

Dear CRC Council Members:

Synod 2019 delegates have, by way of recent decisions, provided new direction and a few requests for the church. This year, synod was well served by its delegates, in addition to young adult representative voices and the valued advice of seminary faculty advisers. Synod was graciously led by a gifted team of officers throughout the week of deliberations. The synod participants attended special workshops on Sunday and fellowshiped over breaks and meals, including a special meal offered for women in attendance and one for deacons. The welcome and hospitality extended by the staff of Calvin College were also greatly appreciated. In all and through all, God was glorified in the work and decisions of all who gathered for Synod 2019.

Some of the matters addressed by the delegates to synod this year include proposed changes to the ministry-share system (now before the churches for review), development of stronger policies and practices in how we address abuse of power, a declaration that Kinism is a heresy, proposed changes to Church Order Articles 51 and 54 with regard to Sunday worship, a proposed modified Ecumenical Charter (also before the churches for review), the appointment of two new task forces (regarding bivocational pastors and ecclesiastical marriage), and much more. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for your council and church members, we have summarized the decisions of Synod 2019 on the following pages. Note that some decisions assign tasks yet to be completed. **Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights during your next council meeting.**

We are always grateful for the opportunity at synod to honor and declare candidates for ministry of the Word within the CRC—*forty-two* new candidates were approved this year (see [crcna.org/candidates](http://crcna.org/candidates))! It is true joy to witness a standing ovation for the candidates and to conclude the celebration with a prayer of gratitude for their commitment and preparation to service to the church in ministry. In addition, synod gave special recognition to *forty-two* ministerial retirees and *nineteen* commissioned pastors who concluded service in the past year. 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 digital version of the *Acts of Synod 2019* is posted to the CRC website at [www.crcna.org/SynodResources](http://www.crcna.org/SynodResources). The printed version of the *Acts* will follow later in August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I want to express our sincere appreciation to all who served the church as delegates and advisers to Synod 2019. These individuals generously gave significant time and energy for a full week. "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans" (Prov. 16:3).

Yours faithfully,



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Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2019 for the Churches  
Summary regarding Ministry Shares  
Summary regarding Ecumenical Categories

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## Summary of Decisions of Synod 2019 for the Churches

### 1. Proposed changes to ministry-share system and current giving

Synod reviewed the Reimagining Ministry Shares report and responded positively by adopting a series of recommendations and the report itself *in principle*. Churches are encouraged to consider the proposed changes and respond by way of overture or communication to Synod 2020. **Read more about what is being proposed for the new ministry-share system in the accompanying document “Synod Decision: Reimagining Ministry Shares.”** (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 789-90.)

In the meantime, until the new system is approved and implemented in 2020, synod approved a ministry share per member amount of \$346.48 for calendar year 2020. Synod also approved inclusion of the Colossian Forum (United States) on the list of accredited agencies recommended for offerings. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 754-55.)

### 2. Ecumenical categories of affiliation; Ecumenical Charter condensed for the churches

Synod 2019 considered and decided to recommend to Synod 2020 a number of changes to Church Order articles describing the way we affiliate ecumenically with other denominations. In this regard, as proposed by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, phrases in the Church Order and Its Supplements that refer to denominations or churches “*in ecclesiastical fellowship*” would change to refer to denominations or churches “*in communion*.”

In addition, synod agreed with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to change the terminology we use in referring to other churches and denominations as well. Churches and denominations that are now referred to as *churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecclesiastical relationships* would be referred to as *churches in cooperation*.

Congregations are invited to respond by way of overture or communication to Synod 2020 per the usual process. Also affected by these changes, if adopted by Synod 2020, will be a revised Ecumenical Charter and a condensed version of the charter for use by the churches. **Learn more about this proposal in the accompanying “Summary of Proposed Ecumenical Categories.”** (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 771-74.)

### 3. Sunday worship practices

In response to Overture 9, requesting revision to Church Order Articles 51 and 54 with regard to Sunday worship services, synod spent significant time considering encouragement for holding a second worship service on Sunday. Synod’s advisory committee observed: “The second service has long proven to be a helpful discipline in fostering appropriate observance of the Lord’s Day, raising the level of biblical and doctrinal literacy in the church, and creating opportunity for deeper and richer fellowship.” To “bring the Church Order into harmony with the current practice of the vast majority of congregations” while yet affirming the rich tradition of the second service, synod proposed removing the requirement that churches assemble “ordinarily twice on the Lord’s Day,” proposed that Church Order Article 54-b be deleted, and proposed the following addition to the Church Order for consideration by the churches, classes, and Synod 2020:

“Each classis shall affirm the rich tradition of assembling a second time on the Lord’s Day for worship, learning, prayer, and fellowship by encouraging churches to include these items as part of a strategic ministry plan for the building up of the body of Christ.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 767-71.)

#### **4. Discipleship and faith formation**

Synod affirmed the importance of Reformed children’s curriculum and encourages congregations to consult with Faith Formation Ministries when considering curriculum, as well as to (1) recognize how critical the church-home relationship is for discipleship, and (2) take steps to strengthen the faith formation partnership between the church and the home. To assist the congregations, classes are asked to appoint a volunteer youth ministry champion to partner in faith formation. Churches are encouraged to consider supporting Faith Formation Ministries with their gifts. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 764-65.)

Similarly, synod encourages use of the many Reformed resources available from Back to God Ministries International, especially the rebranded resources of the ReFrame Media family: *Family Fire*, *Think Christian*, *Groundwork*, *Today*, *Church Juice*, and *Kids Corner*. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 774.)

#### **5. Celebrating new ministry leaders and thanking those who have served**

Synod was introduced to two new ministry leaders: Dr. Christopher Schoon, Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) team leader, and Ms. Sam Huizenga, Raise Up Global Ministries director. At the same time, synod thanked those completing service in the roles mentioned above—Dr. Syd Hielema has transitioned to a new role with Connections II, and Dr. Gary Bekker is preparing for retirement in the coming months. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 764-65, 775.)

Another cause for celebration is that Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) has been faithfully reaching the world with the gospel, discipling believers, and strengthening the churches for eighty years. Praise God! (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 774.)

#### **6. Evangelism and missional culture in our congregations**

Synod identified a need for churches to partner with Resonate Global Mission in evangelism and to foster a missional culture . . .

- emphasizing that “each of us has a vital role to play in God’s mission! Resonate seeks to equip each church and each member for that role, for living and sharing the good news. Mission work is not only for an elite squad of missionaries or church planters—our prayer for the future of mission work is that each Christian will be emboldened in living out the good news!” (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, p. 187).
- calling churches to “examine and repent of anything that hinders full participation in personal evangelism and discipleship.”
- encouraging congregations to “instill, foster, and celebrate a missional culture that raises up leaders who are called to local and global gospel witness. This includes formal roles such as cross-cultural missionaries, church planters, campus pastors, and teachers. It also includes parents, lay leaders, and others.”

Congregations can also help promote a missional culture by recognizing 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. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 775-76.)

## **7. Guidance in assisting immigrant churches**

Synod recognized ongoing work by the executive director and appropriate agencies related to enfolded immigrant churches (in response to a directive by Synod 2018), and commends the “Assisting Immigrant Churches” document (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 101-10) to the classes and churches. In addition, the executive director was instructed, in consultation with the appropriate CRC agencies, to identify and communicate appropriate legal and financial resources to assist churches and classes with the immigration of pastors and their families. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 777-78.)

## **8. Kinism declared a heresy**

Synod spoke very directly in response to Overture 7 asking that Kinism teaching be declared a heresy. Synod acceded to the overture’s sections XI, A-D, stating the following ground: “Kinist theology and practice is neither biblical nor Reformed. Rather, Kinism is a twisting of Reformed doctrine. The Bible makes clear that God’s ideal is a family of every tribe and nation being considered equal in every way. Kinist principles and praxis distort this truth.” In addition, synod sent a strong message that “Kinist teaching will not be tolerated in our churches” by admonishing “councils and classes to promote confessional fidelity and mutually to pursue special discipline of an officebearer who is found to hold views contrary to our standard.”

The deliberations concluded by acknowledging, “with lament, the historic tolerance and indifference within our Reformed theological tradition to perpetual hateful racial prejudice and the theological error of Kinism as well as the need to act as a prophetic voice on these matters in the present and future.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 818-19.)

## **9. Striving for peace and reconciliation for the peoples of Israel and Palestine**

Synod responded to Overture 6 by acknowledging the awareness of injustice and by encouraging and commending work already being done to address peace in the Middle East. Congregations are encouraged to “continue to strive for increased partnership that seeks a third way between mainline and evangelical approaches and fosters increased reconciliation on all sides.” (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 817-18.)

## **10. Addressing abuse of power**

In response to a directive of Synod 2018, a report addressing the abuse of power in our current culture was presented and considered. Many of synod’s decisions on this matter instruct the Council of Delegates or the executive director of the CRCNA to carry out a task such as development of a code of conduct, review of current abuse policies, development of further practices for monitoring and recordkeeping, development of training on abuse of power, and development of a resource toolkit. Synod also decided that the Office of Safe Church Ministry needs to be strengthened to respond to emotional abuse.

More information will be shared with the churches as resources are developed and made available. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 794-99.)

## **11. Adopted Church Order changes**

Synod adopted several changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements, proposed by Synod 2018. The Church Order will be updated in the coming weeks—in the meantime a summary of the changes follows:

- Church Order Article 39—includes a more articulated description identifying the activities of a classis.
- Church Order Articles 42-a and -d; Supplement Article 42-d—better defines the role of a regional pastor.
- Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements—the articles and supplements related to the office of commissioned pastor have been reformatted, and some sections have been incorporated into the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (updates soon to be available at [crcna.org](http://crcna.org)), including provision for the emeritation of commissioned pastors.
- Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f—with a new addition clarifying that the deposition of a commissioned pastor would require the approval of classis.
- Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F—including a requirement to conduct a colloquium doctum for ministers called from other denominations; and a review of the criteria for “need” offered in the Journey Toward Ordination document. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 757, 783-84.)

## 12. Changes regarding “how we do synod”

In response to recommendations of the Synod Review Task Force, Synod 2019 made a number of decisions about how future synods will be conducted. Highlights are as follows:

- Classes are encouraged to provide remuneration to financially disadvantaged delegates.
- A mentor will be provided for young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons.
- Ethnic and gender diversity are encouraged in classical delegation.
- Synod will limit its agenda to not more than two major study reports in any given year.
- Clarification to parliamentary rules will be added to the Rules for Synodical Procedure.
- Synod will be served by a parliamentarian.
- Synod will include opportunity for purposeful dialogue.
- The length of speeches during deliberations at synod will be limited in general to three minutes.
- Synod encourages a stronger connection “between synod and classes and churches.”
- Classes are encouraged to “send one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years, if possible, to build continuity from synod to synod.”
- More training will be offered to delegates prior to synod.
- Delegates will receive orientation regarding power dynamics, helping synod to function in healthy ways and assisting with participation of all delegates and advisers at synod.
- Synod will meet in Grand Rapids, Michigan, or in another midwestern location nearby for three years in succession, followed by a meeting every fourth year in another region in North America where CRC congregations are clustered.
- The Council of Delegates may recommend a plan for a “themed synod” that focuses on a visioning or leadership theme related to the health and growth of the denomination. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 801-17.)

## 13. Two synodical task forces mandated

Synod mandated two new synodical task forces to report to Synod 2021:

- a. The Consideration of Bivocationality Task Force—a response to the Bivocational Task Force report (Appendix A of COD Supplement)—will examine what it means to be a bivocational

pastor today. The new task force will be mandated to give consideration to matters such as the following:

- create a definition of bivocationality
  - give biblical support to bivocationality
  - address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined “proper support”; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like
  - classical oversight
  - cultural differences
  - Church Order implications (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 780, 823, 827.)
- b. The Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force—a response to Overture 14—will study the advisability, legality, and morality of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriage.

“The task force’s mandate shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- 1) Is it legal in the various states, provinces, and territories of Canada and the United States to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding ceremony?
- 2) What implications do the current CRCNA position on marriage and the Church Order have on ecclesiastical (non-civil) weddings and marriages?
- 3) Is it morally legitimate to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding in order to avoid the financial costs and obligations of a civil marriage?
- 4) If people are declared married in a non-civil ceremony in a home country outside of the United States or Canada, should that marriage be recognized by the CRCNA?
- 5) What are the implications for the church with regard to a specifically ecclesiastical marriage?
- 6) What are the implications of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages for senior citizens, including such matters as pensions and end-of-life care issues?
- 7) What, if anything, have other faith communities done with regard to this issue?
- 8) Consult with the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for insights that might be beneficial to this task force. (See *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 791-92, 822-23, 827.)