

# CLASSIS MATTERS

A Newsletter of Classis Georgetown of the CRCNA

July August 2016

## Reflections on Synod, 2016, from our Delegates

(Editor's note: In addition to the regional classes meetings held in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, there is also an annual meeting held each summer, called a Synod. Four delegates; pastor, elder, deacon, and one other of the three, are elected to represent each classis. Your four representatives to the most recent meeting are sharing their experiences with all of you in this issue. When you see them thank them for their service.)

### Synod, June 10-16, 2016, Calvin College

Contributed by Melissa Dykema, Deacon, TrinityCRC

It was my pleasure to represent Classis Georgetown as a deacon delegate to Synod this summer.

We delegates were requested to create a report to summarize some of what we experienced at Synod this year. As I pondered what I would share from such a full week, two words popped into my mind: *meeting and eating*. From Thursday night until Friday at noon over a week later, the vast majority of our waking hours were spent in committee meetings or full sessions, and eating meals and snacks. I hadn't anticipated what long days these would be, and the hours spent in discussion and deliberation left me exhausted.

However, even though those

### Praise & Prayer Requests

~praise God for the work that was accomplished at this year's meeting of Synod.

~pray for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our churches, especially those that are experiencing difficult times.

two words describe what we were actually doing most of the time at Synod, they still don't give a complete picture. Two other words that come to mind are: *listening and speaking*. I was so grateful to have long sections of uninterrupted time in which to hear all points of view, and to share thoughts of my own. Doing this informally over meals gave me a chance to really connect with people, and in the plenary sessions, ideas were carefully and deliberately discussed from all sides of each issue.

Our time together at Synod could also be described with the words *unity and community*. Connecting with the heart of the CRC by simply reading articles in the Banner doesn't give the idea that there is so much unity in the church right now. Being together in person to worship and to pray reminded me that even if our opinions on topics vary, we all have a common love for God and thank him for his Son who has rescued us. We all love him and want to serve him and be like him. The worship team for Synod did a great job helping us identify our many areas of unity and develop community in our praise and worship each morning.

As difficult and weighty topics came up for discussion every day, our conversations were full of two more words: *truth and grace*. I had an interesting perspective from a woman deacon who told me that she has always considered herself to be left-leaning, and that the CRC seemed a bit stuffy and out of touch to her. Being at Synod helped her to see that those who are passionate about truth have very good reasons for upholding that high standard. At the same time, grace and compassion abound.

As the week progressed, two more things we absolutely needed were *patience and humility*. The days were long, and many people spoke at length to issues on the floor. During a coffee break, one deacon I spoke to asserted that he would rather have a root canal than sit through any more of these deliberations. Patience was required to get through the long hours, but it was very important that every voice was heard and issues were examined thoroughly. It was humbling to realize that I had not considered certain people's ideas and points-of-view before, and I had to lay aside some of my pride in those moments.

Finally, Synod was a good mixture of *serious and fun*. Many topics were considered and debated, and the potential consequences of our decisions could be far reaching. But we took time to laugh with our president and speakers when they lightened the mood in their presentations. Our sergeant-at-arms also delighted us by herding us back to our seats with a cowbell and blow-up unicorn head named Roxy.

Am I glad I went to Synod this summer, even though I had to give up being with my family, having a clean house for a week, and spending time outdoors on the first beautiful days of summer? Absolutely. Through the meeting and eating, listening and speaking, the unity and community, truth, grace, patience and humility, I had some serious fun.

Contributed by Gerry Koning, Pastor, Trinity CRC

It was a pleasure to be a delegate to Synod this summer. There were several things that I really appreciated about this Synod.

First, I appreciated having the deacons being a part of our deliberations. This added both younger people and more women in the deliberations of our church. Much of our conversation revolved around finances and I think that it is great to have deacons there to help in this process. I think that the decision not to raise ministry shares by 2% was strongly supported by the deacons at Synod -- they are, after all, the group most responsible for paying them.

Second, I appreciated the large number of people from different ethnic backgrounds. One person in particular was a man from El Paso, Texas, who could not speak English very well, but who soon became my friend as we were able to converse in Spanish. The voices of these delegates -- whether African America, Korean, Hispanic, or Native American -- were an important contribution to our denominational conversation.

Third, I appreciated the strong sense I felt of a desire to have all our decisions be deeply rooted in the Scriptures as well as in the love of Christ. This seemed to me to give us a healthy context for conversations about same-sex marriage, the Doctrine of Discovery, and the persecuted church. Again, I think that this context was greatly helped by the presence of both the deacons and the different ethnic groups at Synod.

I was greatly encouraged by our conversations at Synod this summer. Synod is changing. This year, more than any other

## Reflections on Synod (continued)

year I have been at Synod, it did not seem like it was a place where only white, male, ordained pastors were doing all the speaking and controlling the process. Things at Synod are different and I, for one, thank God for the changes that are happening.

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**Contributed by Jim Roskam, Elder, Georgetown CRC**

~worship is always a plus; being part of robust singing and enjoying songs such as "Be Thou My Vision" and "Lead Me, Guide Me" as well as succinct messages from God's Word, especially one by Rev. Vern Swieringa on longing for wisdom

~the diversity of the denomination with many Koreans as well as others; yet still I saw a name tag with an old Dutch name "Aaltje" (someone's parents holding on to tradition)

~Pastor Church Relations went through a name change to Pastor Church Resources, possibly because contact with the former name may set off a negative stigma

~noted with gratitude that synodical deliberations were bathed in prayer especially committee nine, of which I was a part (Pastoral Guidance to Same-sex Persons in Marriage)

~on Wednesday we met and affirmed 47 candidates for the ministry

~diaconal involvement expands the conversation around greater participation in ministry shares

~most heart warming for me was to learn of the Calvin community's involvement in prison at the Handlon Facility in Ionia, offering a Bachelor of Arts in ministry leadership with the seminary and college participating

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**Contributed by Terry Scholten, Pastor, Alive Ministries**

Synod 2016 was monumental in a num-

ber of ways. It is an amazing experience to meet with multicultural, multinational and ecumenical leaders from around the globe. Synod is a great place to refresh old relationships, and to form new ones. I am glad to be a delegate.

This year, I served on the advisory committee for congregational support. Our committee heard the reports of Cadets, Gems and Youth Unlimited ministries. We were most impacted by the number of girls in Gems (24,000 girls and 5300 women), and almost 40% of the girls in Gems are disconnected from faith or home congregation. Cadets has a cutting edge of international growth, while Youth Unlimited is helping our kids serve — 48,594 hours of service in 2015.

We also received reports regrading congregational services (faith formation, gospel proclamation and worship, mercy and justice, servant leadership, and service link). Those 12 ministries help the CRCNA live out it's mission with qualified leadership engaging it's world. We were blessed with the progress of Faith Formation Ministries, and the new foci for the now newly-named Pastor Church Resources. The CRC's sometimes invisible teams are doing visibly remarkable work. Colin Watson and Darren Roorda are great men and great leaders, helping support the CRC to accomplish it's God-given mission.

Our team also interviewed the committee's recommended candidate for the Banner Editor position, Mr. Shiao Chung. Chung, as he prefers to be called, sustained an amazing Q&A, and blessed us with confidence to recommend him to Synod, believing that Chong would help the CRCNA manage a dynamic dialogue of facts, perspectives and theological groundings as that conversation is partly played out in the pages of the Banner.

Lastly, our team reviewed and updated a baker's dozen of liturgical forms. For

some, that was a work of joy. Everyone on the team, with varied inflection would say, "well, that was fun." I was blessed to re-view again the import of communicating our theology well; words do matter.

The sessions of Synod were lively, debates were lengthy, and most votes were unanimous or very close to it. Even the most controversial moments were handled with respect and decorum. The gallery was occasionally full, and they, too, represented the church well. The CRC is in the thick of some very contemporary and potentially divisive issues, and yet we navigated them together. Our conversations will be long, decades long, as we strive to understand and live into love, grace, gospel and redemption at academic and relational levels. The best moment for me was when an elderly, Native American couple gave their testimony about how they and generations of their families now have faith and know Jesus because of the work at Rehoboth. It was a powerful balance to the stories of pain that accompany the population of the West.

Rev. Jul Medinblik and I shared dinner one day. The seminary is in a good place, working hard to equip upcoming pastors to engage a dynamic culture of leadership. Our collaborations with the RCA are a part of that leadership development, and in 2018 there is a goal to have a joint synod gathering—so you should all volunteer to be a delegate. It will be great to dovetail more of our efforts as we build the kingdom together.

Overall, Synod 2016 was an amazing experience, consuming 15 hours a day of healthy leadership, collaborative relationships, empowering worship, daring hospitality and risky compassion. Sounds a lot like Classis G'towns efforts and values. Thanks for sending me as one of our delegates. No, really, thanks a lot!

## Vision Team, Members & Staff

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