

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA**  
**SYNOD ESCONDIDO 2024**  
**PRESS RELEASE – TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2024**

Synod Escondido 2024 made good use of its first full day of labor, putting significant portions of its agenda to rest.

The day began with Rev. Mark Stromberg expounding on Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, then leading the delegates in prayer and singing. Delegates who arrived after Monday's opening session were welcomed and affirmed their commitment to the truth expressed in the Reformed confessions.

Delegates spent the rest of the morning working in advisory committees, striving to summarize and provide recommended actions for portions of the Synod's agenda.

The afternoon session began with devotions led by Rev. Joel Dykstra, who briefly expounded on Matthew 16:16-18 before leading the delegates in prayer and singing.

The Rev. Dr. Malan Van Rhyn brought greetings to the assembly on behalf of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). Rev. Van Rhyn called the assembly to recognize that the struggles of this age are not unexpected, urging the brothers to press on in faithfully ministering to God's people. He provided updates regarding struggles and developments within the GKSA, urging the URCNA to continue steadfastly in its labors for the Lord and His church. Rev. Jason Tuinstra responded and led the Synod in prayer for the GKSA.

A host of business matters were addressed during the remainder of the afternoon.

Delegates handled several overtures calling for changes to the URC Church Order. Among these, they approved a proposal to amend Arts. 20 and 26 of the Church Order, which would ensure that all decisions of church assemblies – including action taken during closed-to-the-public “executive sessions” – are openly published. Also approved were most provisions of an overture calling for editorial changes to the Introduction and to Arts. 11 through 46 of the Church Order. These changes aimed at improving the internal consistency of the Church Order's language. The assembly declined to approve a request to make a minor change to Appendix 8 of the Church Order.

Some of the afternoon session was spent discussing the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC). For the past 17 years, the URCNA has been an associate member of the PRCC, with the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, IL, serving as the URC's liaison. This year, the Faith Consistory urged applying for full membership in the PRCC – both because of the increasing challenges facing the chaplaincy, and because of the addition of a second URC chaplain. After hearing from Rev. Andrew Spriensma, who has served as an Army chaplain for 17 years, this recommendation was approved. Synod expressed appreciation for the Faith URC Consistory's 17 years of labor as liaison consistory to the PRCC and for Rev. Spriensma's labors ministering to the spiritual needs of American soldiers.

Gratitude also was expressed for the Consistory of Grace URC of Waupun, WI, which has served for 17 years as the Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee.

Looking abroad, the assembly approved maintaining ecumenical relationships with six church federations, including the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia, the Evangelical Reformed Church in India, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Sudanese Reformed Churches. These are churches with which the URC is continuing to pursue ecumenical relations, without yet having entered fully into a Phase 2, or sister-church, relationship.

The delegates declined a request to create a study committee that would have been charged with developing guidelines for churches facing a pastoral vacancy. The advisory committee addressing this overture noted that the concerns expressed in the request were quite broad and could be better addressed in other ways.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in advisory committee work.

After their evening meal, the delegates reconvened for devotions led by Rev. Bill Pols. Having called the brothers to sing Psalm 46, Rev. Pols extolled our matchless King, Jesus Christ, from Revelation 19:11-16. He then led the assembly in prayer.

The floor next was given to Mr. Falko Drijfhout, a fraternal delegate from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. Mr. Drijfhout provided a brief overview of the life and history of the EPCEW – a federation of churches which labor in a spiritually barren land. He noted with gladness the church plants in their midst, describing some of their outreach; and he requested prayer for the challenges that our brothers face in England and Wales and beyond. Rev. Peter Van't Hoff responded and led the assembly in prayer for the EPCEW.

Next up was Rev. Rob Van Doodewaard from the Free Reformed Churches in North America. Rev. Van Doodewaard brought greetings on behalf of the FRCNA, noting the commonalities and shared relationships between our church federations. He noted the need we have for one another, due to the deepening darkness of our culture. Rev. Joel Dykstra responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the FRCNA.

Synod turned its attention to missionary labors during a significant part of Tuesday evening. Appreciation was expressed for the labor of Foreign Missions Coordinator Rev. Richard Bout, with Synod approving a proposal to fund sending his wife along with him on up to two trips to visit mission works annually.

Looking to the URC's home missions efforts, Synod approved adoption of a second edition of the URCNA church planting manual, *How to Plant a Reformed Church*. The assembly decided to publish this manual electronically for free distribution, as well as printing 300 copies via Reformed Fellowship, Inc. at a cost of \$2500. The delegates agreed to urge the churches to give prayerful consideration to the development of classical (or regional) home missionaries.

A significant volume of work was completed by the assembly during its first full day of labor. At the close of the day's deliberations, Rev. Matthew Nuiver walked the delegates through Titus 2:11-3:8, reminding them of the blessing of fellowship that they enjoy, as they share the unthinkable rich blessing of serving Christ together.

The assembly concluded in prayer and song, recessing until 8 a.m.