

Press Release General Synod Guelph Emmanuel May 10- 21, 2022

On May 10, 2022, the twenty-third General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches was convened by the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph. It was a Synod that began by listening to God's voice as revealed in his Word, and it was concluded by hearing God's voice in creation.

God's voice as revealed in his Word

As is customary, on the evening preceding the convening of Synod, a Prayer Service was held. This was led by Rev. Douwe Agema, who was chairman of the previous Synod, held in Edmonton in 2019. He preached on Psalm 119:57-64 under the theme, "The Spirit teaches us to handle rightly the Word of Truth." He impressed on the delegates that they had been tasked by the churches to serve the churches in total submission to the Word of God. He added that it was the prayer that the Spirit would give the strength and wisdom to handle the Word rightly so that all glory would go to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

On May 10, Rev. Peter Feenstra, emeritus minister of the Emmanuel Church, guided the process to come to the constitution of Synod. The delegates elected Rev. John Ludwig as chairman, Rev. Eric Kampen as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as clerk, and Rev. Carl VanDam as second clerk. The agenda items were divided over five committees. As each Synod is free to decide on the format of the Acts, it was decided to work with a different format than used by previous Synods, in the hope that the Acts would be more reader friendly.

The first week of Synod saw the delegates immersing themselves in the agenda items assigned to them, seeking to work in humble submission to God's Word. To serve the members of the churches, this review will touch on the matters dealt with in a topical manner.

Interchurch Relationships

A major item on the agenda of every Synod is interchurch relationships. For many years, the relationships were dealt with by two committees, one maintaining contact with various churches in North America and another maintaining contact with churches throughout the world. Synod decided to make this one committee, as there is overlap in meeting with churches in ecclesiastical fellowship at various international gatherings. A proposal about developing various categories for exercising ecumenical relations, rather than our current way of only having one category was referred back to the committee for refinement, with the instruction to reflect on the feedback provided by the churches.

Synods also are occasions where visits are made by representatives of churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. Guests were present in person from all over the globe, including South Africa, Australia, and Korea. These guests were given the opportunity to address Synod, passing on greetings. Some of those who had been invited, but were not able to attend, delivered greetings via video links. Others sent letters of greetings. These interactions with delegates from various churches throughout the world gave visible expression of the catholicity of the church. It was striking that a number of presentations concluded with Paul's words from 1 Cor. 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."

In reviewing the reports of the committees looking after interchurch relationships, and hearing the presentations of the guests, Synod was made aware of the struggles and joys of these various churches throughout the world. A general theme was that, while COVID had been hard on the churches, God had graciously preserved his churches through this time.

Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP)

The previous Synod had mandated the SCBP to suggest some more hymns, as well as Psalm versions with different melodies, for testing in the churches. The Committee put in a herculean effort over the past three years to fulfill this mandate, soliciting song suggestions, coming up with a suggested list of hymns and Psalms, receiving and considering feedback, and then preparing a report for this Synod. The whole process of testing these songs was greatly hindered by the inability to gather for worship because of the COVID outbreak. When all the factors were considered, Synod considered it best to provisionally approve the Psalms and Hymns, deleting a few as suggested by the SCBP, for use in the worship services. The Committee was mandated to serve Synod 2025 with final recommendations based on further review of feedback received.

Synod also had to deal with overtures to eliminate the Hymn cap of one hundred hymns, set by Synod Chatham 2004. The overtures argued that removing this cap need not jeopardize the priority of the use of the Psalms in worship. Synod was not persuaded and decided to retain the hymn cap. Retaining this cap, however, will not affect the testing of hymns during the worship service for the next three years.

Under the heading of the SCBP, mention can be made of suggestions regarding forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It was decided to remove the qualifier "For the second service" from the abbreviated form. That qualifier was put in place in a time when churches would have a celebration of the Lord's Supper in both services on a Sunday. It now enables the churches to use this as an alternate form. There was also an overture to adopt some shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Synod decided to mandate the SCBP to present the next General Synod with more possible forms, perhaps using some of the forms of our sister churches.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

A highlight of this Synod was the appointment of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, Minister of the Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura, Western Australia, as Professor of Ministry and Mission. His appointment was necessitated by the upcoming retirement of Dr. A. DeVisser at the end of the Academic Year 2022/23, at which time he will have served the churches at CRTS for 19 years. On Monday evening, May 16, Dr. Bredenhof addressed the members of Synod and guests via video link. He indicated that it was most humbling to receive this expression of trust, and to be granted the beautiful opportunity and privilege to train young men who are getting ready for a life of ministry and mission at CRTS. He thankfully accepted the appointment and was eagerly looking forward to beginning his task. Dr. DeVisser also spoke to the Synod and guests, expressing gratitude to the Lord for the opportunity to serve the churches for 18 years in his task at the seminary.

Synod dealt with many other matters related to the Seminary and preparation for the ministry. It received the general report on the operations of the Seminary over the past number of years, as well as reports about funding for the pastoral training program and the fund for needy students. With much

thankfulness it could be noted that the Seminary is able to continue to do its work of teaching men for the ministry of the gospel.

Related to the work of the training for the ministry of the gospel, Synod dealt with an overture which recommended that preparatory examination of students, when they are declared eligible for call, should be conducted in the classis of their home church before they went to the Seminary. For many years, the bulk of that responsibility fell on Classis Ontario West, as the students were members of churches in that classis. Synod adopted this overture, effective January 2023. This will greatly alleviate the workload of Classis Ontario West.

Other matters

Synod dealt with many other matters, such as reports from Committees looking after the Federation Website (canrc.org), Bible Translation, Archives, and Days of Prayer. It also had to deal with a number of appeals. Synod appointed the Church at Aldergrove to convene the next General Synod in 2025.

God's voice as heard in creation

It may not be apparent from this brief review, but the delegates spent an intense ten days discussing, reflecting, considering, and debating. Each day was opened and closed with reading God's Word and asking for his blessing. There was the desire to deal in a just and righteous manner with all the matters on the agenda, so that the Christ, the king of the church, would be glorified and his people served.

In his concluding remarks, the chairman, Rev. John Ludwig, expressed his thankfulness that Synod could be conducted in a brotherly manner, even when there were differences of opinion. He also acknowledged how so many members of the Guelph-Emmanuel Church willingly gave of their time and talents to help Synod function well. The delegates enjoyed many excellent meals and benefitted from the skilled IT and secretarial help. As a token of appreciation, the church was presented with a picture of a Guelph landmark, with a plaque expressing gratitude for hosting Synod. The chairman was given a ceremonial aluminum gavel with the date of the Synod inscribed. Thanksgiving prayer was then offered to our gracious God for his blessing over the Synod, but just before the "Amen" could be said, we heard the voice of God as described in Psalm 29. The powerful voice of the LORD thundered, the waters poured from the heavens, and the power went out and remained out for more than 24 hours! We enjoyed a final meal in dimmed lighting, said our farewells, and the homeward journeys began.

Rev. Eric Kampen

(Vice-chairman during General Synod 2022)