



July 18, 2018

Stated Clerks of Classes

Dear Friends:

Delegates and the much-appreciated young adult representatives to Synod 2018 enjoyed the opportunity to engage with delegates from the Reformed Church in America General Synod for joint sessions, advisory committees, and workshops, as well as for meaningful times of worship and prayer. There was a true spirit of unity and fellowship during the CRC/RCA joint meetings as well as throughout the sessions of our synod. The decisions of synod are now recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2018*—available online and in print. 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.

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 implement a safe church team if not already in place and (2) the startup of a Classis Renewal Advisory Team to assist classes in developing and implementing a ministry plan in time for Synod 2020.

In addition to sending you a copy the printed *Acts of Synod 2018* as soon as it is available, 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 to the electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2018*, posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. (The printed version of the *Acts* will follow later in August.)

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,

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Encl: Summary of Synod 2018 Decisions for Classes

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Summary of Synod 2018 Decisions for Classes

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.)

The following five goals approved by Synod 2014 (*Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 237; *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 559-60) to guide the Safe Church Ministry were reaffirmed by Synod 2018 and may be the basis of important conversations at the fall classis meeting:

- 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. Assistance for classes in developing a ministry plan

Synod received the report of the Classis Renewal Group (*Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 44-50) and noted the establishment of a new Classis Renewal Advisory Team coordinated by the classis renewal consultant to accomplish the following:

- Continue to explore and address the challenges and opportunities facing classes in an ongoing and adaptive way.
- Assist classes in developing and implementing a ministry plan as described in Church Order Article 75 (inserted below).

Classes are encouraged to develop and share their ministry plan (cf. Church Order Art. 75, adopted by Synod 2015) with the Classis Renewal Advisory Team so that the team can provide the COD with a summary of the plans (to be forwarded to Synod 2020). (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 517-18.)

Church Order Article 75

- a. The classes shall implement a ministry plan that advances evangelistic and diaconal witness to Christ and his kingdom in its specific region and, when necessary, assist those churches needing support to fulfill their mission.
- b. Each classis shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.

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

And 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 comments and suggestions regarding 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. The Candidacy Committee will also be presenting required modifications to the “Journey Toward Ordination” document for synod’s approval.

Churches are called to pray for wisdom amid the tensions and challenges related to expectations and processes required for ordained ministry, and classes and congregations are invited 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. 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort

CRC classes are encouraged to recognize the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort at one of their 2018-2019 meetings. The following initiatives are also being planned for the

400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort—the participation of classes and 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.

6. Archiving classis and congregational records

Synod validated the importance of archiving and instructed all classes and 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.

In addition, synod encouraged the following classes, all of which have at least one member congregation more than ten years old that has not had its minutes duplicated, to contact the archives to have this done: Alberta North, Alberta South/Saskatchewan, Atlantic Northeast, B.C. North-West, B.C. South-East, California South, Central California, Central Plains, Chatham, Chicago South, Columbia, Georgetown, Grand Rapids North, Grand Rapids South, Grandville, Greater Los Angeles, Hackensack, Hanmi, Heartland, Holland, Hudson, Huron, Iakota, Illiana, Kalamazoo, Ko-Am, Lake Erie, Lake Superior, Minnkota, Muskegon, Northcentral Iowa, Northern Illinois, Northern Michigan, Pacific Northwest, Quinte, Red Mesa, Rocky Mountain, Southeast U.S., Toronto, Wisconsin, and Yellowstone. (See *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 456.)