



Lux Mundi

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Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12



In this Issue
Reports of broadest assemblies

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Reformed Churches



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Synodal

Biblical church polity is presbyterial-synodal, as opposed to episcopal or congregational. The word “presbyterial” emphasizes the role of the presbyter, the elder, in the government of the church. But elders do not act alone. They come together. That is the word “synodal”, which derives from the Greek words for “with” and “road”. The government of the church is through the assemblies of office bearers.

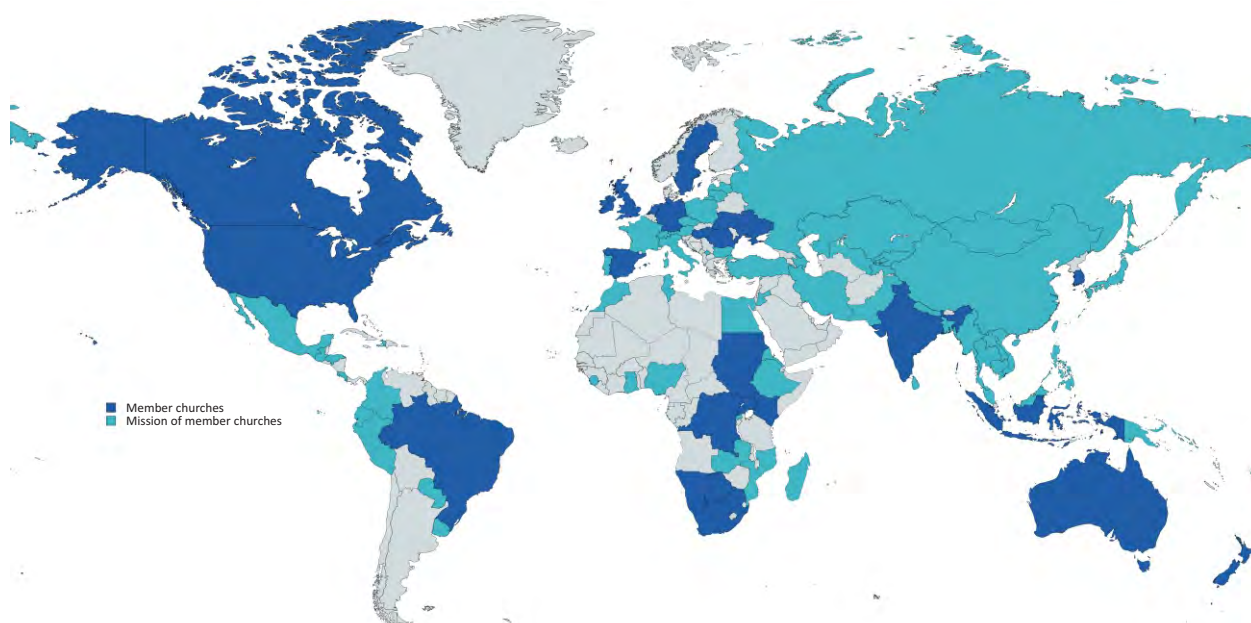
During the past few months many ICRC member churches held their broadest assemblies. The pages of this Lux Mundi are filled with press releases and personal impressions of

several of these. (If your church's is missing, we'd appreciate receiving it: luxmundi@icrconline.com).

Two reports are rather lengthy. They are still worth the read, as these running accounts tell the story of Christ's work in gathering, defending, and preserving His church.

As an aspect of broadest assemblies is hospitality (I enjoyed some with the OPC), it seemed appropriate to dwell on that virtue with a contribution from New Zealand.

Enjoy the read and rejoice in the activities within the Kingdom of God!



Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects are located



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).

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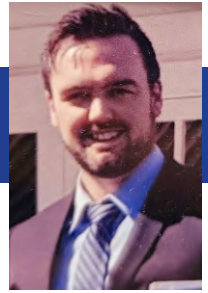
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Christian Hospitality

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
Hebrews 13:2*

I grew up knowing that my Grandparents had a strong Christian faith, and they were a fantastic witness to me of how a Christian should live. I found out they were very involved in the work of Wycliffe here in NZ for over 40 years. Many missionaries in NZ on deputation and furlough would often stay at my Grandparents' house for days, sometimes even a week. Their home was open to everyone.

At my wedding, my Grandad gave a speech. He said, "I pray that your home would always have an open door, for family and friends, to strangers you don't even know. That your home might always be joyful and the love of the Lord present in your house! That others might experience God's love through you and rejoice in Him as well!" Thus, I was determined to do the same.

In Hebrews 13, the author spells out for us how Jesus Christ's saving work should impact the way we live our lives. Knowledge of and belief in Jesus' saving work done once and for all time, should motivate Christians to 'live out' the Gospel.

Remember the two greatest commandments of God: love God and love your neighbour. I read somewhere that these two commands are the two beams of the cross of Christ! One beam is vertical, showing us our restored relationship with God; the other is horizontal, whereby Christ in His work on the cross restores our relationship with our fellow man.

While our relationship with God is of primary importance, it also forms the basis for our relationship with our fellow man. If you neglect the work of Christ which restores your relationship with your fellow man, you stand condemned before God. You can't have one without the other. As Alexander Strauch emphasized, "Christ's followers must be marked not only by total devotion to God but also sacrificial service to neighbour."¹ Hebrews 13:1 says, "Let brotherly love continue." How? Verse 2 calls you to show brotherly love to others through hospitality.

Why should we be hospitable?

Jesus Christ in Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect hospitality!" This command is based on the work of Jesus Christ and is something you must do as a Christian.

It's not that you need to do this to be saved. Jesus Christ has

already died on the cross for your sins, you are already a part of God's family. Now, you are called to show hospitality precisely because you are part of God's family!

It's based on the command to love your neighbour and so it's part of your life of holiness as a believer.

Sadly, it seems to me that hospitality is an almost forgotten Christian virtue in the modern lifestyle of many in the Reformed Church today. We live in big cities where traffic is an issue, we have busy work schedules, precious little time with our families, and so, it is understandable that hospitality has become particularly challenging in the Church today. However, these might be challenges to hospitality, but you cannot allow them to become an insurmountable obstacle to your Christian hospitality. Don't use these things as excuses for ignoring the call of Christ to be hospitable!

Hospitality is meant to be a blessing to the Church. Hospitality provides natural opportunities to strengthen the bonds of unity amongst brothers and sisters in Christ within the Church. Hospitality is also a tool for evangelizing those who are not Christians.



In the early Church, hospitality was very important and a vital part of the work of spreading the Gospel. In fact, “during the first two centuries, nearly all of the Christian Churches across the Roman Empire were characterized by loving, Christian hospitality.”²

For many today, welcoming someone into your home is a fairly foreign concept. To include others who are not part of the immediate family is often perceived to be too difficult. However, the author of Hebrews calls all Christians in every time and place to be hospitable!

How are you doing in this regard? Is your home marked by hospitality?

The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 4:9-10 also reminds us to, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”

All we have belongs to the Lord, and we are to be good stewards of what we have. These two verses directly link hospitality with the stewardship of our God-given gifts! Do you believe that? Because if you do, you will use what God has given you in His service.

Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love! Love of God is shown through love of neighbour.

This is not just a call to be nice to your neighbour and then keep them at arm's length. No! The greatest act of love that you can show anyone is to welcome them into your most sacred place: your home! Into the heart, the hub of your busy lives and show them who you are in Jesus Christ!

Brothers and sisters, you might be thinking of the cost of having people over every week. It's more food than you have budgeted for; or maybe that it's more time taken away from you when you could be resting, and so on. But whatever you're thinking, the benefits far outweigh the cost!

Through hospitality you cultivate fellowship, friendship, and

deeper, meaningful relationships with your brothers and sisters in the Church. Having believers and unbelievers over will encourage them in their faith or encourage them to come to faith!

Christian hospitality fans the flames of Christian love in powerful ways. Eating with another Christian in particular displays one of the most solemn bonds of brotherhood. Eating together in our homes is a beautiful sign of Christian unity, displaying the love of the brethren and the peace of God.

To put this command positively, “remember to show hospitality.” You are to be intentional in your hospitality. Even if you know it's your duty to be hospitable, don't forget to do it! Get into a good habit of it. Don't let your feelings dictate whether or not you practice it, otherwise you won't! You might be tired, you might feel overwhelmed at the thought of how much work is involved, or whatever you are thinking about having people over; hospitality is an attitude, more than it is an action.

The action of hosting someone flows from your attitude of love. Once you begin, continue to do it! One drop of water does not make a stream, so too, showing hospitality once or twice does not make you hospitable.

Loving your brothers and sisters in Christ by showing them hospitality does exactly what Jesus prays for in John 17:20-21&23, “I do not ask for these only, but also for all those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they may also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” It builds unity within the Church, locally, and all over the world!

Hospitality is crucial to the strengthening of the bond between brothers and sisters in Christ and it's vitally necessary for the work of evangelism. Hospitality is the most effective way to share the gospel with relatives, friends and neighbours. If you are not currently practicing hospitality on a regular basis, you are robbing yourself and others of the joy of Christian living!



RCUS Synod 2024



Why is hospitality one of the greatest evangelistic tools of our day?

Hebrews 11 shows us the connection that we have with our forefathers in the faith and the legacy they leave to future generations of faith, including us. So too, we have families that we're a part of where we also pass on our legacy to the next generation.

As I mentioned in the introduction, my Grandparents left me a legacy of hospitality. My parents also, always endeavored to have a family over each Sunday for lunch and at times for dinner as well. This is my heritage, these are my fathers in the family and in the faith, and I want to pass on that legacy to my children as well.

Is this a similar witness to what you have had growing up? If yes, then praise the Lord for faithful generations in your family! If you don't have this legacy in your family history, then hear the Word of God, and make this the heritage for you and your family. That future generations in your line would point to you as their first faithful example of hospitality! Start the new pattern for your household as you seek to express God's love for others.

In this society we don't know what families are, or what they should look like anymore. We have a generation of Kiwis who don't know what a family truly is and how it should function. Many are single mums or dads, who came from a broken home themselves. So, bring them in! Show them how a loving Christian family can and should function.

One thing that many people comment on when they come to a Reformed Church is their amazement that within the Reformed Churches there are families, teenagers, grandparents, all worshipping in the same church! It blows them away, because as the church becomes more like the culture around us, even within churches, the family breaks down. This leads to poor practices in the Church, a lack of living out the love of Christ, a lack of self-sacrificial love. Don't think this can't happen in our Churches.

Hospitality is the best way to cultivate a strong community within the church, where we truly become a "church family!" It is this bond of love that often draws others to find out what is different about this church. As we are bound together by love and being part of each other's lives, we as a church are stronger in our witness to the community around us. That's why you should express God's love for others through your hospitality!

Who are we to show hospitality to?

To strangers? Here in Hebrews 13:2 the term 'stranger' is closely tied to the term 'brotherly love' in verse one. So, what does this mean then? Who is the stranger?

This passage mainly has other believers in view, fellow Christians, but the term 'stranger,' can mean anyone you don't know! The question is the same as asking, "Who is my neighbor that I am to love?" (Luke 10:29) The answer to that is: everyone the Lord brings into your life, whether Christian or not!

Rosaria Butterfield, the author of the book, 'The Gospel comes with a House Key,' points out that the purpose of hospitality is to make a stranger a friend, and then to make that friend a family member!

Verse 2 goes on to say, through hospitality "some have entertained angels without knowing it!" Will you actually host Angels?

Well, hosting angels is not the point of this statement. We see in Hebrews 2:16 that Christ didn't come into this world to help angels, but rather, He came to help mankind. The author of Hebrews simply calls us to be imitators of Christ in our love for other people.

Why are angels mentioned then? Well, this is a possible result of showing hospitality, but it's not the reason for showing hospitality. Saying that some have unwittingly hosted angels is an encouragement to show hospitality! It lends excitement and weight to the blessing of hospitality.

How many of us see a new person in church and get excited about the prospect of inviting them over? Or, to make it more personal, would you, when you see someone new in church, get excited about having them over for lunch? Would the thought of having them over even enter your mind?

Do you see what the author of Hebrews is doing? He says, "What if that person is an angel? And by hosting them, you're hosting an angel unawares!" Now it's exciting to think about hosting strangers, isn't it?

You are to show hospitality out of love, so it's better to think of someone as being an angel, and to treat them with the same honour as if they were an angel, rather than risk treating them unworthily!

In the Old Testament, angels literally and physically were hosted. Just think of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. Three strangers come to Abraham, and he jumps up and gives them water and food and rest. These men are angels, in fact one of them is the Pre-incarnate Jesus Christ! Abraham entertained his future descendant, his Saviour, without knowing it! We are encouraged to do the same as Abraham, our father in the faith.

Remember what Jesus Christ says in Matthew 25:40, "What you did for the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me." It shouldn't matter whether or not someone is an angel, love should compel you, and excite you to invite them over! So what



are you waiting for? Get hospitality happening in the church. Don't fall into the trap of just being hospitable to the people you normally and more naturally gravitate towards. Have everyone over: visitors to the church, families in the church that you have had little or nothing to do with, everyone! Don't neglect any part of the body of Christ. Because the test of the genuineness of God's love in your life, is expressed by showing hospitality to all.

May the Lord stir in us this excitement to proclaim His love and His Word in this way. Entertaining angels unaware! Start with one act of hospitality and then plan the next one to begin or carry on this new pattern, this Christian legacy.

May God's love to us in Christ be the impetus for us to share the bounty we all enjoy! May that love then abound in us and through us as we seek to be a congregation of faithful servants in His Kingdom!

1 Alexander Strauch, Love or Die: Christ's Wake- Up Call to the Church, p. 13.

2 Alexander Strauch, Love or Die: Christ's Wake- Up Call to the Church, p. 7.

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President's Address, Synod-RCUS 2024

Author: Elder Roger Gallimore
Roger Gallimore is an elder with the RCUS.

It is truly both an extreme honor and a humbling experience to serve the church as president of Synod. So many of you have been very gracious with your words of encouragement, counsel and support. Thank you for all your kindness. Above all, I praise and thank our Lord Jesus Christ for His faithfulness and without Whom we are all wholly incapable of serving the church in our appointed roles.

Our appointed roles are indeed many. As I consider what I believe to be the state of the church I am reminded that those serving in leadership roles, such as our beloved pastors, elders, deacons, members and chairs of committees and officers of each Classis and Synod, are deeply committed and continuously give tirelessly of themselves. This can only happen by the grace and strength of our Triune God.

And indeed, our Triune God has given us His grace and blessed the abundance of work taking place on the local, Classical and Synodical levels.

This is unquestionably an exciting time for the church. What follows are the reasons for such excitement.

Most importantly, as reported by the president of each Classis, the Word of God is faithfully preached. In a world gone mad in so many ways, our pastors continue to faithfully stand upon the rock of Christ and unashamedly proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord!" I can't begin to describe the rich blessing it is to tune in to Sermon Audio and listen to our pastors.

Of course, as we learn in Romans 10:14-15, the Word preached requires a preacher. Classis reports show that ten men were examined for licensure and/or ordination this past year. This takes a tremendous amount of time, expense and effort, yet proves to be the hallmark of ensuring sound doctrine from the pulpit.

Like the diligent farmer spreading the seed, Classes, the Synod Welcoming Committee, Foreign Ministries Committee, Communications Committee and Home Missions Committee are faithfully scattering the Word of God through bringing in new churches, hitting the mission field with Bible studies, effectively using technology and adding clarity and support for home missions through a proposed new manual. While you can see the details in reports from Classis presidents and the report from each of these committees, the result, by God's grace, is a 3.2 percent increase in the number of communicant members as reported this year over what was reported a year ago.

Another exciting development is the increased interest and engagement from our young people through greater enrollment in Heidelberg Youth Camp in three of the Classes while the Church in Casper, WY hosted a mid-year Youth Rally. Add to this the Young Adult Reformed Fellowship (YARF) that began through young adult grass roots efforts. They have now met several times in several different cities for community service projects, learning and fellowship.

All these efforts also require financial support, which is primarily generated through Guidelines. Recognizing that the greatest expense for Guidelines is with Ministerial Aid, the Synod Finance Committee thoughtfully and with great care tackled this concern on both ends: expense and income. Designed to mitigate expenses are proposed strategies being presented to Synod to ensure fairness while keeping our promises to aged pastors and widows in need of assistance. On the income side, is the Mission 2025 campaign to raise endowment funds, that has thus far resulted in nearly \$900,000 of pledges and over \$124,000 in cash for a total of \$1,124,000 raised. This was accomplished through presentations at 33 churches and 45 members of the Legacy Society. Plus, the Synod Investment Committee reports a 14.31 percent gain since last year on investments. The excitement is also evident in many other areas. The Interchurch Relations Committee continues with relationship-building and is even hosting NAPARC next year. The Publications Committee completed much-needed updates with Stated Clerk and Constitutional forms while also collating historical study papers. Foreign Ministries continues to provide great oversight and connection with partners in the Philippines, Kenya and Congo along with our Spanish-speaking ministries, Reformed Faith and Life, Middle East Reformed Fellowship, and Westminster Biblical Missions. There is certainly much to be thankful for as we bear witness of all the labors and the fruit thereof through our Lord's blessings.

But all this effort also comes at a cost.

We are still a small denomination. This means that with relatively few laborers the workload is immense. One result is the growing number of reported physical ailments requiring surgery, hospitalization and long recovery periods. Another result is increased isolation. To combat this, the Christian Education Committee has submitted proposals promoting extended learning opportunities, making Sabbatical guidelines available and providing support for Biblical counseling. The Nominations Committee is working hard to identify and recruit more leaders from across the RCUS to serve in Classis and Synod committees, thereby reducing the workload. Two Classes also reported efforts to add times of fellowship among pastors.

By God's grace these strategies and more will help ease the burden, increase the laborers and in turn allow for an even greater support for the ministry of the Word. We must make this a matter of incessant prayer and thoughtful consideration of how all of us can lift up the arms of our pastors.

The bottom line for all these efforts brings us right back to the Great Commission. The church is to make disciples and to teach the disciples to observe all things Christ commanded.

This commission underscores our faithful labors to fill the pulpit with godly pastors proven to be of sound doctrine, to support and care for pastors, to reach out to the community near and far through purposeful evangelizing, to provide good organizational support, to be good stewards of resources entrusted to our care, to share with like-minded laborers and to engage, excite and equip the congregation and beyond of all ages. And we can do all these things, for, lo, Christ is with us, even to the end of the age.

The fact is, Christ has been with us all along. Next year, Lord willing, we will be celebrating 300 years of God's goodness and grace in what was first known as the German Reformed Church and is manifest today as the Reformed Church in the United States. All honor, glory and praise on high to the King of kings and Lord of lords as we gather next year rejoicing in His providence that brought us through wars, threats of false doctrine, a fatal merger and a protracted battle that kept the RCUS intact and on solid footing to rightly minister the Word of God.

Under the capable leadership of the Tricentennial Special Committee there is much preparation taking place toward this celebration, which is slated for Mount Rushmore on June 12, 2025. In fact, this committee has already raised over \$40,000 in support of this joyful observance that will feature singing, notable well-wishes, video, fellowship meal and above all, giving glory to our faithful God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, I present to you a summary of what I believe to be the state of the church: We are the body of Christ on the firm foundation of God's Word with renewed focus on making disciples and tasting, by God's grace, the fruit of growth and the marks of good stewardship.

From here I believe that this next year we must keep our eyes on the Great Commission in every aspect of the church on the local, Classical and Synodical levels while zealously supporting the pastorate in bolstering the ministry of the Word.

And then celebrate with all glory to God alone.

In the Service of Christ Our King,
Elder Roger Gallimore, President

General Synod ARPC 2024

The 220th General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) met at Bonclarken Conference Center in Flat Rock, NC from June 11-13, 2024.

What a week. The 220th General Synod will be remembered for a lot of things: good preaching, spending a whole day on one recommendation (we're not the OPC), lots of good stuff on the inter-church front, condemning Masonic orders, kicking the can down the road on women deacons/deaconesses (however you say that), and erecting a study committee to deal with ESS (I'll explain what this is in a minute) in a twenty-year old paper online. However, for those present at Bonclarken from June 11-13 there is one phrase none of us wants to ever hear again. This needs to go to the Committee On Revisions first. I've decided that if one of my kids is playing the fool I am going to start threatening with sending them to the Revisions committee if they don't get themselves together.

Let me start this review by saying being ARP is the best. I love the spirit, the comradery, and the genuine seriousness mixed with a lack of arrogance which makes us unique in the modern confessional world. As I say all the time, in the ARP we are Reformed, but not mad about it. No place was this more evident than our ability to laugh at ourselves. As I was acting reading clerk I completely skipped a recommendation in a report, and no one went to a mic to scold, or passively aggressively point out my mistake. I noticed it, the Synod had a big laugh about it, and we moved on. That's not to say things didn't get heated, they did. You can't dissolve a whole presbytery, especially for the reasons the Synod decided to do it, and not have the temperature rise in the room. We got intemperate at times, even our Canadians showed some emotion. But, at the end of it the ARP moved to do what it needed to do, not just for recent events, though they were the primary motivation, as it should be, but for a being a place where the basics of Christian life could not be held without controversy. Dissolving a Presbytery is never a light action, it needs gravitas, Biblical mercy and grace, and the hard love of a brother for a brother.

I don't want to get into the nitty gritty of this because at the heart of how we got there are some very sensitive issues. You can probably find them online elsewhere but for the sake of the victims I'll let them tell their own story. Suffice to say that sin must be strangled in its crib, if not, it will destroy everything around it. A 224-year-old presbytery will cease to exist on September 1, 2024 because of the misguided, and gaslighted Presbyterian shenanigans of men under the sway of an individual who did not have the church of Christ in his heart. Presbyterianism is the Scripturally commanded form of

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Bonclarken Centre - Location of ARPC Synods

government, and when it is used as a parlor game to abuse trust it is as ugly as anything man ever made. Yet, when followed it is the best way to help.

One of the things you learn as you get older is that it is a lot easier and simpler just to do the right thing than to try and stop something from happening that you may not like. There is also a lesson to be learned from Numbers 32:23 as well.

One of the things some learned this week is that in the ARP the Synod is an appellate court, not a court of top-down commands. This makes us more Scottish than some of our American Presbyterian compatriots and points to some of the differences concerning being a Synod versus a General Assembly. I lost count how many times the Parliamentarian had to get up and remind the body that the Synod cannot tell you to do something. Only the Presbyteries, or the local Session, can do that. It can encourage, it can condemn, or even bless, but only the lower courts have teeth, excepting certain judicial cases. An action I alluded to above, concerning Freemasonry, is a good example of that. We as a Synod passed some recommendations about Secret Societies, which include a set of questions that a local church session can use to help their members and other members of the local church think through whether or not being a member of the Lodge is in keeping with their Christian commitments, and make certain that the local church knew the Synod's feelings on it the Synod passed this statement, "That the 220th General Synod explicitly and forthrightly declare that Freemasonry is incompatible with Christianity." While the Synod left it up to the personal

conscience of each individual man, the wording of the above motion has little room for nuance. This is a sensitive issue that demands pastoral counsel and care, regardless of what your personal opinion may be on the matter.

A couple other matters worth noting from Synod this week is that while we dissolved one presbytery, we also began the work of dismissing another, in this case for sad, yet good reasons. There were even motions brought forward to stop our Canadian brothers from absconding north of the border. Yet, in good Christian love the ARP Synod (which I guess is of the South again since we are in that direction from Canada) voted to allow the Canadian Presbytery of the ARP to begin the process of establishing their own, national ARP denomination to begin September 1, 2025. I can't express in words how much I am going to miss our Canadian brothers. Many of us look up to those men with gratitude at their humble strength, quick wit, and the times where their erudition teaches us backwoods folks some new words. The ARP in one Synod went from Ten Presbyteries, to soon-to-be Eight. It's an interesting time to be ARP, but the Lord continues to bless us in many ways and I want to end with a few examples.

In some ways the most underrated, yet important thing to happen at Synod this week was the bringing in of our IPAR (Iglesia Presbiteriana Asociada Reformada de Mexico) brothers as fraternal fellows. What this means practically is that it opens up opportunities for peer-to-peer ministry works, especially around education and missions. We are hopeful that as much as we can be of help to our brothers in Mexico, that this is actually much more of a blessing to us in the States as we can learn from them for ministry to the growing Hispanic population in the U.S.A. The first fruits of that are already being seen in conversations happening with Erskine Seminary and Comunidad Reformada de Estudio Superiores (CRES), the denominational seminaries of the ARP and IPAR respectively. Likewise, World Witness's SEED Ministry are looking into ways to help the Huasteca people learn more of Christ in concert with IPAR's existing churches and presbyteries in the region.

As we begin this renewing of a relationship began in the 19th century we also got to hear from a dear friend of the ARP, Rev. Zeeshan Saddiq, of the ARP Church of Pakistan. We look forward to the future when we can become even closer, and there is a chance of that as the ARP Inter-Church committee looks to travel to Pakistan in the near future. Likewise, brothers from the OPC, RPCNA, Canadian Reformed Churches, and the United Reformed Churches gave fraternal greetings. It's always a great help to hear how the Lord is working in our sister denominations as we work together for God's glory. We

have a lot to learn, if we listen.

I mentioned above that I would say a little bit about the study committee we made to study the issue of Eternal Subordination of the Son (the second person of the Trinity). To try and summarize it the issue is over the unity of the Godhead, and whether or not God as the Bible reveals Jesus Christ to us in His divinity and humanity has one will or two wills, one human and one divine, and how that plays out in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

In closing, it was a great week, as it always is. My good friend Jeff Temple likes to say that the ARP Synod is like a family picnic. Sometimes at family events things can get heated, no one hates like family, and no one loves like family, yet at the end-of-the-day we are all still family. That's the way it is in the ARP. We don't feel like we need to be anyone other than we are. No need to be pretentious, because we ain't, and we are fine with that. If you need to peacock to feel special, well there is another place you can be. We just are who we are, in Christ, to the ends of the earth, together.

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ARPC Synod 2024



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Synod RPCNA 2024

The 192nd synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church met on the beautiful campus of Geneva College from June 11-15, 2024. Often we meet in IN, but it was nice to be home at Geneva. About 150 delegates from around the nation (and Japan) attended and, as church courts are public meetings, several interested Reformed Presbyterians from Beaver Falls and elsewhere sat in on the week's meeting.

Ruling elder Tom Fisher (Cambridge, MA) was elected as moderator. Elder Fisher is the third ruling elder to ever serve as moderator of the synod. He is also the second African-American to serve as moderator. Tom's wisdom and grace as well as high practical knowledge of the RPCNA Constitution and rules for ordering a meeting made him an excellent choice as moderator.

Each morning began with worship and the court sat under preaching, prayer, and the singing of Psalms. Our theme for the week was related to God's desire for mercy, not sacrifice. The first sermon was the "retiring moderator's address" by Dr. Pete Smith (Wilkesburg, PA). Dr. Smith preached a riveting message from the Sermon on Mount, even giving cases of conscience in his sermon that "named names" from previous actions of synod describing how to apply mercy to areas of disagreement. Other sermons included a message from Dr. CJ Williams (RPTS); Rev. Iain Wright of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and Rev. Ed Blackwood (Colorado Springs, CO). The singing of Psalms was also an important part of our worship each morning.

First time delegates and new members of the court were introduced. There were twelve new ruling elders at synod and six new pastors. The new pastors included Revs. Ryan Alsheimer (Walton, NY); Hunter Jackson (elect in Broomall, PA); Jon Sturm (Lafayette, IN); Yusuke Hirata (Japan); Keith Dewart (Washington, IA) and David Witmer (Seattle, WA). Fraternal delegates were also introduced and they were heard from later in the meeting. We were brought greetings from delegates from various denominations with whom we have fraternal relationships. The most significant of these was Rev. Matt Dyck from the newly formed Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada. They have been a denomination for one year and described their first year experience in terms of a young man moving out of his parents home: "Food is expensive and rent is expensive." We are grateful for them being our brothers to the North.

Each presbytery was able to present a report of their work in the past year. It is noteworthy that three pulpits are open in the Pacific Coast Presbytery and they could use our prayers and help. The Midwest Presbytery has planted a Mandarin

speaking congregation in Little Rock, AR. The Great Lakes-Gulf saw a year of healing and working towards greater unity. Atlantic, in the Northeast, reports good news from our most heavily populated region of the country. Japan gives thanks for Yusuke Hirata finishing his PhD from Queens University in Belfast and look forward to seeing how God will use him at Kobe Theological Hall and in Japan. St. Lawrence is laboring with less congregations this year as their Canadian churches are now part of the new Canadian denomination. The RPCNA currently has 93 congregations. In those 93 congregations there were 183 baptisms and 165 professions of faith last year.

The boards and agencies each gave reports as well. We heard from Dr. Calvin Troup of Geneva College and he spoke about the various ways that Geneva is a distinctively Reformed Presbyterian college. It was reported that there was a major college-adjacent land gift that will expand the size of the college. Plans are underway for new buildings on that land. The college also has seen a very high increase in enrollment for the coming school year. Dr. Barry York spoke about the work of the seminary. There have been a couple of difficulties this year due in part to Dr. Keith Evans's sudden departure from the faculty (he is now a professor at RTS Charlotte) as well as the death of Dr. Jeff Stivason's wife, Tabitha. The seminary reported on a major remodel of their main building, Rutherford Hall. Rutherford Hall was built in 1898 as the home of Durbin Horne called "The Gables." Seriously, give money to this remodel of our 126 year-old building.

The RP Home also reported and there were two communications connected to the RP Home. One was a request to divest the home because it came to the court's attention that the Roman Catholic Mass is being publicly served at the Home. After a long discussion, a committee was formed to investigate the relationship between the RP Home and the denomination. There was also a motion passed for them to begin revising their practices to preclude Roman Catholic and non-Christian "spiritual care." It was also noted on the floor that the RP Home currently only has two RPCNA employees. A speaker urged pastors and elders to encourage their young people going into health care to consider working at the RP Home.

The missions arms of our denomination are divided between Home and Global Missions. Home Missions (HMB) reported on several church plant endeavors. A question from the floor squashed a rumor that the HMB sought to investigate congregations that choose to use older Bible versions or Psalters. The HMB president affirmed this was not true. Global Missions has been working on revising their

bylaws. After a six year discussion on this with the synod, bylaw revisions were approved. We also heard good reports from several of our mission fields, many of which are in security-sensitive nations and are not written about publicly. Pray for these places and faces bringing the gospel in difficult soil.

The RP Trustees discussed two congregations that have left the RPCNA: the former West Lafayette congregation that left following a minor-on-minor sex-abuse scandal where the pastor and elders were disciplined. Our Dallas, TX congregation left the RPCNA for the Free Church (continuing). It was reported that Immanuel paid the Trustees around \$300,000 in a settlement. (In the RPCNA, when a congregation dissolves its assets belong to the Trustees). The Trustees are currently working with Dallas on a settlement. Related to this, a committee was established to craft a policy on how a congregation can leave the RPCNA. A paper from the Bloomington session seeking “lessons learned” from the Immanuel sex-abuse case was returned to the session. A two year moratorium on the paper was put in place because the matter is “too raw” and “too soon” as mentioned. We may see that paper in 2026.

A committee to consider the biblical and theological appropriateness of our current practice of female deacons will report in 2025. A few questions from the floor about the nature of the committee's work were asked. Another committee concerning recusals in appeals was heard. Some changes on who can speak and vote during recusals were made and the decisions were sent down in overture.

Much of our time was taken up in appeal and complaint and debating reports related to controversies. This is not a negative as the higher court is a court of appeals and established to hear complaints (See WCF 31.3). Several of these related to our practice of exclusive Psalmody, but can be divided into two: the first was a case of conscience instructing RP pastors and elders on how to participate in worship where exclusive psalmody is not practiced. The second related to a ruling elder-elect who took exception to our current practice (although he did believe that only songs from the Bible ought to be sung). For several reasons neither of these were sustained, but the Synod did re-affirm its commitment to a cappella psalmody via special resolution. Later in the meeting we heard that the elder-elect had come to affirm our position fully.

Two complaints led to reconciliation. A two year conflict between the Orlando session and the RP Home led to the beginning of reconciliation. The RP Home sued a former pastor of Orlando who was living at the home resulting in the synod admonishing the home for their sin against this minister. The RP Home has now repented of that and are making steps to make this right with the former resident and

his family. The second was a complaint from the former minister and ruling elder of Phoenix against the Pacific Coast Presbytery. Their complaint was that the presbytery did not make a pronouncement of innocence after investigating an alleged relationship between a 17 year-old young man and an adult female. Part of that complaint resulted in the presbytery repenting of this as they did not find evidence of scandalous sin and another part included forming a commission to investigate this matter further. It is a very complicated and sensitive case, as you can imagine.

Rev. Jeff Yelton appealed a decision of the Midwest Presbytery to suspend his credentials for being insubordinate following counsel to take down or amend a website that promotes wine-only in communion. The issue was not so much about wine, but about the manner in which he wrote about those who promote the use of grape juice in the sacrament. Both contents of the cup are permitted for use in the RPCNA. Mr. Yelton's complaint was not sustained and he remains under suspension.

We also heard a complaint and appeal from Mr. Ben Manring, a member of the Southside Indianapolis congregation, who was rebuked for an email concerning a ruling elder-candidate and why Mr. Manring believed this ruling elder-candidate was disqualified from office. The appeal and complaint was against the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery for upholding the discipline after he appealed to the presbytery. The court sided with Mr. Manring concerning “irregularities in the proceedings” (upheld 77-20). Four other matters related to the appeal were not upheld. The Book of Discipline requires some action on the part of synod in overturning the discipline. A three man commission of former synod moderators will determine how that will occur.

Several other reports were given and some without oral presentations. This synod was a case study in the value of longer synods. There was little time for fellowship as it was a very busy week of labor for the kingship of Christ and the building up of his bride.

Nathan Eshelman

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90th OPC General Assembly (2024)

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Editor's note: the following text has been somewhat edited with a view to its length.

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

According to custom, and after a day traveling to the site of the Assembly, the commissioners gather in the evening and GA begins with worship. This service is normally led by the Moderator of the previous Assembly. Rev. John Shaw (Grace OPC, Columbus, OH) convened the Assembly in the Upper Gwinn Conference Center, preaching from Psalm 56 a sermon entitled "When I Am Afraid." He focused especially on v. 3, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." The object of our trust, the Lord Jesus, grounds our faith when the fears of life surround us. Rev. Brett McNeill (Reformation OPC, Olympia, WA) and the session of Emmanuel, OPC, Kent, WA, assisted in the administration of the Lord's Supper. The offering was designated for the "Seed and Sower Fund," a special reserve fund which aids mother-daughter church planting, administered by the GA's Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

The meeting having been called to order, commissioners then took up the business of the Assembly at 8:30 p.m. Mr. Shaw prayed and the stated clerk, Rev. Hank Belfield (Providence OPC, Chilhowie, VA), called roll and declared that a quorum had been reached. Each presbytery is allotted a certain number of commissioners (ministers and ruling elders) according to size, and then the presbyteries elect men to attend as voting members of GA each year. The total number of commissioners is capped at 155. The duty falls to these commissioners to exercise the gift of rule in matters ranging from discipline cases and complaints that have been appealed to the GA, funding the various ministries of the whole church, hearing overtures from the presbyteries, responding to special circumstances in the church, maintaining relationships with sister churches around the world, and other matters which may come before the Assembly each year.

On behalf of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, Elder Mark Bube (Glenside, PA) introduced the fraternal delegates.

Members of the Assembly's committees who are not commissioners, as well as fraternal delegates from other churches, were seated as corresponding members. Corresponding members are granted privileges of the floor, which means they can speak on matters under discussion, but they are not allowed to make motions or vote.

Elder David Mahaffy (Oak Harbor, WA) gave a preliminary report for the Committee on Arrangements, noting key

information regarding the campus of Seattle Pacific University. At this point the Assembly tested their voting devices with three statistical questions. "Did you grow up in the OPC?" 12 did. "Is this your first General Assembly?" There are 28 first-timers. "What was your decade of ordination?" 18 in the 2020s; 40 in the 2010s; 33 in the 2000s; 18 in the 1990s; 18 in the 1980s; 6 in the 1970s; and 1 in the 1960s – the Rev. George Cottenden, who was asked to stand to applause from the body.

The stated clerk presented the minutes of the 89th General Assembly. He noted that the hard copies of the minutes were mailed to ministers and presbyteries of the OPC, as well as a list of select denominations and seminaries.

The next item of business for the evening was to elect a new moderator for this year's Assembly. Elder David Winslow (Westminster, CA) nominated Rev. John Fesko (RTS, Jackson, MS) and Rev. David Graves nominated Elder Bruce Stahl (Wentzville, MO). After speeches from the nominators, noting especially the nominees' experience at GA in difficult situations, Mr. Fesko was elected moderator and escorted to the chair by Mr. Winslow, who then prayed for his work at this Assembly.

Next the overtures, communications, and appeals were presented by the clerk. There are two overtures, nine communications, nine complaints on appeal, and one judicial appeal.

Times for business and breaks were set, including morning devotions. Each day the commissioners and corresponding members receive breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the dining commons. There are two twenty-minute breaks with coffee and refreshments each day, at 10:00 a.m. and 3:15 p.m. The Assembly pauses its work each morning at 11:40 for a daily devotional with the exception of the Lord's Day, when there is no business and commissioners have the opportunity to worship at nearby OPC congregations.

The docket was presented and adopted by voice vote. The stated clerk presented his recommendations regarding assigning the work to the thirteen advisory committees, which was also adopted by the Assembly.

What exactly is an advisory committee? All members of the Assembly, except the moderator, clerks, and commissioners who give presentations in advisory committees, are assigned to an advisory committee, which typically meet for a half day. Advisory committees help the Assembly with its work. They are tasked with meeting with representatives of the various committees of the General Assembly (such as the Committee on Christian Education, Committee on Foreign Missions,

Committee on Diaconal Ministries, etc.) to review those committees' reports and recommendations. They also meet with knowledgeable parties respecting other business before the Assembly such as appeals, complaints, overtures, etc. This allows members of the Assembly more intensive time overseeing the committees than would be practical on the floor with the whole body. When an advisory committee reports that it is "silent" regarding the work of a committee under its review, this silence is understood to convey approval of the committee's work and concurrence with its report and/or recommendations. However, an advisory committee may bring recommendations to the Assembly that might differ from a committee's report or recommendations under its review. But they may not do so without conferring with at least one member of that committee present at the assembly. This structure allows for a greater "plurality" of sorts, with one group of ordained men (an advisory committee brought together just during the Assembly) reviewing the work of another group of ordained men (a standing or other committee of the GA) in order to advise the whole body as to how it should act when the Assembly gathers throughout the week.

Moderator Fesko prayed and declared the meeting to be in recess until 8:30 a.m. tomorrow when the commissioners will meet in advisory committees.

Thursday, June 20, 2024

After breakfast, Thursday morning began with commissioners breaking off to work in the advisory committees.

Each year some of the commissioners and fraternal delegates are able to bring their wives and families to General Assembly. While the commissioners are in their advisory committees, the women meet. This morning the Committee on Ministerial Care invited the commissioners' and fraternal delegates' wives, local OPC ministers' wives and other women who serve the OPC to a time of fellowship, refreshment, and prayer hosted by Anneke Fesko, CMC's Care Coordinator for Ministers' Wives. The 32 women in attendance enjoyed this sweet time of fellowship and the encouragement they were to each other. The women were especially blessed by the time of prayer for each other, the assembly, and ministers' wives and widows not in attendance.

At 11:40 a.m., commissioners gathered once again in the Upper Gwinn Conference Center for morning devotions. Retired minister Rev. Jonathan Falk read from 2 Corinthians 1:23 - 2:4 exhorting the commissioners regarding discouragements in ministry and the way we are to lead in the church. Christian leaders are not lords. This means we must deal patiently with the sheep, seeking counsel from

older shepherds. We must not micromanage or coerce. Second, Christian leaders work for joy. Finally, Christian leaders seek to help God's people stand firm in their faith. The Assembly then sang #486 in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, "Rejoice, Believer, in the Lord."

Following organizational announcements regarding seminary-hosted meals, Rev. Everett Henes (Hillsdale OPC, Hillsdale, MI) closed this portion of the meeting with prayer and the Assembly recessed for lunch.

Thursday Afternoon

The Assembly reconvened at 3:35 p.m. singing #429 in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Karlo Janssen from the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Mr. Janssen celebrated 23 years of fraternal relations between the OPC and the CanRC, their shared work in defending the interpretation of Scripture and the qualifications for special office in the church, as well as a deep commitment to foreign missions. He recounted recent developments in Canada and the Netherlands regarding growing and diminishing sister church relationships. Finally Mr. Janssen described the changing culture in the CanRC as they lose their "Dutchness," with all the questions this poses regarding church identity.

Mr. Belfield presented the report of the stated clerk. This Assembly marks his fourth year as clerk. He works 24 hours per week on average throughout the year under the oversight of the Trustees of the OPC, as well as pastoring full-time in Chilhowie, VA. He expressed gratitude for the help from the clerk's staff: Mrs. Charlene Tipton, Mrs. Linda Foh, and Mrs. Judith Dinsmore. He also thanked Rev. John Mahaffy (Trinity OPC, Newberg, OR) for serving as the GA assistant clerk for 25 consecutive years. The minutes of the Assembly are mostly the work of Mr. Mahaffy. Assisting him is Elder Mike Shields (Mt Airy, NC) acting as clerk observer. Mr. Belfield reported preparations of the 2025 edition of the Book of Church Order (BCO), set to be printed at the beginning of the new year. The clerk serves ex officio and without vote on the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations and with vote on the Committee on Arrangements. One amendment to the BCO was approved by a majority of the presbyteries since the last Assembly, and will be in effect in 2025: a change in Book of Discipline III, 2, so that the words "unavoidable impediments" will be replaced with the word "circumstances."

The body passed amendments to the Standing Rules of the General Assembly including clarifying the language related to who may serve as the statistician of the OPC. The current statistician plans to retire next year after 39 years of service in this role. The Assembly forwarded the following refined

definition to the 91st GA: "The Statistician of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who is a servant of the denomination and particularly of the General Assembly, shall be elected to his office by the General Assembly for a one-year term. Due to his status as an officer of the General Assembly, the Statistician ordinarily shall hold an ordained governing office in the Church. In collecting and compiling statistical data for his annual report to the General Assembly, the Statistician may utilize the administrative assistance of any communicant member of the Church in good standing."

The Trustees of the OPC, represented by Elder John Hearn (Orlando, FL), presented its report. The Assembly approved the recommended budget for the General Assembly Operation Fund for 2025.

The report of the statistician was received, and Mr. Luke Brown was re-elected to that office of the General Assembly. The total membership of 33,520 persons at the end of 2023 consisted of 599 ministers, 24,645 communicant members, and 8,276 baptized children (non-communicants). This represents an increase of 897 persons (2.75 percent) from 2022's adjusted total of 32,623 members. The communicant membership net increase of 623 included 744 professions of faith and 1,163 reaffirmations of faith; offset by losses from deaths (185), net transfers (152), and discipline & erasures (947). The net increase of 259 non-communicant members (baptized children) came as the result of additions by 769 baptisms and 568 children received with parents, and of reductions by professions of faith (359), death (5), children dismissed with parents (441), and erasures (273). Morning worship in-person attendance of 25,746 in November 2023 exceeded the 2019 pre-COVID level. Sunday school attendance of 11,677 in November recovered to 94 percent of the 2019 level.

The Assembly recessed for dinner at 5:15 p.m.

Thursday Evening

The Moderator called the commissioners together after dinner, singing #100B, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell" in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Elder James Wanliss bringing greetings from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Mr. Wanliss reflected on the common history and commitments, as well as the common responsibility, shared by the FCC and the OPC.

Rev. A. Craig Troxel (Harvest OPC, San Marcos, CA), president of the Committee on Christian Education, introduced the work of the committee as it relates to the Great Commission and the central role it plays in our churches. Rev. Danny Olinger (general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education), PCA Elder John Dunahoo (Great Commission Publications), and Mr.

Winslow discussed resources available to the church. The joint venture between the PCA and OPC in forming GCP is nearing its 50th anniversary.

Rev. Archibald Allison (Emmaus OPC, Fort Collins, CO) discussed the progress of a subcommittee of the CCE tasked with proposing linguistic changes to the Westminster Standards for a potential modern English study version.

Mr. Troxel presented the committee's proposed changes to the Recommended Curriculum for Ministerial Preparation in the OPC, a non-constitutional section of the BCO. The Assembly approved the advisory committee's motion that the proposed revisions be returned to the CCE so that it can seek input from the presbyteries and their candidates and credentials committees, which was agreeable to the CCE.

The Assembly next heard the report of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. Rev. Jeremiah Montgomery (general secretary of the committee) noted that CHMCE is the oldest committee still standing in the OPC, born at the first General Assembly on June 12, 1936. Almost one in ten congregations meeting each Lord's Day is a mission work. The committee has set aside funding to support up to thirty-eight new and continuing mission works, fourteen RHMs, four church planting interns, and four special evangelistic projects. The committee plans to launch a major initiative, its revitalization program, on August 1, 2024, which will pair up congregations with experienced OPC mentors.

The Assembly recessed for the evening at 8:30 p.m.

Friday, June 21, 2024

After breakfast on Friday morning, the Assembly gathered at 8:30 a.m. The Moderator read from Psalm 133 and the brothers sang heartily #46C, "God Is Our Refuge and Strength" from the Trinity Psalter Hymnal.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Maynard Koerner from the Reformed Church in the United States who brought greetings to the Assembly from that historically German denomination. Our two bodies have shared warm fellowship over the years, taking opportunity to offer correction at times as well. The RCUS has experienced growth by every metric over the recent past. It is nearing its 300th anniversary, which will be commemorated at Mount Rushmore in June of 2025. OPC members are invited to join them at that celebration of God's faithfulness.

Rev. C. Steve McDaniel, Jr. (Calvary OPC, Glenside, PA) completed the report for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension by outlining the new revitalization program. It will focus on the goal of spiritual and ministry health through the use of the ordinary means of grace (word, sacraments, and prayer), not on specific measurements of attendance or financial numbers, though

those may follow from increased health. There was discussion from the floor of the Assembly encouraging the committee to explore greater involvement supporting youth group and prison ministry in the churches.

Next the Committee on Foreign Missions presented its report. Rev. John Van Meerbeke (Living Hope OPC, Gettysburg, PA), president of the CFM, introduced the work of the committee. General secretary Rev. Douglas Clawson exhorted the Assembly regarding the vital, life-and-death, nature of our evangelistic work in the world. He passionately encouraged the members of the Assembly to answer the call of foreign missions as many fields are understaffed. There has not been a new evangelist sent to the field in the past year.

A missionary to Asia addressed the body, explaining his work training and examining candidates for ministry, teaching in a seminary, creating and translating online resources, and church planting. The church in Asia has seen a huge increase in church officers and licentiates.

Rev. Mark Richline (missionary to Uruguay) presented on his work with the Paysons in Montevideo, Mercedes, Maldonado, Ciudad de La Costa, Las Piedras, and the new Salvos Por Gracia mission. In the many ministries of the churches, he noted that ruling elder leadership has increased reflecting growth in the congregations. There is a need for more Uruguayan pastors. Mr. Richline and his wife have decided to leave the mission field and return to the U.S. to be closer to assist with family needs.

After the break, the Assembly gathered at 10:20 a.m. singing #380, "Crown Him with Many Crowns." Rev. D. Jason Wallace (Christ Presbyterian Church, Salt Lake City, UT) prayed for the continued peaceful function of the Assembly. The Moderator introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Brian Panichelle of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. He noted the warm fellowship they share with the OPC. He also pointed out the increase of judicial matters in their highest court, the Synod, reflecting a trend in line with the spirit of the age. Major issues under discussion in the RPCNA include the question of women in the diaconate and the place of the mediatorial dominion of Christ. Rev. Ian Wright (Covenant OPC, Orland Park, IL) prayed for the RPCNA.

Rev. Charles Jackson (missionary to Uganda) reported on his work in Mbale as the only OPC minister on the field in that mission. He trains men at Knox School of Theology and helps to run the Reformation Book Room. Ninety percent of pastors in Africa have no formal theological training. Knox is settling into its new facilities, including a new library and dorm, as well as its new accreditation status. The presence of highly qualified African faculty members at Knox is a great encouragement to the students. Roughly 20 students

attend each semester.

Mr. Clawson read a resolution expressing gratitude for what the OPC has been given through the person of Rev. Dr. L. Anthony Curto. The commissioners and guests responded in standing ovation.

A question to the committee from the floor related to whether it had any opinion related to potential reasons underlying the dearth of foreign missionaries. Mr. Clawson remarked that it may be due to cultural changes in the U.S. related to fear, possibly stemming from 9/11. But the causes are unclear. Brazil and China are not experiencing this problem.

Elder Keith LeMahieu (Oostburg, WI) presented the report of the Committee on Coordination. Its work focuses on recommending to the General Assembly a combined budget for the three Worldwide Outreach Committees of Christian Education, Foreign Missions, and Home Missions and Church Extension for the succeeding year, as well as providing accounting services and support for the following: Committee on Diaconal Ministries, Committee on Ministerial Care, General Assembly, OPC Loan Fund, and Joint Venture Board for the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. The WWO budget, which was agreed upon in great unity among the three committees, passed by the Assembly, included a 1.24% increase from the previous year.

At 11:40 a.m. Rev. Zachary Simmons (Resurrection OPC, State College, PA) led the Assembly in the morning devotional from Nehemiah 6. He focused on our need to look to the Lord when we face affliction, deceit, and threat. Jesus faced such things as he went to the cross, and yet submitted himself to his accusers, even seeking for his disciples to go free upon his arrest. We must likewise imitate his focus and fearlessness as we stand at our posts.

The Assembly sang #27A, "The Lord's My Light" followed by prayer by the Moderator, and recessed for the lunch break at 12:05 p.m.

Friday Afternoon

Following lunch, the Assembly reconvened at 1:15 p.m. singing #408, "For All the Saints." Rev. Geoff Downey (Lake Sherwood OPC, Orlando, FL) prayed for the work of the Assembly.

The time of recess was set for 8:15 p.m. tonight at which point the commissioners will gather for a photograph.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Falko Drijfhout of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. The EPCEW has churches in the UK as well as in Sweden, Germany, and Switzerland. Mr. Drijfhout reflected on our shared commitments to the solas of the Reformation and his gratitude for the OPC. The EPCEW is busy with church planting efforts in what has become a barren land in England and Wales. Four churches have left the EPCEW in

recent times without constitutional warrant, seemingly spurred on by some matters being handled by erasure, an administrative act rather than judicial process, of some eleven members. This has posed a challenge to the presbytery overseeing the churches. At the Moderator's permission Mr. Drijfhout briefly exhorted the body from Josh. 21:43-45 and 1 Peter 2:9. Mr. Curto prayed for the brothers in the EPCEW.

Mr. LeMahieu presented on the Barnabas Foundation which assists in financial advice and planned giving. Christians often lack the financial literacy needed with respect to non-monetary gifts and estate planning. OPC members are invited to contact the Committee on Coordination through the "planned giving" link on OPC.ORG as we prepare for a "seven years of plenty" transfer of wealth in the next 20 years.

The report of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries was introduced by committee president, Elder Seth Long (Neon Reformed Presbyterian Church, Neon, KY). Elder David Nakhla (Calvary OPC, Glenside, PA.), who serves as the Administrator of the CDM, characterized the committee as a "band of brothers." The CDM views its work in several categories: ministering to those in need within the OPC, to those in need internationally, to those affected by disasters, to and through local deacons, to and through missionary deacons, to refugees, and through the short-term missions coordinator, Mr. Nakhla. As reported in recent years, 2021 saw a 17% increase in giving to the CDM's General Fund over the previous year. 2022 saw another 10% increase in giving over 2021. And 2023 saw yet another 7% increase in giving, bringing total contributions to the CDM's general fund to \$461,614 in 2023.

In striving to follow a presbyterian structure the CDM requires that appeals for individual aid first be presented at the local level to a board of deacons. If the need cannot be met locally, it may be presented at the regional level to the Presbytery Diaconal Committee (PDC). (Some needs that are regional in nature might originate at the regional level.) If the presbytery finds that it cannot meet the need, it may present it at the denominational level to the CDM. This process ensures that, by the time the need reaches the CDM, the local and regional bodies have had ample opportunity to examine the need, participate in the need as able, and choose to appeal to the CDM for the balance remaining. It also makes them better prepared to provide local oversight of the situation if aid is granted by the CDM.

OPC mission fields in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Uganda (two mission stations and clinic operations), and Uruguay received international mercy ministry through the CDM. The committee, at the suggestion of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch relations, sent a special gift to

the Reformed Churches in South Africa to help care for its retired ministers. The CDM, partnering with Word and Deed ministries, also sent special aid to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Northeast India as 40,000 people have been displaced across nearly 200 villages due to persecution. 359 churches have been destroyed.

Rev. Jerome "Jerry" Farnik (missionary to the Czech Republic from the Presbytery of Southern California) presented on short-term missions in Prague. "Team Praha" assists with Bible teaching and camp during July and August each year, an English camp attended by many unbelievers, a marriage conference, a youth mountain trip, "ready, set, go" VBS, and other meetings and conferences. Due in part to the history of Soviet communism, the Czech Republic is the most atheistic country in Europe. Mr. Farnik invited commissioners and their congregations to the land of John Hus to assist this work.

The report of the Committee on Ministerial Care was presented by Rev. Douglas L. Watson (Redeemer OPC, Waipahu, HI) and Rev. John Fikkert (director of the committee). Mr. Fikkert encouraged ministers to be sure to designate beneficiaries in their wills and retirement plans. He reminded the Assembly that the CMC stands ready to assist ministers in protecting against burn-out through the Retreat Grant and Sabbatical Grant programs. While not wishing to compete with medical insurance "share" plans, the CMC has arranged Blue Cross and Met Life plans available for interested ministers. The CMC now administers the Obadiah Fund which exists to care for retired ministers and their widows. "Love gifts" are sent each year drawn from interest from a fund set up in 2007.

The commissioners reconvened at 3:35 p.m. following the afternoon break, complete with ice cream provided by Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Rev. Patrick Ramsay (Nashua OPC, Edinburg, PA) opened in prayer after the singing of #448, "Union With Thee."

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Jeff Ballantine of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Northern Ireland. Mr. Ballantine shared about the commonalities between the OPC and the EPCNI. Mr. Bube and the late OPC minister Rev. Jack Sawyer, delegates from the OPC's CEIR, visited years ago and were shown an EPCNI member's family guestbook. It had been signed by J. Gresham Machen. Around the time of the birth of the OPC, W. J. Grier and his students at the theological college in Belfast were unhappy with the liberalizing direction of the teaching. They sought redress with the General Assembly, but the teaching was vindicated. Mr. Grier, who had spent time at Princeton with Machen, led a group to form a more faithful body. Ministry in more recent times there has been shaped by the Troubles as violence, bombing, and arson has affected people's

readiness to attend church. They currently face a serious shortage of men entering ministry. He exhorted the commissioners on the importance of plodding, to hold what we have and press on. Rev. Matthew Holst (Shiloh OPC, Raleigh, NC) prayed for the EPCNI.

Earlier in the day, following the report of the CFM and discussions surrounding the lack of applicants as foreign evangelists, Mr. Henes had introduced a motion regarding a day of prayer and fasting, which was then referred for perfections to the advisory committee reviewing the CFM report. It reads: "The 90th General Assembly determines to call for a day of prayer and fasting on Saturday, August 17, 2024, that the whole church may pray as one people, and call upon the Lord with one voice, that we might lament our distress and unworthiness before the Lord, confess our sin, and commit ourselves anew to the work of the Great Commission in the faithful service of the Lord our God; that we would humble ourselves, seeking the Lord's guidance and provision for the spreading of His kingdom to the ends of the earth; that we humbly implore God to raise up missionary evangelists for our foreign fields." Having posted the motion before the afternoon break to allow time for commissioners to consider it, the motion was passed without audible dissent.

Mr. Curto introduced the report of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations by reading from 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. Mr. Bube communicated the purpose of the committee: we seek to enter into and to promote closer fellowship with other churches, where it is consistent with biblical unity and truth, as a visible demonstration of the unity we already have in Christ, all to the glory of God. The written report reviews the committee's current understanding of all those bodies with which we have contact, the closest circle of which (Ecclesiastical Fellowship) includes: In North America: 1. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), 2. The Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC), 3. The Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), 4. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), 5. The Reformed Church of Quebec (l'Église Réformée du Québec) (RCQ/ERQ), 6. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), 7. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and 8. The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Overseas: 1. The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CRCN), 2. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW), 3. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland (EPCI), 4. Evangelical Reformed Church Westminster Confession (ERKWB), 5. The Free Church of Scotland (FCS), 6. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC), 7. The Independent Reformed Church of Korea (ICRK), 8. The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) (PCKK), 9. The

Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), 10. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), 11. The Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ), and 12. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCIre). There are 28 other bodies with which we share exploratory, though perhaps less close, relationships seeking greater unity.

The committee seeks to maintain these relationships in various ways, making special use of membership in ecumenical organizations, specifically the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

The committee, with sadness, has terminated the relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) because they are no longer a church of like faith and practice due to changes in that body to the qualifications for office in the church.

Mr. Bube encouraged the commissioners to practice ecumenical contact within the presbyteries with other church bodies locally.

The committee recommended that the 90th (2024) General Assembly invite the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE) into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which was passed by the Assembly.

Rev. Camden Bucey (historian of the OPC) reported on the Committee for the Historian. An in-memoriam slide presentation played showing the OP ministers who joined the church triumphant this year. Mr. Bucey exhorted the body to remember the enthusiastic commitment to Scripture which the OPC has enjoyed historically and to let that shared principle guide us through areas of disagreement. Mr. Bucey also reported on plans with respect to future publications, including a second edition of Charles Dennison's History for a Pilgrim People.

A suggestion from the floor prompted the committee to consider creating Sunday School-style materials, perhaps even a new video, covering OP history. Mr. Olinger, president of the committee, responded enthusiastically noting as well the ongoing discussions related to updating Fighting the Good Fight for republication.

Mr. Henes prayed for the committee and for the meal. Moderator Fesko declared the body to be in recess for dinner at 5:15 p.m.

Friday Evening

Following the dinner hour, the commissioners gathered again at 6:45 p.m. singing #124, "Now Israel May Say, and That In Truth." Rev. Robert Tarullo (Westminster OPC, Countryside, IL) prayed for the work of the Assembly.

Mr. Bube introduced Rev. Martin Hedman, fraternal delegate from the Presbyterian Church in America. Mr. Hedman celebrated the faithfulness of the Lord toward the

OPC, keeping it faithful. He recounted the story of First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Seattle, WA, which was the largest presbyterian church in the world when its pastor, Rev. Mark Matthews, friend of Machen but not willing to exit the church with him, died in 1939. It does not exist today. The PCA has faced challenges in recent years, including debates related to same-sex attraction, the qualifications for ordained ministry, and abuse in the church. This year the PCA General Assembly was relatively quiet. The PCA ecumenicity committee is well-disposed toward accepting the OPC's invitation to apply to the ICRC for membership, but constitutionally it must attend a meeting in person before it can move forward. He pronounced a blessing of peace on the Assembly. Mr. Nakhla prayed for the PCA.

Rev. John Mallin (chairman) introduced the report of the Committee on Appeals and Complaints. There is one judicial appeal and nine complaints on appeal presented to this Assembly.

The Assembly first took up the one judicial appeal. In summary form: this involves an appeal of the judicial decisions of a session related to holding a trial in absentia and finding a member guilty of rebellion against the civil government and violence against government personnel, which verdict was upheld on appeal to the presbytery.

Moderator Fesko dismissed the commissioners at 8:10 p.m. for the Assembly photo to be taken, after which the body would be in recess. Rev. John Mahaffy (Trinity OPC, Newberg, OR) offered prayer.

Saturday, June 22, 2024

After breakfast together on Saturday, the Assembly gathered at 8:30 a.m. The Moderator read from Psalm 66 and the Assembly sang #515 from the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, "More Than Conquerors." Rev. Daniel Dillard (Grace Reformed, Bend, OR) prayed.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Billy Barron from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. He reported the turn away from Neo-orthodoxy by the ARPC over recent decades. From the CEIR report: "The denomination is centered in the American Southeast but has begun to spread to other parts of the continent. The ARPC is a remarkable case in North American Reformed history where a denomination has been reclaimed from deformation. Over the past forty-plus years, there has been, by the grace of God, a steady reformation that is a genuine encouragement to us." One recent challenge is the dissolution by Synod of a presbytery. The ARPC views itself as "family" denomination, and as a result it can move slowly in areas of change. Recently the ARPC received Synod papers related to secret societies (freemasonry) and women in the diaconate. He exhorted the Assembly to stay faithful, to pursue peace—but not at the

expense of truth—and to preach the gospel, the whole counsel of God. Mr. Holst prayed for the ARPC.

The Assembly again took up the judicial appeal from Friday evening. The advisory committee assisted the Assembly by breaking up the appeal into four distinct specifications of error alleged against the session. Two specifications of error were denied and one was sustained. The body went into recess for the morning break at that time.

After the morning break, the Assembly joined in song, #425, "How Sweet and Awesome is the Place." Rev. Mark Green (Evangelist, Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic) prayed for the gathering.

Mr. Bube introduced Rev. Imre Szöke from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe, which ministers the gospel in Hungary, Romania, and southwest Ukraine. Mr. Szöke asked for prayer for more officers, for the expansion of the gospel, and for the protection of the purity of the small denomination. He shared a story that the first book the church worked to translate was J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* since it so acutely addressed the major issues facing the church in that land today. Mr. Curto prayed for the RPCCEE.

The body returned to consider the fourth specification of error from the judicial appeal. It was denied. Given that one specification of error against the session was sustained early this morning, the Assembly referred the matter back to the advisory committee for its advice regarding what action to take with regard to the appeal as a whole.

Next the Assembly took up Complaint 1. This is an appeal of a complaint by a session against the action of its presbytery in receiving and debating a report from its visitation committee and then using that report as grounds to appoint a committee seeking outside professional help to investigate allegations of misconduct by a session.

The time for morning devotions came at 11:40 a.m. Mr. Mallin exhorted the commissioners from 1 Tim 1:12-16. When Paul calls himself the "chief of sinners," we want to argue with him, or wonder if he is morbidly introspective. But Paul sees God's super-abounding grace against the background of his sinfulness. He speaks to those who feel their need and count themselves unworthy of the Lord's favor. Our malady is not akin to rough edges in need of rounding off; instead, it is like fungus blooming secretly in our moral fiber. If we see ourselves only as sinners, we sink into despair, and yet if we do not see ourselves as sinners, then the cure remains unknown to us. We remain unable to apprehend the remedy. And so Paul calls us to imitate him in imitating Christ, made sin for us, and leading us out of death. The body sang #440, "Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Wretched." Mr. Allison prayed. The Moderator declared the body in recess for the lunch break at 12:00 p.m.

Saturday Afternoon

The body reconvened at 1:15 p.m. singing #369, “Worship Christ, the Risen King!” Rev. Nathan Paschall (Providence Church, Madison, WI) prayed with thanks to God and for the Assembly.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. HaeShin Yoo of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, Kosin. Mr. Yoo recalled hearing OPC missionary Rev. Bruce Hunt preach in fluent Korean when he was a child. Mr. Hunt's ministry from 1946 - 1976 was foundational for the PCKK, which now has over 2,000 churches in South Korea. But they face a challenge today of a decrease in attendance and missionaries sent to foreign fields. Mr. Bube prayed for the PCKK.

The Assembly then returned to Complaint 1. Having heard from the complainant (through a representative from another presbytery) and the presbytery, commissioners asked questions of the representatives and heard speeches from the floor on both sides of the issue. Next, the advisory committee brought its recommendation: “That the General Assembly deny Complaint 1 brought on appeal. Ground: 1. In receiving, debating and acting on its committee's report the presbytery was properly exercising its power to 'visit particular churches for the purpose of inquiring into their state and of taking proper measures to insure that the evils which may have arisen in them shall be redressed.' (FG XIV.5)”

The Assembly denied the complaint.

Next the Assembly took up Complaint 2 involving the same parties as Complaint 1. In brief, Complaint 2 is an appeal of a complaint of the session against the action of its presbytery in adopting a recommendation to appoint a committee seeking help from a professional, non-ecclesiastical, third party—thus surrendering its jurisdictional power of inquiry—in order to properly investigate allegations of misconduct by the session.

The Assembly heard presentations from the complainant and from the presbytery.

The Assembly went into recess at 3:20 p.m. at the call of Moderator Fesko.

Following the afternoon break, the Assembly reconvened at 3:45 p.m., singing #230, “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Rev. Brad Peppo (Wilmington Reformed Church, Dayton, OH) prayed for the work of the body.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Patrick Jok Ding Wic who brought greetings from the Sudanese Reformed Churches. Mr. Jok reflected on the uniqueness of his hometown, Juba, South Sudan, as the only world city with no stoplights. Though this marks 10 years of fraternal relations, this is the first visit to an OPC General Assembly from the SRC. Corruption, crime, warlords, polygamy, and famine afflict the society in which the SRC ministers. Mr. Jok

asked the Moderator to prompt the congregations of the OPC to pray for the SRC. Mr. Clawson prayed for our brothers.

Returning to the consideration of Complaint 2, commissioners raised questions to those representing the complainant and the presbytery. The advisory committee then brought its recommendation: “That General Assembly deny Complaint 2 on appeal. Grounds: 1. A presbytery is free to seek the wisdom and counsel of others, particularly in areas where it recognizes its need. 2. The complaint confuses and conflates non-ecclesiastical entities with civil authorities/magistrates. Presbytery did not seek enforcement or protection by the civil authorities, but assistance in its own inquiry. 3. Seeking the wisdom and counsel of others, even extensively, did not constitute a surrender of the power of inquiry properly belonging to the presbytery and which they explicitly retained.” There was a minority report of the advisory committee recommending that the Assembly sustain the complaint.

The Assembly recessed at 5:35 p.m. and will return to business Monday morning after a day of worship, fellowship, and rest on the Lord's Day. Rev. Jonathan Cruse (Community Presbyterian Church, Kalamazoo, MI) offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

Sunday, June 23, 2024

On the Lord's Day, commissioners enjoyed rest from the business of the Assembly by worshipping with nearby congregations of the OPC, followed by fellowship lunches. At 6:30 p.m. members of the Assembly gathered again on the campus of Seattle Pacific University for an evening worship service led by members of the Presbytery of the Northwest Rev. Daniel Dillard (Grace Reformed, Bend, OR) and Rev. Robert Van Kooten (Sovereign Grace OPC, Oak Harbor, WA) who preached from 2 Kings 13:10-25, “A Dead Prophet and a Living Word.”

Monday, June 24, 2024

The Moderator called the Assembly to order at 8:30 a.m. and read from Romans 11:33-36. The Assembly sang #121A, “I Lift My Eyes Up to the Hills” from the Trinity Psalter Hymnal and Mr. Peppo prayed.

Mr. Bube introduced Rev. Kevin Backus, the fraternal delegate from the Bible Presbyterian Church, who has attended many OPC General Assemblies. He is accompanied this year by BPC pastor, Rev. Tito Lyro. Notable goings on in the BPC include the removal of the non-binding 1903 Declaratory Statement, amending the Book of Discipline to distinguish between private and public offenses, as well as the adoption of a resolution on Gender Dysphoria and Transgenderism. Mr. Backus asked for prayer for their church plants in Myanmar. The BPC is thankful for its Western Reformed Seminary just down the road from this

meeting of the Assembly. Though the BPC and OPC separated in the early days after the church's formation in 1936, our reunion through fraternal relations some 30 years ago brings great joy to the BPC. The OPC remains its closest sister church. He encouraged the OPC to keep going, studying issues for itself, in the face of the worldly patterns around us. Mr. Nakhla prayed for the BPC.

The Moderator then presented proposals to streamline our deliberations to help the Assembly finish its business by the close of the meeting on Tuesday night. They were moved and adopted.

The order of the day to take up remaining overtures came before the Assembly.

Overture 1 is a request for the General Assembly to amend the name of the Presbytery of New Jersey to the Presbytery of New Jersey and Puerto Rico effective September 28, 2024. There are now three churches in Puerto Rico, and the character of the presbytery has significantly been shaped by those relationships. This change would help solidify those connections and the witness of the presbytery. The advisory committee was silent. The overture was approved by the Assembly without audible dissent and to applause by the body.

Overture 2 is a request from a presbytery for the General Assembly's advice regarding when and if those with serious sin and/or criminal history might be considered to serve in ordained office in the church. This includes such grievous sins as murder, sexual assault, and offenses requiring a man to register as a sex offender. The advisory committee made two recommendations. The first was: "That the General Assembly adopt the following statement: 'In light of the transformative and renewing power of the gospel (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Ephesians 2:1–10, Titus 3:3–7), and in consideration of the biblical examples of Moses, David, and the Apostle Paul, we affirm that those with a criminal past can serve faithfully in ordained office in Christ's church. However, there are some crimes and some contexts in which ordination should not be pursued, due to the scandalous nature of some sins, and the necessity for ordained officers to be exemplary in character, above reproach, and well thought of even by unbelievers. This decision must ultimately be left to the wisdom of local sessions and/or presbyteries, who ought to ask the Lord of the harvest to provide men fitting to rule His church.'"

The advisory committee made a second recommendation, amended by the body, and in summary form: To elect a study committee of three ministers and two ruling elders appointed by the Moderator to study the matter, to offer recommendations to the presbytery, and to report back to the 91st General Assembly. It was approved. Rev. Todd Smith (Faith Bible Church OPC, Brick, NJ) prayed for the

matters contained in the overtures.

The Assembly returned to consider Complaint 2. The Assembly denied the complaint.

Complaint 3 came before the Assembly. It involves the same parties as Complaints 1 and 2. In brief it is an appeal of a complaint by a session against the action of its presbytery for entering into a specific contract with a specific outside organization through its committee acting effectively as a commission. The complainant alleges that the presbytery thereby abused its discretion with regard to timing; contradicted what the committee/commission was authorized to do; and failed to respect the liberties (Form of Government XIV.5) and preserve the rights (Book of Discipline I.2) of the session.

Rev. Andrew Miller (member of the Committee on Appeals and Complaints) presented for the committee guiding the Assembly through the standing and orderliness of the matters being presented to the body.

The Moderator declared the body in recess at 10:00 a.m.

At 10:20 a.m. the body reconvened, singing #446, "Be Thou My Vision." Rev. Francis VanDelden (New Hope OPC, Frederick, MD) sought God's help in prayer for the Assembly's work.

Mr. Bube introduced fraternal delegate Rev. Kurt Vetterli from the Evangelical Reformed Church Westminster Confession. This is his ninth visit to an OPC General Assembly. The church ministers in Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. The ERKWB, abbreviated according to its German name, enjoys warm relations with the OPC and has received our delegates in recent memory. A new church in Munich brings great encouragement. Mr. Vetterli is especially heartened by the presence of Mr. Curto, now residing in Europe, assisting in Rankweil, Austria; St. Galen and Basel, Switzerland. Mr. Vetterli spoke words of blessing and encouragement to the body to keep giving our special witness in the U.S. Mr. Curto prayed for the brothers.

The Assembly returned to Complaint 3. Representatives of the complainant and the presbytery made their presentations and answered questions from the floor. The advisory committee recommended that the complaint of a session against its presbytery not be sustained. The Assembly debated the matter.

Complaint 3 was sustained.

The Assembly next turned to the morning devotional at 11:40 a.m. The commissioners sang #67B, "O God, Show Mercy to Us," after which Mr. Allison preached from 2 Corinthians 10:1–6. He directed the commissioners to consider that final battle and deliverance leading to our heavenly joy. This comes about by God's means. But now around us we see carnal weapons used even to preach the gospel: the prosperity gospel, philosophical/expert

arguments, eloquent falsehoods, entertainment in the church, and a trance-like appeal of the preacher's personality. But what are God's weapons?: The clear preaching of the word of God, telling it like it is; believing, earnest prayer; genuine compassion; a love for souls and a longing to see them as the Lord's; the serious study of God's work, expounded for the church; a godly example. These are insufficient in the analysis of Mr. Worldly Wiseman. But the Lord uses them for the advancement of his kingdom. They are mighty for pulling down strongholds such as: ignorance of the Bible; prejudice against God's creative power in favor of atheistic theories; philosophical captivity; and modernist biblical interpretation. But as Spurgeon said, the Bible is like a lion. It needs only to be let out of its cage against such strongholds and attacks. We need God's converting power to take us from rebels to surrendered captives to King Jesus, reconciled to God.

The Moderator declared the body in recess for lunch.

Monday Afternoon

Following lunch, the Assembly reconvened at 1:15 p.m. singing #417, "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun." Mr. Van Kooten prayed.

Mr. Bube introduced Rev. Malan van Rhyn fraternal delegate from the Reformed Churches in South Africa to tell the Assembly what the Lord is doing in its midst. He read Revelation 1:7 and affirmed that the Lord reigns over his church in South Africa: "We expect the Lord." The RCSA (also known as the GKSA) has had just one seminary, the Theological School Potchefstroom. A recent decision allows faculty appointed by a university, and so opens the instruction of the church's theological students to those who are not Reformed professors. This posed a problem for the church, and the RCSA Synod has taken steps to set up a new school, the Reformed Theological Academy. Mr. van Rhyn thanked the OPC for its love gift to the RCSA for the support of its retired pastors. Rev. Brian Wingard (Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota) prayed for the RCSA.

Since Complaint 3 was sustained, the Assembly has next to consider the amends sought by the complainant. The advisory committee recommended the following amends: "That the presbytery take all appropriate steps to restore the good names of the church and its officers." The Assembly referred the amends back to its advisory committee to confer with all parties to see if they are agreeable.

The Assembly next considered Complaint 6 as it involves the same parties as Complaints 1-3. In Complaint 6 the session charges its presbytery with error in failing to dismiss charges against the session's pastor which were filed more than two years after commission of the alleged offense, despite

wholly inadequate evidence of "unavoidable impediments" to earlier filing of said charges (Book of Discipline III, 2). In other words, at the heart of this complaint is the two-year limit on filing charges.

The Assembly heard presentations from the complainant and the presbytery, followed by questions from the floor.

The advisory committee recommended that the Assembly deny Complaint 6. Its grounds were: 1. The complaint demands more of the presbytery in its evaluation of the evidence than Book of Discipline III, 2 requires. The complaint insists on, "an affirmative finding"; BD III, 2 provides, "unless it appears that unavoidable impediments have prevented" earlier filing. 2. The advisory committee received and reviewed the report of the presbytery's preliminary investigation committee that described in considerable detail the circumstances that prevented an earlier filing of the charges. The advisory committee also reviewed the minutes of the presbytery meeting at which, after a lengthy debate, the presbytery determined that there were unavoidable impediments that prevented the earlier filing of charges. The advisory committee therefore believes the claim of the complaint that there was "no evidence beyond mere undocumented assertions by the accusers" to be unjustified.

The Assembly debated the matter.

The Moderator declared the Assembly in recess for the afternoon break at 3:15 p.m.

The Assembly reconvened at 3:35 p.m. singing #341, "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed." Rev. Phil Proctor (Sterling OPC, Sterling, VA) prayed for clarity and for God's grace that we might do what is right.

Mr. Bube introduced the final fraternal delegate, Rev. Jack Schoeman from the Free Reformed Churches of North America. He extended warm greetings from the FRCNA which stretch across Canada, mostly in Ontario, as well as in the U.S. They are the sister churches of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands—or the CGK—as well as the Heritage Reformed Church, whose seminary the federation uses. The FRCNA are withdrawing from a mission work in Guatemala and directing efforts instead toward Thailand. Mr. Tarullo prayed for the FRCNA.

The Assembly denied Complaint 6 in the following language: "That the General Assembly deny Complaint 6 on appeal without prejudice as to whether the two-year limit (BD III, 2) may be raised upon future judicial appeal."

The Assembly next considered amends related to the one specification of error that was sustained by the Assembly in the judicial complaint. The advisory committee recommended that the Assembly remit the case to the session with the instruction that it vacate its judgment against the member and hold a new trial after a verdict is

reached in the civil case concerning his actions on a specified date. The Assembly approved the amends. Mr. Winslow prayed for the matters related to the judicial appeal.

Complaint 4 next came before the Assembly. This is an appeal of a complaint by a member against his session regarding its position paper entitled “Can a Woman Teach a Mixed Sunday School Class?” that was sent to the congregation. This study paper set forth the session's view on women, as part of the general office of believer, being biblically permitted to teach a mixed class of adult men and women in settings outside of divine worship (like Sunday School and other Christian educational opportunities). The paper sees prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 relating to authoritative office.

The complainant and representatives of the session presented their positions and entertained questions from the floor. The complainant drew distinctions between peer teaching in a one-on-one context as opposed to authoritative teacher-group teaching.

The order of the day arrived, and Rev. Andrew Canavan (Corona OPC, Corona, CA) prayed for the Lord's blessing over the meal and time of fellowship. The Moderator declared the Assembly in recess for dinner at 5:15 p.m.

Monday Evening

At 6:45 p.m., following dinner, the Assembly was once again called to order singing #452, “Rock of Ages, Cleft For Me.” Mr. Simmons prayed for the deliberations of the Assembly.

The order of the day arose to hear the reports of the Temporary Committee to Examine Presbyterian Records and the Temporary Committee to Examine Standing Committee Records. Their recommendations were adopted, including: “That the General Assembly send the following communication to the clerks of the presbyteries and recommend that they send the same to the clerks of session within their bounds: every minister and a commissioned ruling elder from every session of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has the duty and obligation to attend all stated meetings of their presbytery. This duty is implied in Form of Government XIV, 3, 'Meetings of the presbytery shall be composed, insofar as possible, of all the ministers on the roll and one ruling elder from each congregation commissioned by the respective sessions.' When officers are unable to fulfill this obligation, it is proper respect out of duty and Christian courtesy to request the presbytery to provide an excuse for their absence.” Elder John Terpstra (Austin, TX) prayed, asking for God's blessing on the continued integrity and accuracy of our record-keeping so that the wondrous works of the Lord would be preserved for future generations.

The Assembly returned to the matter of Complaint 4. The

advisory committee did not recommend that the General Assembly sustain the complaint on the following grounds: “The complaint did not convince a majority of the committee that [the session] is not entitled to hold its exegetical conclusions on this matter.”

The Assembly sustained Complaint 4.

The following amends were approved: “1. That the session retract this position paper. 2. That the session commit to allowing only men to teach mixed adult Bible studies or Sunday School classes that involve teaching Scripture. 3. That the session notify the congregation of the above actions.”

Rev. Craig Troxel (Harvest OPC, San Marcos, CA) prayed for the matter and the parties involved.

After a 10-minute break the Moderator called the meeting to back order at 8:15 p.m., and the commissioners sang the Doxology. Rev. Jonathan Hutchison (Reformation OPC, Morgantown, WV) prayed for the Assembly.

The Assembly returned to the matter of deciding on amends for Complaint 3, one specification of which was sustained. The advisory committee made its recommendations. The Assembly adopted the following amends, in summary: That the presbytery acknowledge and record in its minutes its error in contracting with the outside organization to investigate and communicate this action to the session filing the complaint. That the presbytery refrain from using in any way the executive summary and recommendations generated by the outside organization (in fulfillment of the presbytery's contract) in relation to the allegations concerning the members of the session and take all appropriate steps to restore the good name of the members of the session. Rev. Michael Myers (Heritage OPC, Royton, GA) prayed for the parties involved in this series of complaints.

Complaint 5 next came before the body. In sum, this is an appeal of a complaint by a member against the actions of his session relating to the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against him. The member charges the session with error “for improperly initiating judicial proceedings against [him], carrying out the proceedings in a misleading manner, violating decorum due in judicial proceedings, and ... failing to follow the rules of the Book of Church Order,” as well as “piercing his headship as a husband,” and breaching his confidentiality.

The Committee on Appeals and Complaints presented its report noting that the session had understood the member to have come as his own accuser, but then halted formal proceedings and rescinded its judicial actions when the member raised objections. There is therefore a question regarding the extent to which the complaint is moot. The complaint focuses on alleged errors during the time the

session initiated discipline.

Representatives of the complainant and the presbytery gave presentations and answered questions from the floor. The advisory committee recommended denying the complaint. The Assembly then debated the complaint.

Complaint 5 was denied by the Assembly.

Mr. Winslow prayed for the parties involved. At 9:42 p.m. Moderator Fesko declared the Assembly in recess until 8:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

The commissioners of the Ninetieth General Assembly gathered on Tuesday, the final day of the Assembly, at 8:30 a.m. and sang #145D, "God, My King, Thy Might Confessing." Rev. Charles Oliveira (Westchester OPC, Rochelle, NY) prayed for God's blessing.

Elder Mark Stumpf (Mifflinburg, PA) presented information on the OPC Loan Fund.

Next the Assembly considered Complaint 7. In brief it is an appeal of a complaint by two members against the action of their session in adopting the position that it "should not admit into membership any who are unwilling to give the sign of covenant baptism to their children." The complaint focuses on the categorical refusal to admit such rather than the right, in specific cases and for compound reasons, to refuse membership to those unwilling to present their children for baptism, which the complainants affirm. The complaint alleges that the session's position is unbiblical, unconstitutional, and unwise.

The Committee on Appeals and Complaints noted: "A version of this question came before the Thirty-second General Assembly: Does the Constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church permit church sessions to receive into communicant membership those who refuse to present their children for baptism? The Thirty-third General Assembly declared that the admission to membership of those who cannot in good conscience present their children for baptism is a matter for judgment by sessions. All things else being equal, a session may determine to receive or refuse into membership those who cannot in good conscience present their children for baptism. The position of the Thirty-third General Assembly has become something of a precedent in the OPC, though it should be noted that the Ninetieth General Assembly, as the highest judicatory of the OPC, is not bound by that precedent."

One of the complainants as well as representatives of the session and presbytery—complaints against a session which appear on appeal before General Assembly have already been heard at the presbytery level—gave presentations and answered questions from the floor. The session acknowledged that its position is not absolutely

rigid. The advisory committee recommended that the Assembly deny the complaint.

The Assembly debated the matter and denied Complaint 7. The Moderator declared the body in recess at 10:00 a.m. for the morning break.

Upon reconvening at 10:20 a.m. the commissioners sang #433, "Amazing Grace!" and Mr. Long prayed.

Mr. Winslow offered prayer for the matters pertaining to Complaint 7.

The Assembly next considered Complaint 9. This complaint by a former OPC minister, now a member, charges his presbytery with error in its decision to consider divesting him of office without censure. The complaint does not concern the presbytery's decision to divest but its decision to contemplate divestiture. The motion to consider divestiture came as a recommendation of the presbytery's shepherding committee, on the grounds that the minister appeared to lack certain gifts requisite of a minister of the gospel. The committee had received a letter a month earlier signed by five members of the presbytery raising concerns regarding the gifts requisite of the man as a minister and requesting consideration of divestiture (Form of Government XXVI, 3.a). The heart of the complaint alleged that judicial matters, including settled formal discipline, as well as the administrative act of divestiture were mingled inappropriately.

The complainant and representatives of the presbytery made presentations and answered questions from the floor. The advisory committee unanimously recommended that the Assembly deny the complaint.

The Assembly debated the matter and denied Complaint 9. Mr. Wright asked if the Moderator might impress upon the complainant to hear the counsel and judgment of his presbytery and, now, the General Assembly. Moderator Fesko did so, encouraging the complainant against bitterness, to see the hand of the sovereign Lord in hard providences, and to know that it is God's love to him to conform him to his Savior.

Mr. Winslow prayed for the parties connected to Complaint 9.

The body next considered Complaint 8. This is an appeal of a complaint, originally filed by an elder on sabbatical, against the action of his session in approving to ask a ruling elder emeritus to resume voting in light of Form of Government XXVI, 7, which complaint was upheld on appeal to the presbytery. The session now complains against the presbytery for sustaining the complaint.

The body stood in recess for lunch at 12:00 p.m. Rev. Robert Arendale (Redeemer OPC, Beavercreek, OH) prayed for the commissioners' fellowship over the break.

Tuesday Afternoon

Following the lunch break, the commissioners reconvened at 1:15 p.m. and sang #228, "Hast Thou Not Known, Hast Thou Not Heard." Elder Luke Denny (Cincinnati, OH) prayed.

Rev. John Shaw (Grace OPC, Columbus, OH) presented a protest, to be filed with the stated clerk, against the actions of the General Assembly with respect to the approval of amends number two after Complaint 4 was sustained.

The Assembly returned to consider Complaint 8. Representatives of the session and the presbytery made their presentations and answered questions from the floor.

It is the original complaint filed against the session that is before this Assembly. Thus voting to sustain would be to affirm the sustaining vote of the presbytery, and voting to deny would be to overrule the judgment of the presbytery.

The advisory committee recommended that the complaint be sustained on the following grounds: "Performing, on occasion, the functions of that office" Form of Government XXVI, 7 does not have in view a retired elder being returned to service on the session, by the session, as a voting member, unless by way of congregational vote (FG XXV, 2) and installation (FG XXV, 7). There were no 'extraordinary circumstances' (FG XXV, 1) that would have prevented the congregation from re-electing their emeritized elder and the session properly installing him. The advisory committee notes with thanksgiving that the [session] peaceably complied with the [presbytery's] decision to sustain [the member's] complaint, and the amends granted, even while filing this appeal."

The Assembly debated and then sustained Complaint 8.

Mr. Winslow prayed for the parties involved in Complaint 8. The business from the Committee on Appeals and Complaints having concluded, Rev. Larry Westerveld (Trinity OPC, Hatboro, PA) prayed for the health of the church.

Next the Assembly heard the report of the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel. Elder Michael Cloy (Marion, NC) presented. This committee of the GA labors especially in credentialing chaplains for the OPC and several other Reformed churches. Those chaplains are sent out by the presbyteries as evangelists. The committee encourages the presbyteries not to let these men slip through the cracks of our life together. Mr. Arendale prayed for the committee.

The Special Committee to Help Equip Officers to Protect the Flock next presented its report to the Assembly. The committee assembled two handbooks in its mandate—"Protecting the Flock against Sexual Predation" and "Strategies for the Protection of the Flock against Domestic Violence"—as well as a sample child protection policy, a short guide to preparing to bring a charge in the OPC, a recommended safety checklist for sessions, as well as a table of citations from the Westminster Standards relevant to this subject.

The Moderator declared the Assembly in recess at 3:15 p.m. for the afternoon break.

The Moderator called the Assembly to order at 3:35 p.m. The commissioners and guests sang #447, "Christ, of All My Hopes the Ground" and Mr. Falk prayed.

Representatives of the Special Committee to Help Equip Officers to Protect the Flock answered questions from the floor.

With respect to the committee's report, including the resources it produced, the Assembly approved the committee's recommendation to communicate the report to the churches for study and edification. The committee was dissolved with thanks.

Mr. Arendale offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the work of the committee.

Rev. Stewart Lauer (Presbytery of Ohio) presented a response to the protest filed by Mr. Shaw regarding the second amends to the sustained Complaint 4.

Elder David Mahaffy (Oak Harbor, WA) presented the report of the Committee on Arrangements. At the suggestion of the advisory committee, the Assembly applauded in thanksgiving for the work of the Committee on Arrangements in serving the Assembly so well in Seattle, WA. The Assembly approved the recommendation: "That the 2025 (91st) General Assembly be held at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois, starting at 7:00 p.m. on June 4 and ending no later than noon on June 10." The field of nominees having been set by the Committee on Levity, Rev. Everett Henes (Hillsdale OPC, Hillsdale, MI) and Rev. Steve Igo (Cedar Presbyterian Church, Jenison, MI) topped the field for the coveted Jack-in-the-Box award, this year awarded by commissioner vote.

The Trustees' proposed budget and askings were approved. Mr. Belfield prayed for the Trustees.

Rev. Christopher Malamisuro (Good Shepherd OPC, Cincinnati, OH) offered the resolution of thanks, which was approved by the body.

Regarding the matter of naming the newly created committee stemming from Overture 2, the Assembly approved the name, "The Special Committee on Criminal History and Officer Qualifications."

At the close of the Assembly twenty other commissioners had joined Mr. Shaw's protest.

The Assembly approved the final reading of the minutes by the assistant clerk.

The Assembly rose and was closed in prayer by the Moderator. The Assembly joined in singing the Doxology. Moderator Fesko declared the body dissolved at 5:25 p.m. to be convened at 7:00 p.m. on June 4, 2025 at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois.

Gleanings from the Sudanese Reformed Churches Report

2. Fraternal Visits

SRC is a young Reformed denomination advancing Reformed faith in midst of other Christian denominations that have better resources and capacity in Sudan and South Sudan. Intentionally, it has been her prayers to seek Reformed biblical churches to relate to so that she is able to build her Reformed capacity. In God's providence, her prayers are being answered and fulfilled through International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

David Nkala, the OPC General Secretary for Diaconal Ministries together with two ministers from Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) paid a fraternal visit to Juba between 17th - 19th February 2024. For David Nkala this was a fourth time to visit SRC in Juba. For Rev. Lee Shelnutt and John Alexander Pettett from ARPC it is their first fraternal ecclesiastical visit to SRC in Juba, South Sudan. While in Juba they visited Internal Displaced Persons



David Nkala, Alex and Lee together with some SRC leaders visiting Tree of Life Sudanese Reformed Church, Gueri, Juba

(IDPs) camp in Juba, four SRC congregations' sites (Grace, Tree of Life, Ebenezer and Bethel). In Bethel, and Grace, they inspected SRC schools. On the following Lord's Day Rev. Lee Alan Shelnuut preached and taught God's word at Bethel. They worshipped God and fellowshiped with Reformed family. It was indeed a great celebration of our shared Christian Reformed unity in Christ Jesus. Warm-heartedly, SRC appreciates their sacrifice, love and faith in visiting Reformed family in Juba, South Sudan.



The fraternal team visiting IDPs camp in Juba



Alex visiting IDPs camp in Juba for first time

Synod URCNA 2024

Monday, June 17, 2024

Scripture, prayer, singing, and warm fellowship marked the start of the 13th Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Convening on Monday evening, June 17, delegates gathered at the Escondido United Reformed Church in Escondido California.

Prior to the official start of Synod Escondido, Rev. Chris Gordon led delegates and guests in a prayer service that included the reading of Scripture, the singing of several Psalms and hymns, and corporate prayer for the work of Synod. Rev. Gordon offered encouragement to the brothers by preaching on Hebrews 10:32-39.

Following the prayer service, Rev. Gordon called the assembly to order on behalf of the Consistory of Escondido URC, which served as the Convening Consistory for Synod. He was ably assisted in these opening exercises by the URCNA Stated Clerk, Rev. Ralph Pontier.

Following opening devotions, a roll call of delegates, and the affirmation by synodical delegates of their commitment to the Reformed confessions, the assembly addressed several important preliminary matters. These included the adoption of the provisional agenda, approval of advisory committee assignments, and the adoption of the proposed time schedule.

To lead the assembly, delegates elected Rev. Bradd Nymeyer (First Chino URC in Chino, CA) as Chairman; Rev. John Bouwers (Hope Reformed Church in Brampton, ON) as Vice Chairman; Rev. James Sinke (Bethel URC in Woodstock, ON) as First Clerk; and Rev. Doug Barnes (Grace URC in Alto, MI) as Second Clerk.

After the officers were seated, the Chairman expressed appreciation for the leadership of Rev. Gordon as Chairman pro tem and offered instruction and encouragement for the delegates as they prepared to get some rest prior to tackling the work of the churches in the week ahead. He urged delegates and guests alike to pray fervently for God's blessing upon the chairmen and reporters of Synod's advisory committees, the executive committee, and the delegates.

The assembly was recessed after a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession, acknowledging the sovereign care of our gracious God, whom this assembly of the churches will strive to serve.

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Synod Escondido 2024 made good use of its first full day of labor, putting significant portions of its agenda to rest.

The day began with Rev. Mark Stromberg expounding on

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, then leading the delegates in prayer and singing. Delegates who arrived after Monday's opening session were welcomed and affirmed their commitment to the truth expressed in the Reformed confessions.

Delegates spent the rest of the morning working in advisory committees, striving to summarize and provide recommended actions for portions of the Synod's agenda.

The afternoon session began with devotions led by Rev. Joel Dykstra, who briefly expounded on Matthew 16:16-18 before leading the delegates in prayer and singing.

The Rev. Dr. Malan Van Rhyn brought greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). Rev. Van Rhyn called the assembly to recognize that the struggles of this age are not unexpected, urging the brothers to press on in faithfully ministering to God's people. He provided updates regarding struggles and developments within the GKSA, urging the URCNA to continue steadfastly in its labors for the Lord and His church. Rev. Jason Tuinstra responded and led the Synod in prayer for the GKSA.

A host of business matters were addressed during the remainder of the afternoon. Delegates handled several overtures calling for changes to the URC Church Order.

Among these, they approved a proposal to amend Arts. 20 and 26 of the Church Order, which would ensure that all decisions of church assemblies – including action taken during closed-to-the-public “executive sessions” – are openly published. Also approved were most provisions of an overture calling for editorial changes to the Introduction and to Arts. 11 through 46 of the Church Order. These changes aimed at improving the internal consistency of the Church Order's language. The assembly declined to approve a request to make a minor change to Appendix 8 of the Church Order.

Some of the afternoon session was spent discussing the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC). For the past 17 years, the URCNA has been an associate member of the PRCC, with the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, IL, serving as the URC's liaison. This year, the Faith Consistory urged applying for full membership in the PRCC – both because of the increasing challenges facing the chaplaincy, and because of the addition of a second URC chaplain. After hearing from Rev. Andrew Spriensma, who has served as an Army chaplain for 17 years, this recommendation was approved. Synod expressed appreciation for the Faith URC Consistory's 17 years of labor as liaison consistory to the PRCC and for Rev.

Spriensma's labors ministering to the spiritual needs of American soldiers.

Gratitude also was expressed for the Consistory of Grace URC of Waupun, WI, which has served for 17 years as the Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee. Looking abroad, the assembly approved maintaining ecumenical relationships with six church federations, including the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia, the Evangelical Reformed Church in India, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Sudanese Reformed Churches. These are churches with which the URC is continuing to pursue ecumenical relations, without yet having entered fully into a Phase 2, or sister-church, relationship.

The delegates declined a request to create a study committee that would have been charged with developing guidelines for churches facing a pastoral vacancy. The advisory committee addressing this overture noted that the concerns expressed in the request were quite broad and could be better addressed in other ways.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in advisory committee work.

After their evening meal, the delegates reconvened for devotions led by Rev. Bill Pols. Having called the brothers to sing Psalm 46, Rev. Pols extolled our matchless King, Jesus Christ, from Revelation 19:11-16. He then led the assembly in prayer.

The floor next was given to Mr. Falko Drijfhout, a fraternal delegate from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. Mr. Drijfhout provided a brief overview of the life and history of the EPCEW – a federation of churches which labor in a spiritually barren land. He noted with gladness the church plants in their midst, describing some of their outreach; and he requested prayer for the challenges that our brothers face in England and Wales and beyond. Rev. Peter Van't Hoff responded and led the assembly in prayer for the EPCEW.

Next up was Rev. Rob Van Doodewaard from the Free Reformed Churches in North America. Rev. Van Doodewaard brought greetings on behalf of the FRCNA, noting the commonalities and shared relationships between our church federations. He noted the need we have for one another, due to the deepening darkness of our culture. Rev. Joel Dykstra responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the FRCNA.

Synod turned its attention to missionary labors during a significant part of Tuesday evening. Appreciation was expressed for the labor of Foreign Missions Coordinator Rev. Richard Bout, with Synod approving a proposal to fund sending his wife along with him on up to two trips to visit

mission works annually.

Looking to the URC's home missions efforts, Synod approved adoption of a second edition of the URCNA church planting manual, *How to Plant a Reformed Church*. The assembly decided to publish this manual electronically for free distribution, as well as printing 300 copies via Reformed Fellowship, Inc. at a cost of \$2500. The delegates agreed to urge the churches to give prayerful consideration to the development of classical (or regional) home missionaries.

A significant volume of work was completed by the assembly during its first full day of labor. At the close of the day's deliberations, Rev. Matthew Nuiver walked the delegates through Titus 2:11-3:8, reminding them of the blessing of fellowship that they enjoy, as they share the unthinkable rich blessing of serving Christ together.

The assembly concluded in prayer and song, recessing until 8 a.m.

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

The business of Synod Escondido slowed on Wednesday, as delegates engaged in times of careful deliberation and prayer.

Unlike the first day of the URCNA's Synod Escondido – which was marked by a flurry of action – the second day was characterized by discussion of matters that required much careful thought and debate. Sprinkled throughout the deliberation was Scripture, prayer, and heart-stirring song. Wednesday began with devotions by Rev Greg Lubbers, who led the assembly to see from Psalm 65 the gospel optimism that should characterize our ministry, our speech, our attitudes, and our very faces. He led the brothers in prayer, as well as in singing Psalm 65.

The delegates also spent time in prayer for particular needs within the churches. The brothers prayed for healing and comfort for those who suffer and grieve.

Two guests from like-minded church federations brought greetings to the assembly on Wednesday morning.

The first was Rev. Andrew Nugteren from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Rev. Nugteren provided a brief introduction to the CRCA, celebrating the unity between our federations. He requested prayer regarding the spiritual pressure Australian culture is exerting on Christians to conform to ungodly views, and also for the raising up of a new generation of ministers. Rev. Nugteren encouraged emeritus ministers from the URCNA to consider filling vacant pulpits of the CRCA. Rev. Stephen Wetmore responded and led the brothers in prayer for the CRCA.

A bit later, Mr. Wayne Johnson brought greetings on behalf of the Reformed Church of the United States. He reported on the recently held synod of the RCUS, which was quite encouraging, and described some recent changes these churches have adopted. Mr. Johnson also recalled some of

the rich history bound up in the RCUS, which next year anticipates celebrating its 300th anniversary. Rev. Harold Miller responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the RCUS.

Significant deliberations were held during the morning session regarding a proposal to receive into the URCNA a church from Cape Town, South Africa. While the delegates expressed deep appreciation for the leaders of this church, significant concerns were raised regarding the difficulties implicit in such a long-distance relationship, as well as the implications arising from this precedent. After lengthy discussion, the assembly voted to not receive the church, although the representatives of the church which were present were warmly welcomed to participate in the assembly.

The men spent a bit of time receiving reports from the convening consistory and from the committee charged with reviewing credentials of synodical delegates. They then entered into discussion regarding two overtures that would have changed the manner in which synodical assemblies are held. This discussion was cut short by the clock, as the lunch hour drew near.

Rev. Richard Kuiken led the brothers in a brief meditation on Jeremiah 6:16, along with prayer and song, prior to lunch. He emphasized the importance of simply inviting acquaintances to worship, where they will encounter the ancient paths of God's truth.

After lunch, Rev. Phil Vos led the brothers in considering the truth of God's Word from Psalm 84, which emphasizes the blessing of drawing near to the Lord in the midst of our weakness. Rev. Vos then led the men in prayer and song.

Rev. Patrick Jok from the Sudanese Reformed Churches greeted the assembly, rejoicing that the Lord allowed him to be present despite a challenging time of travel. Rev. Jok lamented the violence and instability that has afflicted South Sudan, yet he noted the Lord's blessing in seeing growth in the churches and Christian schools. Rev. Jok also presented a request to the URCNA from the SRC for coaching and mentoring, so that a good foundation can be laid for their churches. Rev. John Van Eyk responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the SRC.

Delegates spent most of the early afternoon wrapping up advisory committee work, reconvening in mid-afternoon.

Upon resuming their meeting, the delegates heard from Rev. Jonathan Kruis, who brought greetings on behalf of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. He expressed appreciation for the fellowship between the RPCNA and the URCNA, particularly in light of the pessimism and discouragement that sometimes seems to be the spirit of this age. He also commended the resources of the RPCNA, including Geneva College and the Reformed

Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Responding, Rev. Todd De Rooi led the assembly in prayer for the RPCNA.

The delegates then returned to their pre-lunch business, debating two overtures which sought to change the manner in which URC synods are held. Instead of each consistory delegating two men to synod, as now is done, each classis (regional assembly) would delegate six ministers and six elders, resulting in a much smaller assembly. This was aimed at promoting better deliberation and stewardly use of resources. Those favoring the current practice emphasized the value of involving a larger number of delegates, thereby promoting fellowship and unity among the churches. Ultimately, the proposed change was defeated.

Another debate centered around the proposed adoption of pastoral advice aimed at helping the churches to better grasp the relationships between church, state, and family, as well as the calling of Christians regarding those relationships. An advisory committee recommended not adopting this pastoral advice, arguing that the advice in question was not an adequately comprehensive summary of biblical and confessional truth regarding the topic. This proposal, too, was defeated.

The afternoon session was wrapped up by Rev. Bill Boekestein, who led the brothers in considering the truth of Psalm 121, in prayer, and in singing.

The day wrapped up with a number of the URCNA's missionaries and church planters addressing the assembly, encouraging the brothers with reports of the work being done on a variety of mission fields. Truly, the fields are white for the harvest!

Thursday, June 20, 2024

The third full day of Synod Escondido of the URCNA was packed with productivity.

The day began with singing and a brief meditation on Romans 8:31-39 by Rev. John van Eyk, who reminded the assembly of God's sovereign care for His people, as the saving God who abides with His people to bless them. He called the delegates to focus on the great love of God, then led the assembly in prayer.

Rev. Anup Hiwale brought greetings to the Synod on behalf of the Evangelical Reformed Church of India. Rev. Hiwale described the recent growth of persecution in India, alongside the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel. Despite some discouragements, church planting efforts are being blessed. Rev. Hiwale warned the brothers against the growing threat of Hinduism in the U.S. and Canada. He also requested prayer and encouragement from the URCNA, expressing gratitude for the support the ERCI receives. Rev. Mark Vander Pol responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the Evangelical Reformed Church of India.

The assembly started its agenda matters for the day with a focus on the URCNA website. The Website Oversight Committee was commended for its work and encouraged to continue its labors to maintain and to overhaul the federational website. Mr. Gary Fisher, Webmaster for the URCNA, was reappointed with thanks for his labors.

Synod next turned to the report of its Study Committee on Digital Media and Corporate Worship. This report alerted the churches to the implications of using digital media for corporate worship. It provided pastoral advice to aid the churches in utilizing digital tools for outreach and for help in exceptional cases, while emphasizing the importance of embodied worship and the sacramental nature of in-person gatherings. The report was recommended to the churches for study, and its pastoral advice was adopted, with appreciation expressed for its wise counsel. Both the pastoral advice and the report itself will be placed on the URC's website, and the report will be distributed to the consistories for further study and use.

Shifting gears to look at missions matters, the assembly considered and adopted a proposal to create the position of Home Missions Clerk. Serving in a part-time capacity, this clerk will be charged with assisting the Synodical Committee for Home Missions in its website and social media use, distributing newsletters and communications, sharing prayer requests for home missionaries, and otherwise assisting the committee in promoting home missions within the URCNA.

A proposed change to the Church Order was next up, with the Synod rejecting a proposal that would have given ministerial candidates at least eight weeks after being declared a candidate to answer any calls extended during that time.

However, Synod approved a proposal to ensure that every committee include a statement of its synodical mandate in reports submitted to synods. This was done to ensure that delegates understand the stated purpose and goals of the committee, while discouraging committees from straying beyond their mandates.

Synod also agreed to dissolve the appointment of an Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee. Established in 2007, this role was filled from the start by the Grace URC of Waupun, WI, which provided guidance and accountability especially needed during the years of establishing the URCNA's web presence. In recent years, it has become clear that this close level of oversight is no longer needed, so the Synod agreed to bring this position to an end.

After the morning break, the brothers heard from Rev. Richard Vander Vaart, who brought greetings on behalf of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. He reviewed

the recent Synod of the ARP, including a declaration that Freemasonry is incompatible with church membership, among other challenging matters. He urged prayer for wisdom and blessing upon the ARP in these matters. He also noted that work has begun to establish a Canadian ARP. Rev. Mitchell Persaud responded, leading the delegates in prayer for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

URCNA Foreign Missions Coordinator Rev. Rich Bout spoke to the assembly about the work of missions within the federation. He highlighted the importance of the weekly missionary prayer requests, which are intended to be included in church bulletins; as well as the missionary prayer map, a new version of which recently was distributed.

Delegates heard about some of the mission works Rev. Bout has recently visited, including those in Turkey and Mexico. Showing a brief video, Rev. Bout highlighted the value of the four-week Cross Cultural Mission Training program, the second session of which recently concluded in Mexico.

Turning back to the Church Order, the assembly took up a pair of overtures addressing the appeals process in the URCNA. These overtures both sought to resolve a perceived conflict between a Church Order provision and a provision of one of its appendices, although they did so in contrary ways. After extensive deliberation, the brothers recommitted this matter to the advisory committee for further consideration.

Prior to lunch, Rev. Dan Borvan read from Psalm 68, led the assembly in prayer, and called for the singing of Psalm 100.

Over the lunch break, delegates enjoyed the opportunity to hear from Christopher Yuan, a Bible professor and author. Dr. Yuan described his journey out of homosexuality and into Christianity, emphasizing that the alternative to sexual brokenness is holiness through Christ. The presentation offered a strong reminder of God's power to redeem.

Following lunch, Rev. Brian Vos led the assembly in considering Psalm 90, recognizing God's steadfast love and care for His people. Leading the delegates in prayer for God's guidance, he then called them to sing praise to the Lord.

Before returning to business matters, the chairman recognized and expressed appreciation for several URCNA ministers who are on the cusp of emeritation. The assembly echoed the chairman's words of appreciation in its applause.

Rev. Dr. Bryan Estelle then brought greetings to Synod Escondido on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He rejoiced in the joint commitment of the URCNA and the OPC to caring for the flock and noted our cooperating in publishing the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. He requested prayer for the members, deliberations, and decisions of the OPC General Assembly, especially concerning challenging

matters that will require humility and a just spirit; and he sought prayer for more laborers for the work of missions. Rev. Brian Vos responded and led the Synod in prayer for the OPC.

Returning to agenda matters, the assembly received a report from the Stated Clerk of the Federation, Rev. Ralph Pontier, for whose service gratitude was expressed.

Several amendments to the URC's Regulations for Synodical Procedure which were recommended by the Stated Clerk also were adopted. These changes aimed to ensure that the Regulations are consistent with prior synodical decisions and past practice.

Synod next tackled a few proposals relating to the URCNA's synodical assemblies.

The Synod approved an overture seeking to establish a synodical organizing committee. The goal of this action is to ease the burden of hosting synod.

The assembly declined an overture that would have established a synodical travel fund. This overture sought a way to share travel costs for synod among the churches.

Turning next to the ecumenical work of the federation, Synod – noting that the classes have been faithful in appointing representatives to serve on the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity – agreed to discontinue the appointing of at-large members of the committee, expressing thanks for its outgoing members-at-large, Rev. William Boekestein and Rev. Calvin Tuininga. The assembly also noted several options to potentially deepen the relationship between the URCNA and the Canadian & American Reformed Churches. Synod took up the committee's urging to remind the churches of our mutual responsibility to engage one another in our ecumenical task through prayer, classical dialogue, local efforts, and expressions of concerns.

Following an afternoon break, Rev. Steven Vande Velde brought greetings on behalf of the Canadian & American Reformed Churches. Rev. Vande Velde noted the need to develop our mutual relationship by pursuing familiarity actively, rather than relying on past impressions and assumptions. He noted some of the struggles that the CanRC has endured, urging candid discussion of hard matters, so that our people might gain a deeper and more honest love for one another. Rev. Jason Vander Horst responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the Canadian & American Reformed Churches.

Returning to business matters, Synod took up the report of its Study Committee on Human Sexuality. This committee sought to address the Biblical teaching concerning human sexuality, with a focus on the nature of sin, temptation, and repentance. After spending some time polishing the committee's report, the delegates commended it to the

churches for study. They also adopted as pastoral advice two sections of the report: "Biblical and Confessional Statements on Human Sexuality" and "Affirmations and Denials on Human Sexuality." These will be published on the federation's website, that this advice might be readily accessible to the churches. Rev. Simon Lievaart led the assembly in prayer, thanking the Lord for His Word and asking Him to bless this application of the Word, both as a witness to the world and as a help to the churches.

Having completed this weighty matter, Synod then turned to the report of the Canadian Board of Directors. Noting the desire of Mrs. Pam Hessels to conclude her work as Canadian Treasurer – which position she has held for about 20 years – the assembly rose in applause to express its appreciation. The Synod then made appointments to the Canadian Board of the URCNA, while also confirming the appointment of Mr. Johnathan Fennema as Canadian Treasurer.

Turning to the United States Board of Directors, the Synod made appointments to the board. It then approved a proposal from the U.S. Board of Directors to establish a Litigation Fund. This fund would serve essentially as self-insurance to prepare for the costs of defending against litigation filed against the federation. The brothers also voted to ratify restated Articles of Incorporation and amended By-Laws for the U.S. Board.

Having come to the end of the afternoon, the assembly was led in closing devotions by Rev. Quentin Falkena. Rev. Falkena read Psalm 73, pointing out the privilege that belongs to Christians in being able to draw near to God, knowing that we belong to Him. Having prayed, the brothers closed with song.

After supper, Rev. Nick Smith led the Synod in singing Psalm 42 and read Revelation 5:1-10. He pointed out the victory of Christ over the darkness of this age, whom we as Christians reflect to the world. He then led the assembly in prayer.

Turning to matters of business with a financial angle, Synod approved an overture seeking to establish a study committee to determine the feasibility of establishing a building loan fund for the URCNA. The brothers then approved financial reports from the past two years, expressing gratitude to the U.S. and Canadian treasurers for their diligent work.

Synod then considered the second of two overtures that requested numerous relatively minor changes to our church order, most aimed at improving the internal consistency of the language of the URCNA Church Order. Painstakingly plodding through 40 of the 65 proposed changes, Synod approved most of them (although they will need to be ratified by two-thirds of the consistories of the federation).

Rounding out the day, Rev. Jaren Beard read John 1:29-36,

commending the example of John the Baptist, who was willing to become less so that Christ might be revealed. He then led the assembly in a closing prayer and song. Synod Escondido recessed until 8 a.m.

Friday, June 21, 2024

The final day of Synod Escondido began strong, with the assembly rising to sing with vigor Psalm 33. Rev. Gary Zekveld then read this Psalm, recalling the sure hope that is found by trusting our sovereign God and resting in His steadfast love. The brothers then spent a few moments in prayer.

The business of Synod began with refining the mandate and specifics of a synodical organizing committee, which was created on Thursday. This committee will be charged with securing a location for hosting synod, providing logistical elements necessary for synodical delegates, and preparing and maintaining a manual for the organizing of synod. This committee will report to the convening consistory of synod and to the national corporation of the URCNA in the nation where a given synod is held.

The assembly next turned its attention to the report of the URCNA Statistician, receiving her report and expressing appreciation for her faithful and excellent service to the churches. Synod reminded the churches to be diligent in submitting their statistical data annually and in responding promptly to the Statistician. The brothers also refined the categories of statistical information being collected from the churches.

Returning to some unfinished business from Thursday, Synod took up the remainder of an overture that requested numerous small changes to our Church Order, most aimed at improving the internal consistency of the language of the URCNA Church Order.

Synod approved most of these, refining several points. These decisions, because they seek to change the Church Order, will need to be ratified by two-thirds of the consistories of the federation.

Further unfinished business followed, as Synod resumed consideration of a pair of overtures addressing the appeals process in the URCNA. Both overtures aimed to resolve a perceived conflict between a Church Order provision and a provision of one of its appendices, although they did so in contrary ways.

After lengthy deliberation, the assembly adopted a change which explicitly restricted appeals by individual church members. Under the newly adopted change to Appendix 7 of the Church Order and to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, an individual would retain the right to appeal decisions of his own consistory, but he would not be permitted to appeal the decisions of a classis or synod. Should an individual believe that a decision of a broader

assembly should be appealed, he would need to ask his consistory to pursue that appeal.

Additional changes specified how an appeal may be brought by a classis, as well as the circumstances under which delegates to a broader assembly who previously handled an appeal may participate in judging an appeal.

One of the last items of business for any Synod involves the adoption of a budget.

This the delegates handled quickly, thanks to the efficient work of their advisory committee.

Prior to the delegates' final meal together, Rev. Paul Murphy briefly reminded them from 1 John 3:1 and other texts that God loves His people with the very love that He has for Jesus – amazing grace! Rev. Murphy then led the brothers in prayer and song.

After lunch, Rev. William Godfrey read Psalm 103, led in prayer, and called the assembly to sing praise to the Lord.

The assembly then moved into elections. Rev. Doug Barnes was elected to serve as Stated Clerk, and Rev. Mark Vander Pol as Alternate Stated Clerk. The assembly then recommended two men for service on the U.S. Board of Directors, from whom the Board will select one member.

To fill the role of Home Mission Clerk – a position approved on Thursday – Synod appointed Mr. Paul Lawton.

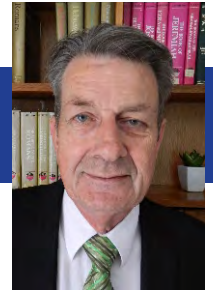
Looking forward to the next synod, the assembly accepted the offer of Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, AB, to serve as convening consistory for a synod to be held on June 8-12, 2026.

Led by one of its delegates, the assembly rose to express appreciation for the officers of Synod.

The chairman, Rev. Bradd Nymeyer, expressed hearty thanks for the work of the Convening Consistory of Escondido URC and the congregation itself, many of whom devoted extensive effort to making Synod run smoothly. He highlighted the long, faithful, and humble service of our outgoing Stated Clerk, Rev. Ralph Pontier, who has served the federation for eight years. He also expressed gratitude to his fellow officers of Synod Escondido, and also to the delegates, for their devoted work. The vice-chairman echoed the sentiments of the assembly in expressing heartfelt appreciation for Rev. Nymeyer in his faithful leadership.

Reading Psalm 90:17 – “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” – the chairman concluded Synod Escondido with prayer, calling the brothers to end their time together by rising to sing the Doxology.

To God be all the glory!



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Synod RCNZ 2024: Concerto Grosso

Il preludio

The 32nd Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand began on the 7th September, 2024. On a warm day which later developed into a cold change with showers we were comfortably enclosed within the modern post-earthquake facilities of the Cornwall Street (Christchurch) congregation. The Rev. Josh Meinsma opened proceedings as the church counsellor for Christchurch, and thus the moderator protem of Synod, with a devotion based on Zechariah 2:4-5 and prayer. This was followed by Synod receiving and approving the credentials of delegates from our RCNZ churches and our fraternal (sister) churches.

Then we elected the following brothers into our moderamen: Moderator: Rev Reinier Noppers; Vice-Moderator: Rev Ben McDonald; First Clerk: Mr John van Dyk; and for Second Clerk: Elder Ed Havelaar. Following this there was the constitution of Synod and the signification of agreement with Confessional Standards.

In the evening a Prayer Service was held commending our Synod to the Lord. There were a number of prayers for different aspects of our churches that we share together, with the Rev. Reinier Noppers leading the service and preaching from 1st Corinthians 1:1-3. These words recognise that our hope is in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is his Spirit in us that stirs us to encourage and help each other.

La fuga

We began the Monday with the Rev James Hyslop reading from John 1:1-18 and reflecting particularly on the words about our Lord that he is full of grace and truth, and thus how that must work out in our own lives also. He then prayed and we sang together. This was a distinguishing feature of our Synod – several times every day there was the reading of God's Word, the mediating upon God's Word, prayer, and the singing to God from our hearts. And what singing it was!

The Moderator reflected on what has happened in the life of our churches since our last Synod. There has been a church instituted (New Plymouth); ministers ordained (Revs Josh Meinsma & Matthias Schat); a candidate awaiting ordination (Peter Yoo); a minister retiring with one about to (Revs David Waldron & John Haverland); a minister departing overseas (Rev Andrew de Vries), with one about to after being released from his call (Rev Albert Couperus); Vicars having passed exams and waiting calls (Kevin Star & Jae Kim); a Vicar currently serving (Andrew Miller); and

those who have served our denomination in the past and have been promoted to glory (Rev. G. I. Williamson & Wim Weeda).

Practical details were noted with appointments to advisory committees and other functions, the schedule of daily meetings outlined, and the agenda adopted.

Ile contrappunto

A hallmark of our gathering together was the presence of sister denominations and those we are in ecclesiastical fellowship or contact with. From within New Zealand the Grace Presbyterian Church and the Koshin (Korean) Churches were represented, from Australia there were delegates from the Free Reformed Churches, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Presbyterian Reformed Church, and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and from further afield the Canadian & American Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian, the United Reformed Churches of North America, and the Reformed Churches in South Africa were personally represented.

It was encouraging to have so many, but also sobering as it was clear from their addresses several of them have been through very difficult times. One denomination has had their number of churches drop from eleven congregations to two in a very short time, another had to depose a senior minister who in the process took two congregations out of their denomination, and another is struggling with a number of congregations rebelling by ordaining women elders. But there had been growth amongst others of our sister churches, with steady increase, reflected through an increased number of congregations and members. With each presentation from a sister church or church in ecclesiastical fellowship there was a response from one of our Inter-church Relations Committee followed by prayer for our brethren there. In-between sessions there was time for us to catch up with those colleagues and make new friends.

Il verismo

A helpful report in terms of the world we live in today was the Conversion Therapy Study Report. Under such headings as 'What is the Conversion Therapy Act', 'What is 'harm'?', 'How invasive is the legislation to discipleship and the gospel?', 'The Human Rights Acts and Freedom of Religion', and 'Trying to determine liability', we were given a chilling picture of our position in the public square. Things have certainly changed and we thank these brothers for alerting us to these threats to our calling as churches and Christians and how we may respond to them.

Il diminuendo

Some are gifted with the financial side of things, while others of us are not. But it was a subject we could not avoid as Synod being our widest body sets the criteria for such fiscal matters as ministers' stipends, quotas for various shared ministries and overall costs in running such things as Synod. We are blessed to have churches that give generously and wholeheartedly, and this was again evident in our gathering. There are several committees focussed upon this area, such as the Church Extension Committee, the Remuneration Committee, and, of course, our Synodical Treasurer (Sr Alice Saathof). These are folk in our churches who are not as much to the forefront of our wider shared work but who faithfully work away in the background, enabling much of our other service to go on fruitfully.

L'istruzione

The Rev Dr Murray Capill spoke to use regarding the blessed history of the past and present situation of the Reformed Theological College, now in Melbourne, Victoria. They currently have a central location in the CBD and a good number of staff and students. He spoke of the blessing of having a fifth member in the faculty, Dr Nick Brennan, who had become the Systematics Theology lecturer. Nick was also present and briefly introduced himself. They are in good heart and have a growing presence amongst Christians and churches of a reformed thinking in the wider Melbourne urban area. In response the College was commended to the Lord in prayer and our financial support of the RTC, including

the support of 50% of the amount needed for the Systematic Theology chair that we committed to at our last Synod.

Gli studente

Following the report from the College we dealt with the report of the Deputies for Students for the Ministry. In this we could see our blessing in having a number of men in the process of preparing for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. While presently we have none at the Mid American Reformed Seminary there are a number studying in class or on-line at the RTC. Two of these students commence vicariates in 2025 with another two presently studying at the RTC and a further four having been accepted as students for the ministry by various Presbyteries. On top of this there have been three vicars serving amongst us this year who have passed their exams and thus are available for call (one has accepted a call with the other two involved in visiting congregations in connection with receiving possible calls), and one man still in the process of finishing his vicariate.

It was decided to compile and publish a Ministry Student & Vicar Manual to create an official practical manual for the churches in relation to students. This manual deals with such questions as the support for a student and his family, how a home church keeps a connection with the student, the appropriate seminary to go to, together with the current guidelines and information from the Office Bearer's Handbook.



Synod 2024 of the RCNZ

La gioventù

We continue to be encouraged by the work of those amongst us involved with our children and young adults. We received the Calvinist Cadet Corps & Gems report and continued our regular support to them by means of supporting leadership training at their annual National Executive and their magazine In Touch. We also very much commend them to your prayers.

And while they did not form part of our Synod business, we must not forget to mention the work of faithful Sunday School teachers, Youth Club leaders and Committee members, regional youth committees, and Catechism teachers. They may not be part of Synod's agenda but they are vital components of the local church.

Prendersi cura dei ministri

Synod spent some time considering the packages of our ministers, both in terms of current stipends and future care where there had not been the opportunity to have their own housing before or during their ministry. A committee of the whole looked at some key questions in connection with the subject of housing. Helpful information on this was raised from sister churches, and the ministers and churches were urged not to leave it till too late in a minister's time in service to have this discussion.

Another aspect of our care for ministers was shown in the Ministers & Wives Conference Report where we could note the ongoing fellowship that our ministers and their wives have at the usually triennial conference (Covid disrupted the pattern a little). Next year it will be held in Hanmer Springs in the South Island with planning already well advanced for this.

Le missioni

We had the privilege of having two of our missionary couples – Hans & Lisa Vaatstra and Pieter & Joanna van der Wel – speak to Synod of their work in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu respectively. The Vaatstras served with the Reformed Bible College in south-eastern PNG and the Reformed Church of Papua New Guinea and spoke of the privilege they had to serve with God's people there. It is a young denomination that is growing and so there is much work to do and trained local pastors very much help in this. The van der Wels served with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Vanuatu, preaching, teaching, and finalising Bible translation work. We rejoiced that a whole Bible is now available in the local language of the area where they served.

Il libretto

In the foyer a number of past Synod photos were laid out. Some faces in the early Synods were unknown so we were asked to write down if we knew who they were to aid our Synodical Archivist. The Rev Dirk van Garderen was able to

particularly help out with this.

Our Synodical Archivist, Leen van den Berg, has been in this position for some years and has found two fellow members of the Hastings congregation able to take it on after him. In connection with this a Mandate for Synod Archives was drawn up by the Synod.

L'editoria

The National Publications Committee reported on their ongoing work which primarily revolves around the publication of our monthly magazine, Faith in Focus. In addition to this there is the Yearbook and the RCNZ Website which falls under their purview. These essential parts of our body life as a federation continue to be faithfully maintained and appreciated (look where you're reading this review!).

We warmly thanked John Holtslag for over fifty years of service on this committee, much of it as the Convenor, as he announced his retirement. Walter Walraven now becomes the Convenor and continues as the Editor of our magazine. He is also the longest serving editor.

La coda

Synod was able to finish its work by Thursday lunchtime. This was due to a good harmony throughout and no particular issues that involved special consideration. At this stage we considered and decided upon the budget for the period up till the next Synod, and appointments to Standing Committees, other Committees, and ongoing Synodical positions.

A Letter of Loyalty to His Majesty King Charles III was read out and approved by common consent. It was decided to hold the next Synod in September 2027 at the Silverstream Reformed Church in the Wellington Presbytery.

The Moderator expressed thanks to the three retiring ministers – Revs John Haverland, Sjirk Bajema, & Leo de Vos – who take on emeritus status in this next inter-synodical period. Thanks were further expressed to the Vaatstras & van der Wel's for their faithful service overseas.

Further thanks were conveyed to the Christchurch organisers and their assistants. We were greatly helped also throughout the time of Synod by the organising committee from the Christchurch congregation. They fed us well and provided any amenity that was needed to do our work.

The Rev Noppers ended with his thanks to all others who helped and to his fellow moderamen. We then read Psalm 136 in responsive manner, the Moderator prayed, and we sang Psalm 136. Synod was then formally closed.

RPCA Impacted by Severe Rain

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa (Uganda) has been severely impacted by rain along the Uganda-Congo border. As the pictures show, the destruction has been severe. The RPCA has also been impacted by the recent death of Mrs. Agneta Jakaita, the wife of the RPCA stated clerk, Mukamba Tom. May the Lord comfort those who mourn and provide the RPCA with what is needed to rebuild.



Iron sheets salvaged from the church and school



Namutumba RPCA church destroyed by a storm in July 2024



Bungokho Natondome RPCA Primary school destroyed by a storm in August 2024



Zombo RPCA church members praying in the shade, after their church was destroyed.

*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
The LORD sit enthroned a king forever.
May the LORD give strength to His people!
May the LORD bless His people with peace.
Psalm 29:10-11*