

Press Release of Classis Manitoba held concurrently with Classis Central US of the United Reformed Churches of North America, on April 3-4, 2017 at Christ Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Combined Classis Opening (Tuesday evening)

On behalf of Christ Reformed Church at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Rev. Spencer Aalsburg opened the meeting by reading from Revelation 7:9-17, and prayer. He invited all present to sing from Psalter Hymnal #398, *The Church's One Foundation*. He spoke some words of welcome to all delegates, and commented upon the fact that this was the first time he was aware of that the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) were conducting concurrent Classis meetings. Fraternal delegates were also welcomed. They included Rev. G.I. Williamson from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and Rev. James Grossman from the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS). Mr. Peter Veenendaal was welcomed as Deputy of Classis Manitoba to neighbouring classes and presbyteries, and Rev. Todd De Rooy as Classis Central US representative of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU).

Most of the important parts of our meetings were conducted in joint session. Classis Central US of the URCNA and Classis Manitoba also met separately to handle certain other points on the agenda to help use our time wisely.

Classis Manitoba

After the opening of our joint meeting, Classis Manitoba met separately. The credentials of the delegates were examined by the brothers from the Carman East and reported to be in good order. All the churches were properly represented by the primary delegates. Classis appointed Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst as president, Rev. J. Poppe as vice-president, and Dr. A.J. Pol as clerk. Classis was declared constituted. The president thanked the convening church of Carman East for the organizing of Classis. The agenda was adopted.

As memorabilia it was noted that the Emmanuel American Reformed Church at Denver is still vacant and encouragement was given. Since the last Classis held in October of 2016, Rev. S. Vandevelde received and declined a call to the church of Neerlandia South, Alberta. It was also noted that recently the Lord took home Rev. J. Mulder, who served as minister in Carman from 1958-1966.

Reports to Classis Manitoba

The treasurer for Classis Manitoba, br. Henry Veldman, submitted his report and suggested an assessment of \$5 per communicant member for 2016. Travel reimbursement is set at 41 cents/km. Classis agrees to the suggested assessment. Gratitude was expressed for the work our treasurer does.

The church appointed for inspecting the books of the treasurer, Carman West, reported that two brothers examined the books and found them to be in good order. The church appointed for inspecting the Classis archives, Winnipeg Redeemer, reported that two brothers examined the archives and found them to be in good order. The Deputy for Contact with the Manitoba

Provincial Government submitted a report on his mandate and activities. These reports were received with gratitude.

Question period (Art.44 CO)

The president asked the questions according to Art.44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. In closed session the Redeemer church asked for advice from Classis in a matter of discipline. Classis gave concurring advice to proceed with discipline, and the office bearers and the member involved were brought before the Lord in prayer.

Address of fraternal delegates

Classis Manitoba and Classis Central US then met concurrently under the combined leadership of the chairmen Rev. Todd Joling (URCNA) and Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst. The decision was approved to extend to each other as delegates the privileges of the floor but without voting rights.

Rev. G.I. Williamson addressed the joint classes on behalf of the Presbytery of the Dakotas (OPC). He rejoiced in being able to be at a concurrent classis, and reflected on his involvement in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand in the early 1960's, where Dutch immigrants from many different Reformed churches came together in one church. They adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith in addition to the Three Forms of Unity, and this served as a great help for them in various controversies that arose. By means of his address Rev. Williamson encouraged us to continue to promote and seek unity together. Prayer was offered for the Presbytery of the Dakotas (OPC).

Presentation of Aldergrove Mission Board regarding mission work in Brazil

Two representatives from the Aldergrove Mission Board, Harold Ludwig and Jan Kottlenberg were welcomed. Mr. Harold Ludwig addressed the concurrent classis on the work of mission in Brazil supported by many of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Western Canada. This work has been ongoing since the 1960's, and currently there are two missionaries being supported, Rev. Ken Wieske and Rev. Jim Witteveen. An update was being given on the mission work in Brazil, and questions were answered regarding this work. Prayer was offered for the work of mission in Brazil.

Fraternal Greetings

Rev. Brian Janssen passed on greetings on behalf of the Presbytery of Iowa of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). He gave an introduction to their Presbytery, and commented on how the Presbytery had received a new minister, Rev. Sacha Walicord, who was going to teach at Dort College and who would also help out in the local churches. Prayer was offered for these churches.

Closing devotions (Monday evening)

Closing devotions were held by reading Matthew 26:57-68, a short meditation on this passage was given, and prayer was offered.

Opening devotions (Tuesday morning)

Opening devotions were held by reading from 1 Peter 5:1-6, and a few words were spoken about

this passage. We sang from Hymn #399 *Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun*, and opened in prayer.

Fraternal greetings

Fraternal greetings were given by Rev. James Grossman from the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS and from Rev. Travis Grassmid of the South Central Classis of the RCUS. A letter of fraternal greetings was also received from the Presbytery of Ohio of the OPC. Prayer was offered for these churches.

URCNA classis reports

A report was given by Rev. Todd De Rooy concerning his visit to the Presbytery of the Dakotas. The Church Planting Advisory Committee reported on two church plants that Classis Central US supports. Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa oversees Rev. Landazuri in Quito, Ecuador. Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois oversees Rev. Ruben Sernas in Chicago Heights, Illinois. Classis received reports on the progress of these church plants, and voted to continue to support this work. A report was also given on the work of Rev. Spriensma, who serves as military chaplain. The work of these men was remembered in prayer.

URCNA federation reports

The federation's missions committee gave a report. Rev. Bout's work as mission coordinator was remembered with appreciation. The mission committee's role is to work with consistories at their invitation, and their role is advisory only. They are also trying to be aware of all the churches' home and foreign mission works, and to enhance communication and cooperation. There are difficult issues that those involved in mission work confront, and it is helpful to learn from one another.

Rev. Todd DeRooy submitted a reported on his work as a representative of Classis Central US on the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. He expressed thankfulness of the clerks of both convening churches in organizing this concurrent Classes.

A report on the ongoing work of the committee for ecclesiastic contact with foreign churches was received. A report of the Psalter Hymnal Committee was also received. The URCNA and OPC are putting together a combined Psalter Hymnal for use in the churches. Certain copyright issues are currently being dealt with. The committee hopes to have this hymnal published by the end of 2017. A report was presented by a representative of the URCNA's federation's website. Some frustrations were expressed about how this website is not yet functioning as it should. Various issues are being addressed.

Fraternal greetings

Brother Peter Veenendaal provided greetings on behalf of Classis Manitoba. He explained the role of the Deputies for Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries, and noted that two other members of this committee were currently attending the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC in Denver, Colorado. His report to Classis Manitoba was received for information. Rev. Todd DeRooy responded, and led in prayer for our churches.

URCNA overtures

An overture was submitted to change the rules of Classis Central US so that those who undergo an ordination exam or a colloquium doctum must present a sermon manuscript to help Classis evaluate their eligibility to serve in the ministry. This has been the practice in the past, but it has not been codified in the rules of Classis. This proposal was adopted.

An overture was presented to propose a change to Art.64 of the Church Order. This concerned the nature of departure of members from the URCNA. The last Synod noted that there were not enough categories to deal with the nature of different types of departures from the church. Thus Classis was asked to approve a revised article for consideration at the next synod. This included dealing with membership transfers to other faithful churches in ecclesiastical fellowship, membership release to churches with whom the URCNA is not in ecclesiastical fellowship, and erasure of members who seek to join a church whom consistory cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, or in other circumstances where someone departs from the church. In situations of erasure, since this is a form of abbreviated discipline, the approval of Classis shall be sought. This overture was amended and adopted.

An overture was presented to adopt a marriage affirmation and gospel testimony. This is a statement of the Biblical perspective on marriage and sexuality, to serve as a testimony of the URCNA's stand on these issues to society at large and especially to the governing authorities. The goal of this document is to serve as a statement to the governing authorities to protect the churches' freedom of speech and freedom of religion over against liberalizing trends in our culture. The overture was adopted, and passed on to synod for its consideration, and to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) for its consideration.

Opening devotions (Tuesday afternoon)

Opening devotions were held by reading Psalm 111, and prayer. Hymn #222:1,2,3,7 *O Give the Lord Whole-hearted Praise* was sung.

Church visit reports (Classis Manitoba)

The joint Classes went into closed session. Church visit reports to the churches of Denver, Winnipeg Grace, and Winnipeg Redeemer were read, and certain questions were asked and answered. Thanksgiving and intercessory prayer was offered for each of these churches.

Appeal to Classis Central US

An appeal was lodged by a brother from one of the churches, considering the nature of a person's "soul," and requesting that consistory pursue the revision of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession to reflect his views on this matter. This appeal was discussed and Classis Central US judged that the appeal was not sustained. Pastoral advice was given for the officers of Classis to continue to pray for the church that is dealing with this member, and for the brother who lodged the appeal. Prayer was offered.

Church visit reports (Classis Manitoba)

Classis Manitoba continued to meet separately. The Denver delegates were thanked for their presence and input at Classis. They departed to make their flight home. Classis Manitoba went into closed session to continue to deal with two more church visit reports. Church visit reports to

the churches of Carman East and Carman West were read, and certain questions were asked and answered. Thanksgiving and intercessory prayer was offered for these churches.

Appointments and concluding matters

The Carman West Canadian Reformed Church will serve as the convening church for the next Classis. It will be convened, D.V., on June 23, 2017 (or, if deemed not necessary then, September 22, 2017). The suggested president for next Classis is Dr. A.J. Pol. Personal question period was made use of. The president noted with gratitude that brotherly censure was deemed not necessary. The Press Release was approved for publication, and the Acts were read and adopted.

Closing

Classis met in joint session. Appreciation was expressed for the opportunity to meet together in this historic concurrent Classes. Rev. Todd De Rooy was thanked for stimulating us to promote unity in this way. The clerks of the convening churches for our Classes were thanked for their organizing of this meeting. Christ Reformed Church was thanked for their gracious hospitality. Rev. Todd Joling thanked the delegates from Classis Manitoba for being willing to travel all this way to take part in this concurrent Classes. Dr. A.J. Pol responded by expressing thankfulness for the opportunity to meet, and hoped that it would be another step in the process of getting to know each other and grow in appreciation for each other. Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst led in closing devotions by reading from Philippians 2:1-11 and invited us to sing from Hymn # 493 *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*. Classis was closed. The delegates were invited to enjoy supper together, before departing for home.

For Classis Manitoba,
Rev. Joe Poppe
Vice-president at that time