Report from Synod 2024

as Delegate for Classis Huron

Rev. Thomas Bomhof (Community CRC, Kitchener), Elder Jeroen Oosterom; (Stratford CRC) and Elder John Tamming and Rev. Sid Couperus (both from Owen Sound CRC) represented Classis Huron at Synod 2024 held at Calvin College June 14-20.

The Agenda for Synod 2024 came with a 40 Day Devotional entitled GOD WITH US**,** written by CRC members, missionaries, pastors, and staff, young and old, different languages, reflecting CRC diversity and encouraging prayer for our church.

All delegates were placed in Advisory Committees; Bomhof Chaired A.C. #8 “Discipline Matters,” Oosterom in A.C.#6 “Global Missions and Ecumenical Matters”; Tamming A.D.#3 “Church Order and Related Matters”; Couperus A.C.#5; “Congregational Care and Justice”.

Administering Synod takes organization, cooperation and coordination and much prayer. Our Denominational Director of Synodical Services Rev. Scott DeVries was diagnosed with stage 4 Cancer in March and died five weeks later, April 27th, 2024. Rev. Dr. Zachary King and Denominational Staff served Synod exceptionally well in time of loss and grief.

Synod began **May 29th, on Zoom**, electing;

* Chair of Synod Pastor Derek Buikema, Orland Park, Ill;
* Second Chair Pastor Stephen Terpstra Borculo CRC Zeeland, Mich;
* First Clerk Pastor Joshua Christoffels; Hammond Ind.; and
* Second Clerk Pastor Daniel DeGraaf Baldwin Wis.

A week later, each Chairperson from the nine Advisory Committees invited delegates in their respective committee **on June 5th by zoom**, introducing delegates to each another, and preparing for Synod’s in-person meeting opening at Calvin University Campus**, June 14-20**. The meeting of Synod took place in tight spaces on the floor of Calvin’s Chapel. Friday and Saturday were spent in Committee work. Sunday was worship and rest and every morning, CRC prayer shepherd Pastor John Hoekema invited delegates to begin together in prayer at 7:00 a.m.

Monday morning’s plenary session began 8:15 with worship and welcomes. The Council of Delegates consist of 55 C.R.C. volunteers, 1 from each Classis, who do the work of Synod between Synod. They came recommending an extension of the Denominational Ministry plan adopted 2020 called ***Our Journey 2025***. Covid interrupted its implementation and it still seemed relevant at this time. They came listing 4 priorities.

1) Cultivating practices of **Prayer** and **Spiritual Disciplines**;

2) Listening to **all generation**, shaping ministry together;

3) Growing in **Diversity** **and unity** by seeking justice and reconciliation with neighbours and newcomers; and

4) **Share the gospel** by living **missionally** and planting churches, connecting with local and global ministries.

The Vision has been extended into ***“Our Journey 2030”*** and worth local churches adopting.

Synod deliberated next steps around gravamen and discipline around the Human Sexuality Report, for much of two days.

* Churches with written protests against the CRC’s teaching on Synod 2022 and 2023 declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong and legal marriage, were placed under “limited suspension” and given one year to retract their protest and repent from their teachings, or begin the process of disaffiliation from the denomination. “Discipline is Discipleship.”
* Classis Iakota requested that Synod declare the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A.108 a Salvation Issue and the registered vote was rejected by 103 to 59.
* Office bearers who struggle with signing The Covenant of Office Bearers could write a Gravamen to their local council, (with a three year limitation).
* Office Bearers with Gravamen are to recuse themselves from Classis meetings, delegates to Synod or Synodical Agencies or Boards.
* Office Bearers under limited suspension may still attend Classis Meetings and speak, but they may not vote.
* Synod 2024 also asked all delegates in Classis be asked to sign The Covenant of Office Bearers every year (and not just first-time delegates.)

Susan LaClear, the **Director for Candidacy for the Christian Reformed Church** gave a riveting speech, warning our denomination, like many others, is facing a pastoral leadership shortage. 30% of CRC pastors are 60 and older. Instead of being vacant for 1 or 2 years, churches are now vacant 3 to 5 years. We need more commissioned pastors. She mentioned fears of financial burdens; potential relocation for study and ministry; perceived lack of support for theological education; and negativity within the denomination as reasons why people are reluctant to enter ministry. She also highlighted, students were coming to the denomination because of Reformed theology; well formed character of a lot of CRC folk; covenantal commitment to one another; 400 years of Church Order wisdom; a belief in leadership development; and lay governance and ministry leadership. She then introduced 12 new candidates for ordination, along with 13 others who could not make Synod. *Classis Huron delegates were delighted to celebrate with* ***Melissa Burmaster****, serving Waterloo Campus Ministry, who was also presented.* Susan LaClear challenged all delegates to pray daily to the Lord of the Harvest to raise up and send out laborers into the harvest field.

Synod heard from the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria, Isaiah Jirapye Maagaji, who said thank you for missionaries and synods before, who poured their hearts into “our people”. They now have 500,000 worshipers, 300,000 members, 276 pastors and 20 Classis’s, and 3 Bible Colleges, 25 schools and 5 health clinics. Thankyou to Resonate. Luke Ariko Ekitala, General Secretary from East Africa has 1,200 congregationas, with schools and healthcare centers and community developments. Patrick Jok general secretary from Sudanese Reformed Church from South Sudan, share of their struggles, with civil war and economic hardship, but churches are growing there. It was so humbling to hear how excited they were to stand before the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of North America and give words of gratitude and thanks for all we as a denomination have done for them in the past, and present.

Finally, Rev. Kevin DeRaaf gave a presentation on behalf of Resonate, informing Synod of

* 33 new church plants that have taken off since Covid, and especially the last two years, among the Latin Consejo and Black Communities in the South-Eastern States.
* There is a hunger and thirst for training and teaching in the Reformed faith, spawning new faith communities bearing fruit.
* Included in the larger Global Vision of the denomination, Resonate has also been working with a cluster of Venezuelan congregations who have indicated an interest in also “belonging” to the Christian Reformed Church of North America.
* The tensions and strains of our denomination walking through these last three Synods has impacted Ministry Shares and diminished abilities to support missions at home and abroad but Resonate continues to hear stories of God’s redeeming work in and through churches and church plants alike.

God Is Still With Us and continues to hold his church and our denomination in his hand. May his kingdom continue to come, and his will be done among us, so that we might continue to serve him and go on our way rejoicing. Thankyou for entrusting the four of us with the privilege of representing Classis Huron at Synod 2024.