary: vimeo.com/425890630
Servant Leadership Ministries: vimeo.com/425987996
Raise Up Global Ministries: vimeo.com/382655914

(See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 419.)

3. New name for Back to God Ministries International

The longstanding multimedia ministry agency of the CRC, *Back to God Ministries International*, will transition to a new approved name, *ReFrame Ministries*, with the tagline *God's Story. Today's Media*. *ReFrame* has been the name of BTGMI's English-language ministry for more than ten years and thus has brand equity both within the CRCNA and among wider audiences. The tagline *God's Story, Today's Media* points to God, the gospel, and the distinctive use of media for ministry. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, pp. 458-59.)

4. Recognition of the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in the CRCNA

The year 2021 marks a significant milestone in the history of the Christian Reformed Church—the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women. In recognition of this anniversary, the COD adopted a recommendation that Synod 2021 allow time in its schedule for recognition of this milestone, and that recognition begin with Synod 2021 and conclude at Inspire 2021 in August.

Churches and classes also desiring to recognize the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in their context and anytime within their schedules will be supported by denominational staff and resources. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 456.)

5. Consideration of CRCNA structure in light of Canadian charitable-law requirements

Upon review of a communication from two Ontario, Canada, councils expressing concerns about the process that led to structural changes in light of Canadian charitable law, the COD acknowledged the difficulty of this journey and reaffirmed the desired principle of unity. Three COD task forces are currently working to develop proposed leadership position descriptions and a restructure proposal to comply with Canadian charitable-law requirements. The COD will present the proposed changes to Synod 2021 for consideration and adoption. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 419.)

6. Interim executive director appointed and senior leadership transitions

Since late February 2020, Colin P. Watson, Sr., has been serving as acting executive director of the CRCNA, necessitated by the retirement of Steven R. Timmermans. With gratitude to God for his willingness to delay his planned retirement date of January 6, 2021, the Council of Delegates, on behalf of synod, appointed Mr. Watson as interim executive director until summer 2021, at which time he plans to retire. The appointment provides continuity in the denomination's senior leadership position until synod itself can decide on a potential new structure and personnel to fill the position.

Notice of the planned retirement of John Bolt, director of finance and administration, in summer 2021 was also noted by the COD during the June meeting. The COD declared the intent for Synod 2021 to appoint or ratify new senior leadership positions and persons to fill these positions. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, pp. 420-21.)

7. New process for denominational ministry funding and current giving

Synod 2019 adopted in principle a new denominational ministry funding system, based on pledges by member churches, to take the place of the current ministry-share system. Churches were encouraged by Synod 2019 to study and consider the system proposed in the report *Reimagining Ministry Shares (Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 110-18) and to respond by way of overture or communication to Synod 2020, which was to consider the proposed system for adoption. One

overture was received and considered along with the report. The Council of Delegates, on behalf of synod, approved the implementation of the Reimagining Ministry Shares report and the resulting Church Order Supplement changes. A timeline for the implementation of the new system is appended to this document and is included in the *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 475.

Until the new ministry share system is fully implemented, the COD approved a ministry share per-member amount of \$346.48 for fiscal year 2021. The COD also approved inclusion of the following ministries on the list of accredited agencies recommended for offerings: the Center for Church Renewal and Pathways to Promise (in the United States) and the Christian Labour Association of Canada Foundation (in Canada). (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, pp. 460-61.)

8. Resolution regarding systemic racism

In response to recent events and tragedies in the United States and a formal statement issued by leadership in the CRCNA regarding racism, the COD adopted the following resolution:

By this resolution, the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, acting on behalf of synod, declares its abhorrence regarding the sin of systemic racism; its support of our denominational leaders who signed the statement about the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor; and its hope that in the midst of our struggle against racism the power of the gospel of justice and grace in Jesus Christ can be displayed.

(See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, pp. 457-58.)

9. Abuse of power training for pastors

In order to continue the progress being made in response to the Abuse of Power Task Force report and recommendations addressed by Synod 2019, the COD endorsed a training program for pastors as described in Appendix C of the COD Supplement (pp. 371-74). The program, which will be required for all ordained persons in the CRC, will be implemented as soon as possible. This program will also serve as a template to help in the development of trainings to be made available for leadership in the churches and classes. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, p. 423.)

See Appendix Ministry Shares Re-Imagined: What You Can Expect on the following page.

Ministry Shares Re-Imagined: What You Can Expect

The Council of Delegates, acting on behalf of Synod 2020, adopted the new ministry share system. The diagram below provides a timeline for implementing the new program in July 2020.

06

(July 2021) **NEW MINISTRY YEAR BEGINS** — the ministry year will run from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. Ministry shares received starting in July will be put towards the approved budgets. In addition, a new letter will be sent to congregations to help them start the planning process for the next cycle of pledges.

01

(July 2020) **INFORMATIONAL LETTER FROM THE CRCNA IS RECEIVED** — letter will include information about previous ministry share giving and some suggestions for how to think about determining your pledge amount.

02

(August/September 2020) **CHURCH COUNCILS & CONGREGATIONS DETERMINE PLEDGE** — this might have to happen outside of your traditional budget process (according to Church Order, councils are allowed to make this decision on their own). This first pledge amount is what the church will contribute during the fiscal year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.



05

(May 2021) **BUDGETS FOR MINISTRIES ARE APPROVED AT THE CORPORATION/COUNCIL LEVEL** — The Council of Delegates (as well as its Canadian and Michigan corporations) will review the proposed budgets including any changes to programs or personnel. These budgets will be approved for the ministry year beginning on July 1.

04

(January 2021) **PLEDGES ARE FORWARDED TO CRCNA OFFICES** — stated clerks of each classis should forward the pledges from their region to the US or Canadian offices of the CRCNA using an electronic form provided to them. These pledges will help determine the budgets for mission efforts and other ministries in the coming ministry year. Ministry shares are only one part of this budgeting process. Any significant variation in revenue from ministry shares, church offerings, individual gifts or other sources, will impact what ministry can be achieved.

03

(Fall 2020) **PLEDGES FROM EACH CONGREGATION ARE SENT TO THE FALL CLASSIS MEETINGS** — each congregation will forward their pledge to the stated clerk of their classis. At the Fall meeting, each classis will have a conversation about these pledges. The intent is not to shame or guilt anyone, but rather to work together as the Body of Christ, learning from each other about how their pledges were determined, and in some instances making adjustments.

