Reformed Churches of South Africa Greet Synod 2017

Risimati Hobyane and Henk Stoker traveled from Potchefstroom to bring greetings to Synod 2017 from Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA).

“We appreciate this invitation because it reflects more than any other thing our ecumenical unity and fraternal fellowship over many years,” said Hobyane. “The most important reason for our presence is our firm commitment to our mutual confession of the unity of the church of Christ.”

He said that in the two synods since the GKSA last had a representative at a Christian Reformed Church synod in 2012, his denomination has struggled over the role of women in ecclesiastical office, coming to the decision that they understand Scripture to only allow suitable men in the offices of elders and pastors. The synods also dealt with a “turn-around strategy” to address their membership decline.

Hobyane also told delegates that his church is interested in the discussion about the Belhar Confession. “We were very clear on it in 2012,” he said, referring to his church’s caution against the CRC adopting it.

“Although we are divided by deep seas and huge waves,” Hobyane said, “We are one in Christ.” —Gayla R. Postma

Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterian Church Looks to Learn, Collaborate

Nate Dreesmann brought greetings to Synod 2017 from the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterian Church (ECO), a five-year-old denomination of 120,000 members in 340 churches.

Dreesmann told synod delegates that congregations coming into ECO are asked to shift from being clergy-centered to an unleashed laity, from safety to risk-taking, from homogenous to preparing all God’s people for a post-Christian culture, from attractional to missional attractional.

“We did not know how to fully equip our churches for these shifts,” he said. “We are beginning to cultivate relationships. We desire to share what we’ve learned and be in the posture of learners from those who do better than we do.”

He noted that strategic partnerships with the Christian Reformed Church and World Renew make sense for them, to work together to have a great impact.

“We ask for your prayers for what we are doing and to hear how we can pray for you as co-laborers . . . to work together to accomplish our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.” —Gayla R. Postma

East African Churches Share Their Struggles

A group of East African church leaders spoke in a panel discussion at Synod 2017.

Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa
General Secretary Martin Wanjala reported that, especially in rural areas, “people are accepting Christ as Savior and Lord, coming to church and liking the life of ministry,” which, he said, “gives me great joy.” He added that people will walk 10 miles to hear someone preach, often necessary because of rough roads and tribal insurgencies.

Wanjala asked delegates to pray for upcoming elections in Kenya, that the violent clashes surrounding the 2007 and 2013 elections there will not be repeated. In Burundi and Congo, he reported, people are coping with shortages of food and medicine and with instability because of violent tribal clashes.

Christian Reformed Church—Burundi
General Secretary Jean-Bosco Nsabimana echoed Nsabimana’s concerns about Burundi. “Most of the Christians [have run] away,” he said. “The problem is lack of food in Burundi . . . Less than half of our people have jobs—it is not possible to find a job. I ask for your prayers so that we may have peace in Burundi.”

Reformed Church of East Africa
The Reformed Church of East Africa is a Kenyan church that was begun by Dutch missionaries in 1948. The denomination has grown to include over 600 congregations, said Jonah Lagat, general secretary of the denomination. His church has been helping children who are orphaned because of AIDS. “This brings me joy, because we are able to reach out to the world and bring a positive impact.” — Roxanne Van Farowe