

Overture RSE 2024

The overture was presented by the Flamborough-Redemption CanRC to Classis Central Ontario September 2024.

It was then presented by CCO September 2024 to Regional Synod East 2024.

It is now being presented by RSE 2024 to General Synod 2025.

Proposed Solutions to Shorten the Duration of General Synod

The Consequence of Lengthy General Synods

The reality that a typical general synod will last approximately 2+ weeks is recognized by most elders among the federation of churches. For example, the eight general synods since 2001 have had an average duration of twelve days. None have been finished in less than nine days.¹

Consequently, elders still engaged in the workforce hesitate to allow their names to stand as delegate to general synod. Many have limited vacation days, others are unable to step back from important work-related projects (either as employees or employers), still others cannot afford the financial impact of being absent from work. Additionally, general synod is normally held in the month of May.² While this may be of benefit to ministers wrapping up a busy season of catechism instruction, it isn't a benefit to those elders engaged in construction or agricultural industries.

Faced with these challenges, the Acts of various general synods reveal that elder delegates, who can more easily accommodate two or more weeks in their schedules to attend general synod as delegate, tend to be independently wealthy, older, or retired brothers. Furthermore, some elders in this unique demographic have served as delegate to general synod on multiple occasions. As much as possible no elder, because of his job, wealth, or availability, should have greater opportunity to attend general synod than others. If Article 49 supports an equal number of elders and ministers at general synod, the same principle of equity would suggest that elders of all ages, vocations, and status would also have an equal opportunity to attend general synod as a delegate. So, how can these realities be remedied by practical solutions? The simplest solution is to seek ways to reduce the span of time in which general synod meets.

The following two proposals represent two distinct ways to improve the efficiency and reduce the length of general synod. They are meant to stand on their own individually.

Proposal 1: Adopt a Hybrid Model of Virtual and In-Person Meetings of General Synod

¹ Guelph GS 2022, May 10-23 (13 days); Edmonton GS 2019, May 14-23 (9 days); Dunnville GS 2016, May 10-19 (9 days); Carman GS 2013, May 7-21 (14 days); Burlington GS 2010 (14 days); Smithers GS 2007, May 9-22 (13 days); Chatham GS 2004, February 10-21 (11 days); Neerlandia GS 2001 (13 days).

² Chatham GS 2004 is the one exception to this pattern.

1 One of the benefits of living through Covid-era restrictions—perhaps the only one—was the
2 revelation that important meetings, even ecclesiastical meetings, could be conducted effectively
3 via virtual conference calls (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.).
4

5 For example, in May-June 2024 the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America
6 employed a hybrid model of online and in-person sessions of synod. In the Preface to *Agenda for*
7 *2024* the CRCNA states: “The Council of Delegates of the CRCNA decided in February 2024
8 that, due to the anticipation of a weighty agenda, Synod 2024 will begin with a virtual convening
9 session on Wednesday, May 29, at 7:00 p.m. (EDT). In addition, a virtual advisory committee
10 meeting will take place on Wednesday, June 5, at 7:00 p.m. Reverend Steve DeVries, pastor of
11 Lee Street CRC, Wyoming, Michigan, will serve as the president pro-tem until synod is duly
12 constituted and its four officers have been elected. Synod will meet in person beginning on
13 Friday, June 14, at 8:15 a.m. in the Calvin Chapel on the campus of Calvin University in Grand
14 Rapids, Michigan. A community-wide Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise will be held
15 Sunday, June 16, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. at Lee Street CRC, 1261 Lee Street SW, Wyoming,
16 Michigan. Prior to the convening session, all delegates and advisers to synod are encouraged to
17 take time to view the video orientations posted on the synod site—designed as a secure site for
18 delegates and advisers only. The orientation will assist first-time delegates and advisers in
19 understanding the nature of synod and will provide helpful reminders for returning delegates and
20 advisers to synod. In addition, special orientations will be held for advisers to synod, as well as
21 for advisory committee chairs and reporters and their alternates (see the proposed daily schedule
22 in the Announcements section on the following pages for more information).”³
23

24 This hybrid model allowed the CRCNA synod to complete in-person sessions of Synod 2024
25 within four days, despite a large delegation, and a challenging and divisive agenda! If this was
26 possible in the CRCNA, then it stands to reason that the general synod of the Canadian
27 Reformed Churches, with fewer delegates, could also effectively embrace such a model in order
28 to reduce the duration of in-person sessions of general synod.
29

30 With this in mind, Regional Synod East (November 2024) proposes to General Synod 2025 that
31 general synod agree to adopt a hybrid model in which delegates to general synod meet virtually
32 and in-person. At least one month prior to the convening of in-person sessions of general synod,
33 the convening church will host a virtual session of general synod during which delegates to
34 general synod choose members to the executive, and populate the various advisory committees.
35

36 **Proposal 2: Direct Future Convening Churches of General Synod to Hire a** 37 **Clerical Support Team (1-3 members)**

38 It is a well-known fact that the daily meetings of ecclesiastical assemblies conclude by reviewing
39 and adopting the official Acts. What distinguishes general synod from the minor assemblies is
40 the fact that this review takes place following each day of general synod. In theory, a general
41 synod of 12 days, will include 12 occasions to review and adopt the official Acts.
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³ Christian Reformed Church in North American, “Agenda for Synod 2024.” Last accessed on June 25, 2024 at https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/2024_Agenda.pdf

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1 Any delegate to an ecclesiastical assembly will attest to the fact that the important process of
2 reviewing and adopting the official Acts can be cumbersome and time consuming. Even at a
3 meeting of classis, this process can fill an entire hour. Presumably, the same is true of general
4 synod. A simple math calculation reveals that a 12 day general synod will see delegates spending
5 at least 12 hours in total reviewing Acts rather than proceeding through the rest of the agenda—a
6 full day spent approving Acts!

7
8 A good recording clerk keeps an accurate record of the Acts, and documents things in such a way
9 that the Acts have minimal grammatical errors. But this is a challenging task. When the Acts are
10 not entirely accurate, or are filled with numerous errors, the delegates will be required to spend
11 an inordinate amount of time reviewing, discussing, editing, and finally approving the Acts.

12
13 Since the task of recording clerk at general synod is so large, it would be beneficial to enlist the
14 help of other capable individuals in helping review and edit the official Acts. These same
15 individuals could assist the convening church in any other administrative tasks so that delegates
16 can more easily focus their attention on working through the material on the agenda. Since the
17 Canadian Reformed Churches do not have any permanent position like a stated clerk, an
18 alternative solution would be to direct the convening church of general synod to hire a team of 1-
19 3 individuals gifted in secretarial and administrative work, to function as a team of assistants to
20 the recording clerk of general synod. In this way, general synod could potentially be shortened
21 by a full day because of increased efficiency when reviewing each day's Acts.

22
23 With this in mind, Regional Synod East (November 2024) proposes to General Synod 2025 that
24 general synod agree to direct the convening church of each general synod to hire a team of
25 administrative assistants to work alongside, and under the direction of general synod, in order to
26 improve the overall efficiency of general synod.