



July 26, 2017

Dear CRC Council Members:

Synod 2017 delegates have written into the “CRC history books” decisions that provide new direction and a few requests for the church. As in years past, synod welcomed three women advisers, three ethnic advisers, and seven young adult representative voices in the work of the advisory committees and in its plenary sessions. Synod was also graciously led by one returning and three first-time officers throughout the week of deliberations. In addition to their important work, delegates took time to fellowship over a president’s picnic, honor retiring seminary faculty, and enjoy meals and breaks with friends old and new! The welcome and hospitality extended by the staff of Trinity Christian College was greatly appreciated. In all and through all, God was glorified in the work and decisions of those gathered at Synod 2017.

Some of the matters addressed by the delegates to synod this year include the governance responsibilities for the new Council of Delegates, clarification for the office of commissioned pastor (to be reflected in Church Order Supplement, Article 23 and the commissioned pastor handbook), designation of an Annual Day of Justice, a new name (Resonate Global Mission) and ratification of a director (Rev. Zachary King) for the new mission agency, discussion about membership decline and church renewal, and a new designation of *contemporary testimony* for both *Our World Belongs to God* and for the Belhar Confession. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for your council and church members, we have summarized the decisions of Synod 2017 on the following pages. Note that some decisions provide instruction for work yet to be done—you will be hearing more about these matters in the coming months. Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights at your next council meeting.

We are always grateful for the opportunity at synod to honor and declare those presented as candidates for ministry of the Word within the CRC—*thirty-nine* new candidates were approved! What a blessing to witness a standing ovation by more than 200 delegates and advisers, joined by family members of the candidates, and conclude a time of celebration with a prayer of gratitude offered for their commitment and preparation to service to the church in ministry. In addition, synod gave special recognition to *fifty* ministerial and commissioned pastor retirees. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church and wish them God’s grace as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

The electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2017* will soon be posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources—watch for an announcement by way of CRC News. The printed version will follow closer to the end of August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, I want to express our sincere appreciation to all who served the church as delegates and advisers to Synod 2017. These individuals generously gave significant time and energy for a full week. The spirit of unity and love for the mission of the church was evident all around.

Yours faithfully,

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Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2017 for the Churches

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Summary of Decisions of Synod 2017 for the Churches

1. A new category: *contemporary testimony*

Synod adopted a new category—contemporary testimony—and its definition (below), followed by placement of *Our World Belongs to God* in the newly defined category.

A contemporary testimony is a dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRCNA—its congregations and members—as an important statement that speaks to essential matters in a given time period. It is useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship. As such, it must periodically be reviewed if it is to speak contemporaneously and perhaps (1) be revised if authorship belongs to the CRCNA or (2) be provided newly revised accompanying explanatory material if authorship belongs elsewhere.

Later in its meetings, synod also decided to place the Belhar Confession in the category of contemporary testimony; however, adherence to the Belhar Confession will not be included in the Covenant for Officebearers. Subsequently, synod discontinued the previous category for the Belhar—ecumenical faith declaration. The executive director was instructed by synod “to include footnoted comments with the Belhar Confession to provide biblical and confessionally grounded clarity to the parts of the Belhar that are widely recognized to cause disagreement and alarm.” These footnotes will be written by a special ad hoc team in the coming weeks. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 699-700, 707-708.)

2. Remembering, reaffirming, and reinvigorating our responses to global humanitarian challenges; Peacemaking efforts

Synod addressed a report presented by way of the BOT Supplement (Appendix Q) and took the following actions in response, all of which are important for CRC members and churches. Synod 2017:

- Urges CRC members, congregations, and agencies to remember and renew our passion to serve God by serving the poor and oppressed in ministries of relief, development, proclamation, and advocacy for justice.
- Reaffirmed and recommends to members, churches, and denominational agencies, and educational institutions the conclusions and recommendations contained in the CRC's 1978 and 1979 reports on hunger, as well as in the 1993 report “Freedom to Serve: Meeting the Needs of the World.”
- Reaffirmed and recommends to members, churches, and denominational agencies, and educational institutions the conclusions and recommendations pertaining to root causes of suffering and oppression contained in the 2006 War and Peace report, the 2010 Migration of Workers report, and the 2012 report of the Task Force on Creation Stewardship.
- Endorses and supports a renewed and revised multiple agency, collaborative program that would build on our existing ministry capacities to exercise the following within a healthy biblical Reformed worldview:
 - Increase our efforts to educate CRC members, congregations, agencies, and educational institutions on how best to serve people who are poor and hungry.
 - Continue and increase our effective relief, development, and justice ministries with people who are suffering from drought, famine, war, climate change, trafficking, and persecution.
 - Increase our understanding of the root and systemic causes of hunger, poverty, oppression, and injustice.

- Improve and broaden our ability to be active and engaged Christian citizens, standing with and advocating for the rights and welfare of those whom the world would disdain and discard.

Synod also took note of peacemaking efforts of CRC ministries in the Middle East. (To reference above decisions see *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 633, 635.)

3. New Annual Day of Justice and Disability Awareness Week

Synod adopted the third Sunday of August of each year, beginning in 2018, as an Annual Day of Justice for the CRCNA. CRC ministries will help promote observance of this Annual Day of Justice. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 631.)

Synod also encourages “churches . . . to annually sponsor events to celebrate Disability Awareness Week, preferably during the week preceding the third Sunday in October.” (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 632-33.)

4. Resonate Global Mission and a new leader

Synod approved a new name for the former “new mission agency,” Resonate Global Mission, and ratified the appointment of the person to serve as its new director, Rev. Zachary J. King. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 701-702.)

5. Church renewal

In response to an overture from Classis Southeast U.S., synod gave instruction to the executive director to:

- Make available a list of current denominational resources related to church renewal, including church planting with emphasis on training for evangelism.
- Work with each agency and educational institution to seek out best practices and resources related to church renewal in the CRC and similar denominations and share these with classes and congregations in order to more faithfully carry out our commitment to Church Order Articles 74-76.
- Work with each agency and educational institution to collaborate in finding areas of convergence related to church renewal and to develop effective strategies for implementation by classes and churches.

Realizing the significance of this matter for the church, synod then instructed the executive director to keep the call to prayer for church renewal, church planting, and evangelism continually before God’s people. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706.)

6. Back to God Ministries International; spiritual growth and outreach

Churches and individual members throughout the CRC in North America are encouraged to use resources provided by ReFrame Media, the English outreach of Back to God Ministries International, to assist in spiritual growth and encouraging outreach in their local communities. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 703.)

7. Encouraging safe church practices

Synod reminds the churches of the “need to provide constant vigilance in protecting the vulnerable,” and to provide “safe church personnel, policies, and practices.” (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 636.)

8. Worship Ministries resources

Synod encourages congregations to make use of the wide variety of resources Worship Ministries has available, including *Reformed Worship* and the resources commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (ReformationDay500.org). (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 639.)

9. Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund resources

Synod also encourages the churches in the United States to make use of the resources of CRC Loan Fund as needed to enhance ministry. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 630.)

10. Ministry share for 2018

Synod received the agencies and institutional unified budget as information and approved a ministry share amount of \$339.48 for calendar year 2018, unchanged from the previous two years. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 628.)

11. Offering support

Synod approved the following requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2017. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 617.)

- Two offerings by the churches in support of Back to God Ministries International (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 242).
- Recognize the following Sundays as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Resonate Global Mission: Easter, Pentecost, the third Sunday in September, and Reformation Day Sunday (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 255).
- Commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 294).

Synod also encouraged local churches to increase their financial support for World Renew’s yearly World Hunger Sunday in response to the “Global Humanitarian Challenges” report, Appendix Q of the BOT Supplement. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 696.)

Synod approves the list of above-ministry share and specially designated offerings for the agencies and institutions of the CRC and denominationally related ministries and received as information the list of nondenominational agencies, previously accredited, for calendar year 2018. This list will be printed in the back of the *Acts of Synod* and is available at crcna.org. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 628.)

12. Transition to Council of Delegates

Synod noted that the implementation for the transition from the Board of Trustees governance model to the new Council of Delegates governance model was effective as of July 1, 2017. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 620.)

13. Archiving church records

Synod again validated the importance of archiving and instructed all churches . . . to send duplicates (photocopies, faxes, or email attachments) of their constitutions and articles of incorporation to the archives. Copies can be sent via surface mail, fax, or email to Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402; fax: 616-526-7689; or crcarchives@calvin.edu. (See *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 623.)