

Synod 2023 Delegate Report – Victor Laarman

Synod is the annual gathering of CRC officebearers from across the denomination to deliberate on matters that relate to our common theology and ministry. This was the second synod where I have served as a delegate (the first being in 2019). I served alongside Elder Arnold Bosman, Rev. Bernie DeJong (serving as deacon), and Rev. Henry Meinen. Synod was held at the Calvin University campus at June 9-15.

Rather than providing a detailed summary of all the decisions made at synod this year, I will refer you to the [Synod News page](#); and since the plenary sessions of synod were recorded, you can watch them [here](#).

Instead, I will briefly share some of the highlights and challenges of Synod 2023.

Committee Work. Much of the work of synod occurs in the committee work that happens Friday and Saturday. This occurs before the plenary begins on Monday morning. I was assigned to Committee 2, which covered “Church Order and Related Matters”. Our primary task was reviewing the proposed Code of Conduct for all officebearers in the CRC, and addressing the numerous overtures advising synod to change or not adopt the Code of Conduct. With careful modifications, we presented the code of conduct to synod, and it was approved (to be ratified by Synod 2024).

Our committee also had deal with a change in *Church Order* article 45, regarding who is delegated to Synod. Previously, each classis was to delegate four officebearers: one pastor, one elder, one deacon, and one additional officebearer. With the change (now approved by synod), classes may delegate no more than two delegates of an office (e.g. two pastors and two deacons). This will allow classes that have difficulty finding four delegates a bit more flexibility to do so. Furthermore, we dealt with an appeal of a decision of Classis Holland by one of councils within that classis.

Overall, our committee work was very good. Typically, the committee is where each delegate gets to contribute most directly to the shape of synod. Our committee members were a pleasure to work with.

Plenary highlights. Plenary session began on Monday morning and lasted until Thursday afternoon. For the most part, the plenary sessions went smoothly. A lot of work was accomplished. Some highlights:

- Synod received reports from Dr. Zachary King (General Secretary of CRCNA), Calvin University, Resonate, World Renew, and other ministries.
- Synod approved two seminary professors who displayed an orthodox and robust faith: Dr. Gabriela Tijerina-Pike and Dr. Daniel Daley.
- Synod approved the appointment of Rev. Kevin DeRaaf as Director of Resonate.
- Synod instructed the Office of General Secretary to create a statement on assisted suicide that will state our denominations opposition to the wanton destruction of human life.
- Synod provided much-needed guidelines to bi-vocational ministry in *Church Order*.
- Synod approve a report on Ecclesiastical Marriage (i.e. religious marriage ceremonies performed *to the exclusion of the state*) and strongly advised pastors not to perform such marriages.
- Synod discussed the idea of a ‘virtual churches’, and will study it further.
- A motion from the floor of synod launched a lengthy discussion about the denomination creating a plan to grow our congregations through evangelism and outreach, which synod approved.
- Each day began with a time of worship, which was uplifting and a great way to start the session.

Difficult conversations. Much time was given to follow-up on a decision of Synod 2022 to regarding the definition of ‘unchastity’ in the *Heidelberg Catechism* 108. Synod 2023 upheld the definition of ‘unchastity’ as including homosexual sex. Synod also rejected the appeal of Neland Avenue CRC, to Synod 2022’s order to “immediately rescind its decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage.” Yet Synod 2023 decided against pursuing further discipline at this time.

These conversations were lengthy, difficult, and often emotionally-charged. We heard from many voices speaking for and against Synod 2022’s decision regarding human sexuality. Our ethnic and young adult advisors also participated in the conversation, speaking strongly in favour of Synod 2022’s decision regarding human sexuality.

While most of the plenary session was completed in an orderly manner, Thursday’s session ended in frustration; several delegates ‘unseating’ themselves and leaving in protest. This happened due a number of contributing factors: pacing-issues with previous plenary sessions, too much work for Synod 2023 to complete, and the high-stakes nature of the discussion (regarding a proper understanding of *gravamen*). The result was that Synod 2023 left unfinished, forwarding the discussion about *gravamen* to Synod 2024.

Final Reflections. Even with the frustration of the final session, and not completing the work we were assigned, my overall experience of synod remains positive. It is a privilege to spend time to get to know officebearers from across the denomination over meals, during committee work, and through travel. I appreciate being able learn more about our denomination, how it operates and what the primary concerns are. I enjoyed worshipping with another CRC congregation in the Grand Rapids area on the Sunday morning.

Thank you to Classis Huron for entrusting me with the responsibility of serving as a delegate to Synod 2023.

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