

Press Release of General Synod Aldergrove 2025

May 6 - May 16

The night before Synod 2025 started, a prayer service took place at the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church. Rev. John Ludwig, chairman of the previous synod, preached on 1 Timothy 3:15. His theme was: *“The Church of the living God is the pillar and buttress of the truth.”* The message focused on the church’s calling to confess and preserve the truth of the gospel in the world. Following the sermon, the worshipers prayed for God’s blessing on the upcoming synod.

Opening

The next morning, the twenty-four delegates met in the church building at 9:00 a.m. On behalf of the convening church, Rev. Rob Schouten welcomed everyone on behalf of the convening church. He also led the opening devotions. He read Colossians 1:1–20 and gave a meditation on verse 18a: *“And he is the head of the body, the church.”* The delegates joined in prayer, asking for God’s guidance over the deliberations and decisions of Synod.

The convening church examined the credentials from Regional Synods East and West and found them to be in good order. Rev. John Louwerse was elected as chairman, Rev. Rob Schouten as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as first clerk, and Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer as second clerk. Rev. Schouten then declared General Synod 2025 duly constituted.

The chairman expressed gratitude for the extensive work carried out by the convening church. This included receiving correspondence and organizing a vast agenda, arranging hospitality for all delegates, coordinating three meals per day for delegates and fraternal representatives, and providing the necessary technical setup. As Synod progressed, the diligence and care of the host church became more and more evident.

Following a short adjournment, Synod formally adopted the agenda. The executive suggested a way to conduct the business of synod. Five advisory committees were appointed, each assigned a portion of the agenda. These committees were tasked with summarizing the issues, analyzing submissions, and preparing recommendations for discussion in plenary session. Much of the early part of Synod was occupied with committee work in preparation for those deliberations.

The main decisions of General Synod 2025 are summarized in the following paragraphs. For more details, readers should check the official Acts of Synod 2025. You can find the provisional Acts at www.canrc.org. In time, the official Acts will also appear there.

Ecumenical relationships

In keeping with the mandate of the previous synod, the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) proposed a revision to Article 50 of the Church Order. The previous wording referred to relations with “churches abroad,” a phrase that no longer reflects the global and regional realities of our ecclesiastical ties. The CER recommended the following revised wording:

“Ecumenical relationships with other churches of Reformed confession shall be entered into where feasible and be maintained according to the rules adopted for this purpose by general synod. On minor points of ecclesiastical governance and practice churches shall not be rejected.”

Synod adopted this proposal.

Synod also approved a new classification system for ecumenical relationships. Churches with whom we have formal ecclesiastical fellowship (commonly known as “sister-church” relationships) are now categorized as either Category A (“intense contact”) or Category B (“less intense contact”). This distinction does not affect mutual recognition but reflects the level of interaction and the allocation of limited resources. In God’s providence, closer ties have developed with some churches, and these categories simply acknowledge that reality.

In addition to these two categories of ecclesiastical fellowship, a third category called “ecclesiastical contact” was affirmed. This category applies to churches of known Reformed character with whom full ecclesiastical fellowship is not yet feasible. In such cases, a relationship of mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation is pursued with the goal of eventual closer fellowship.

Beyond these three levels—governed by what is now called “Rule 1”—Synod adopted a new provision referred to as “Rule 2.” This allows for more flexible local ecumenical engagement in cases where no formal ecclesiastical fellowship exists. Rule 2 permits the following, in accordance with adopted protocols:

1. Pulpit fellowship with the concurring advice of classis;
2. Reception of members at the Lord’s Supper according to local regulations;
3. Reception of members into the local congregation according to local regulations;
4. An account of these ecumenical activities to be given to the appropriate classis.

A highlight of Synod was the decision to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches (The Netherlands) – GK, a new federation formed by the merger of two church groups that had previously separated from the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv). In 2019, our churches were compelled to sever ties with the GKv, and it was therefore a joy to recognize and enter into fellowship with a faithful Reformed federation in the Netherlands (Category A). Rev. Rik Douma attended Synod as a credentialed delegate of the GK, addressed the assembly, and expressed gratitude for this newly established relationship.

Synod also decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), designated as Category B. While based largely in the United States, the ARPC includes twelve congregations in Canada, located in Ontario and New Brunswick. These Canadian churches are working toward forming their own federation. Rev. Aaron De Boer represented the ARPC and was given the opportunity to address Synod. Delegates rejoiced in the evident unity of faith and shared commitment between the two church bodies.

Fraternal delegates were received from a number of sister churches, including the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Churches of Quebec (ERQ), and the United Reformed Churches of North America.

In addition, letters of greeting were received from the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Brazil. Observers from the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Heritage Reformed Congregations were also present and given the opportunity to address Synod.

Our confessions speak of the catholicity of the church, and this truth became tangible as Synod received greetings from churches across the world. It was a joy to hear about the worship and witness of Christ's church on every continent.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Synod 2025 received the report of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) with thankfulness and approved its recommendations. Permission was granted to the Board to reappoint Dr. J. Van Vliet as Principal for another three-year term (2025–2028). Synod also acknowledged the importance of faculty succession planning, as three of five professors are expected to retire within a few years of one another, around the year 2035. Several changes to the seminary's bylaws were adopted. These include: clarifying that all governors must be men eligible to serve as office-bearers in their local church; simplifying the process for appointing substitute governors; extending the time limit for completing a degree from five to seven years; and allowing adjunct professors to hold an appropriate master's degree rather than requiring a doctorate.

Synod approved the creation of a new bursary, the Advanced Theological Studies Assistance (ATSA), designed to help academically gifted CRTS graduates pursue further theological education with a view to potential future service as professors.

For many years, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) have strongly supported the work of CRTS. Synod took note that they continue to value CRTS highly but are exploring the possibility of establishing their own seminary—Australian Reformed Theological Seminary (ARTS)—though not before 2040. Of the four models under consideration, the FRCA is currently focusing on a partnership model in which ARTS would function as an affiliate of CRTS, overseen by an advisory committee rather than joint governance. This model avoids the need for legislative amendments in Ontario.

Synod also appointed new governors, approved financial reports, and expressed gratitude for the ongoing support of the churches, including contributions from the FRCA and the Women's Savings Action. A suggestion from the Toronto-Bethel church to add a sixth professor was noted but not adopted, as it had not followed the usual ecclesiastical route of church discussion.

Revision of Article 30 of the Church Order

For many years, the churches in our federation have discussed how new matters may be brought to a general synod. The previous protocol required churches to follow the "ecclesiastical route": first submitting a matter to classis, then to regional synod, and only afterward to a general synod. This practice was based on Article 30 of the Church Order, which governs how matters are placed on the agenda of major assemblies.

In response to an overture from Regional Synod West 2024, Synod Aldergrove 2025 decided to revise the final sentence of Article 30. It now reads:

"A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly and is common to its churches may be put on the agenda by one of its churches."

This change means that a local church may submit a new matter directly to a major assembly—such as a general synod—provided the matter pertains to the churches in common and has not already been considered at that level. The Guidelines for General Synod were updated to reflect this change.

Limits on hymns

Synod 2025 made a significant decision in determining that the cap of 100 hymns in the Book of Praise was for the duration of past revisions only, and affirmed that the cap is currently null and void.

Seven churches had appealed Synod 2022's decision to maintain the cap, arguing that it lacked a solid basis and unnecessarily limited the churches' ability to include edifying hymns and alternate Psalm settings. Synod agreed, concluding that Synod 2022 had improperly placed the burden of proof on those seeking change by requiring them to demonstrate that the 2004 decision was erroneous—a standard that does not apply to overtures proposing something new.

Synod further judged that supporting the singing of Psalms does not require restricting the number of hymns, and that expanding the hymn section can serve the churches while continuing to honour the place of the Psalms.

Article 55 of the Church Order

Synod 2025 received overtures from both Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West requesting a revision of Article 55 of the Church Order, which governs the use of psalms and hymns in worship. After careful consideration, Synod adopted a new version of the article, as recorded in Article 115 of the Acts. The revised wording reads:

“The 150 Psalms of the Bible are foundational to the church’s worship, and are to be sung frequently in the worship services. General Synod shall adopt metrical versions of the psalms and shall approve hymns for inclusion in a song book which shall, as a rule, have the principal place in the worship of the church. The Consistory may also approve the singing of alternate settings of the psalms and additional hymns, provided they are in harmony with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.”

Additions to the Songbook

Synod approved the inclusion of nineteen alternate psalm settings. Thirty-one hymns previously tested by the churches were also approved for inclusion. These selections will be published in an authorized *augment* to be used alongside the existing *Book of Praise*. These new songs may be incorporated into a future edition of the Book of Praise when it is reprinted.

Changes to the Form for Profession of Faith and Baptism

In Article 184, Synod 2025 considered an overture from Blessings Christian Church and Classis Central Ontario requesting changes to the wording used in the Forms for Public Profession of Faith, Infant Baptism, and Adult Baptism. The overture proposed a return to language used prior to 1983. At that time, the first question in the Profession of Faith Form read:

“Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?”

In 1983, this was changed to:

“First, do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church?”

The 2025 overture argued that the change made in 1983 was not merely a shift in terminology but introduced a different emphasis. It recommended a return to a formulation more consistent with historic Reformed liturgies, which present the Apostles' Creed as the primary summary of

the Christian faith. Synod agreed and adopted a revision of the phrase “summarized in the confessions” to “summarized in the Apostles’ Creed” in the relevant liturgical forms.

While reaffirming the church’s expectation that members adhere to and are bound to both the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions, Synod concluded that the revised wording more faithfully reflects the original intent of the profession and baptismal questions and provides greater clarity in a pastoral setting.

Shorter Forms for the Lord’s Supper

In response to a mandate from Synod 2022, Synod 2025 evaluated two proposed shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, prepared by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (SCBP). These forms were designed to be Reformed in character, aligned in content with the existing forms, and significantly shorter than the current abbreviated form.

Synod decided to provisionally adopt both Short Form #1 and Short Form #2 for use in the churches. These forms are to be used on a trial basis and are not yet final. Churches are encouraged to make use of them and to submit feedback based on their experience. A newly established *Committee on Liturgical Forms* has been tasked with collecting and evaluating that feedback, refining the forms as needed, and reporting to the next general synod with recommendations regarding their adoption, revision, or discontinuation.

Form for Infant Baptism

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod West, proposing a revised Form for the Baptism of Infants. The overture expressed concerns about the current form’s sentence complexity, formal tone, length, occasional lack of clarity, and outdated language.

Recognizing that many of the concerns raised were valid, Synod determined that a formal revision process should be entrusted to a synodically appointed committee, with input from the churches. Synod also observed that similar issues likely exist in the Form for the Baptism of Adults, given its parallel structure.

Accordingly, Synod appointed a three-person committee to review both baptism forms. The committee was mandated to evaluate clarity, language, structure, and doctrinal fidelity, to consider consistency with related forms, and to propose revisions. A draft version is to be distributed to the churches at least 15 months before the next general synod, with the final report submitted no later than six months before synod convenes.

Footnote to the Apostles’ Creed

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod East requesting that an explanatory footnote be added to the phrase “*he descended into hell*” in the Apostles’ Creed. The overture proposed clarifying that these words do not mean that Christ descended to the place of eternal torment after his death, but rather express the depth of his suffering, as understood in Lord’s Day 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 44).

After discussion, Synod decided not to adopt the proposed footnote. While acknowledging that the phrase has long been a subject of theological discussion, Synod judged that adding a footnote to the Creed itself was not the best way to address the concern. Instead, such matters are better handled through faithful preaching, catechesis, and instruction in the confessions.

Conclusion

The work of Synod was completed in ten days. We give thanks to the Lord for granting perseverance to the delegates. The meetings were conducted in a spirit of brotherly harmony and mutual respect. We express appreciation for the gracious leadership of Rev. John Louwerse as chairman. It is our prayer that the decisions made at Synod will serve the well-being of Christ's church and contribute to the unity and vitality of our federation in the years to come. Soli Deo Gloria.

R. Schouten

Vice-chairman of Synod 2025