

**Synod Schererville 2007**  
**Press Release**  
**United Reformed Churches in North America**

Synod Schererville



Thursday, 12 July 2007

PALOS HEIGHTS, IL – With their meeting time rapidly passing, delegates to Synod Schererville 2007 of the URCNA dug in to their work with vigor on Thursday.

Their attention ranged from addressing errors about the doctrine of justification, on the one hand, to synodical regulations and Web sites, on the other.

Significant matters addressed on Thursday are detailed below.

### **Justification and the Federal Vision**

The URCNA joined a number of Reformed and Presbyterian federations in addressing a movement of growing concern known as the “Federal Vision.”

In doing so, Synod 2007 approved statements which:

- ✓ Affirmed “that the Scriptures and confessions ... teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, based upon the active and passive obedience of Christ alone.”
- ✓ Affirmed “that the Scriptures and confessions teach that faith is the sole instrument of our justification apart from all works.”
- ✓ Determined to “remind & encourage individuals and churches that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in Church Order Art. 29, 52, 55, 61, and 62 for addressing theological error.”

The Synod then adopted a statement comprising rejections of error, intended to serve as pastoral advice to the churches. That statement said:

Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that “God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,” able to perform “the commandment of life” as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);

2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the “commandment of life” given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the “instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness” (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than “leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified” or “a certain knowledge” of and “a hearty trust” in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).

Finally, Synod 2007 appointed a study committee to examine the Federal Vision and similar teachings regarding the doctrine of justification. The committee was asked to bring a clear statement concerning this matter to the next synod.

### **Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Union**

Synod also took steps to draw closer to several like-minded federations of churches in addressing the report and recommendations of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Union.

The most weighty step was a move to enter Ecclesiastical Fellowship, or Phase Two, with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The URCNA has been in Phase One, Corresponding Relations, with the OPC since 1997. That phase is intended to be one of exploration through correspondence and dialogue.

By agreeing to enter Phase Two with the OPC, the URC would formally recognize this denomination as a true church and would encourage closer relationships between the two church federations. Before this action becomes official, however, it will require ratification by a majority of the URC's consistories.

Synod 2007 also asked its ecumenical committee begin dialogue with the Korean American Presbyterian Church and the Heritage Reformed Congregations. They also agreed to ratify the entrance of two denominations – the Free Reformed Churches of North America and the Heritage Reformed Congregations – into the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

### **Song Book Committee Mandate**

In answer to a pair of overtures, Synod on Thursday adopted a statement clarifying the mandate of its Song Book Committee.

Synod 1997 established the Song Book Committee with the task of producing a new song book for the URCNA. In light of increasingly close ties with the Canadian Reformed Churches, Synod 2001 determined that the Song Book Committee should work with its equivalent from the CanRC. Since that time, there has been some debate concerning whether the committee was to produce only a joint URC-CanRC song book, or a URC song book developed in consultation with its Canadian sister church.

The measure adopted on Thursday answers the debate by calling the committee to work with and consult the CanRC committee, but to produce a new song book specifically for the URCNA. At the same time, Synod affirmed the URC's commitment also to continue dialoguing with the Canadian Reformed Churches regarding a song book.

### **Theological Education Committee**

Clarification also was given to the Theological Education Committee.

This committee has been working with a Canadian Reformed Church committee in an attempt to develop agreement with the CanRC on how ministers are to be educated. To date, the committees have been at an impasse, with the CanRC committee maintaining that Scripture mandates at least one federationally-controlled seminary, while the URC committee maintained that it does not.

The CanRC's Synod Smithers 2007 recently removed that roadblock. While affirming their "strong preference" for at least one federationally-controlled seminary, Synod Smithers acknowledged that this is not a matter of principle, but one of application. Therefore, it declared that this matter should not impede movement toward unity between the URC and CanRC.

Synod Schererville 2007 delegates affirmed six points of agreement between the URC and CanRC committees and affirmed the URC committee's position that a federationally-controlled seminary is not Biblically mandated.

### **Proposed Joint Church Order**

In another matter aimed at laying the groundwork for eventual unity between the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed federations, Synod 2007 received a proposed church order that could be used as the governmental basis for a joint federation in the future.

This Proposed Joint Church Order now will be distributed to the churches for study. The Proposed Joint Church Order Committee also will provide expositions of various parts of the proposed church order and will hold no more than eight regional conferences throughout the federation to discuss it.

Having reviewed the document, consistories will be free to submit concerns and suggestions to the committee, which was mandated to produce a revised copy – as well as a summary of communications from the churches – for Synod 2010.

### **Separation of Churches and Ministers**

The current URC Church Order also received some fine-tuning on Thursday with the adoption of revised language for Article 11.

This article governs the separation of ministers and churches when the minister has no call to serve another congregation and has not committed any offense worthy of discipline.

Although the principle of the current Article 11 remains in the revised article, the new language seeks to emphasize the weightiness of such an action. Even more significantly, it requires that the church and its minister seek reconciliation with the help of the church visitors and the classis before proceeding to a separation.

Because it is an amendment of the church order, this measure requires ratification by two-thirds of the URC's consistories.

### **Other Matters**

Other matters addressed on Thursday by Synod Schererville 2007 included the following.

- Synod provisionally adopted newly drafted Regulations for Synodical Procedure. These new rules for how URC synods are to operate will be used until amended or adopted by the next synodical meeting.
- Synod appointed the consistory of Grace URC of Waupun, WI, to be the oversight consistory for the federation's Website Committee. Delegates also adopted a number of recommendations intended to guide the Website Committee as it builds an Internet presence for the URCNA.
- Synod received greetings by fraternal visitors from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and the Free

Reformed Churches of North America. In addition, several URC missionaries addressed the assembly.

- Synod decided that the next synodical meeting will be held, if the Lord is willing, in the summer of 2010 at a date to be determined. Cornerstone URC of London, ON, was chosen to serve as the convening church.

Information concerning the remaining deliberations and decisions of Synod Schererville 2007 will be made available after business concludes on Friday, the Lord willing.