

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
SYNOD ESCONDIDO 2024
PRESS RELEASE – WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2024

The business of Synod Escondido slowed on Wednesday, as delegates engaged in times of careful deliberation and prayer.

Unlike the first day of the URCNA's Synod Escondido – which was marked by a flurry of action – the second day was characterized by discussion of matters that required much careful thought and debate. Sprinkled throughout the deliberation was Scripture, prayer, and heart-stirring song.

Wednesday began with devotions by Rev Greg Lubbers, who led the assembly to see from Psalm 65 the gospel optimism that should characterize our ministry, our speech, our attitudes, and our very faces. He led the brothers in prayer, as well as in singing Psalm 65.

The delegates also spent time in prayer for particular needs within the churches. The brothers prayed for healing and comfort for those who suffer and grieve.

Two guests from like-minded church federations brought greetings to the assembly on Wednesday morning.

The first was Rev. Andrew Nugteren from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Rev. Nugteren provided a brief introduction to the CRCA, celebrating the unity between our federations. He requested prayer regarding the spiritual pressure Australian culture is exerting on Christians to conform to ungodly views, and also for the raising up of a new generation of ministers. Rev. Nugteren encouraged emeritus ministers from the URCNA to consider filling vacant pulpits of the CRCA. Rev. Stephen Wetmore responded and led the brothers in prayer for the CRCA.

A bit later, Mr. Wayne Johnson brought greetings on behalf of the Reformed Church of the United States. He reported on the recently held synod of the RCUS, which was quite encouraging, and described some recent changes these churches have adopted. Mr. Johnson also recalled some of the rich history bound up in the RCUS, which next year anticipates celebrating its 300th anniversary. Rev. Harold Miller responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the RCUS.

Significant deliberations were held during the morning session regarding a proposal to receive into the URCNA a church from Cape Town, South Africa. While the delegates expressed deep appreciation for the leaders of this church, significant concerns were raised regarding the difficulties implicit in such a long-distance relationship, as well as the implications arising from this precedent. After lengthy discussion, the assembly voted to not receive the church, although the representatives of the church which were present were warmly welcomed to participate in the assembly.

The men spent a bit of time receiving reports from the convening consistory and from the committee charged with reviewing credentials of synodical delegates. They then entered into discussion regarding two overtures that would have changed the manner in which synodical assemblies are held. This discussion was cut short by the clock, as the lunch hour drew near.

Rev. Richard Kuiken led the brothers in a brief meditation on Jeremiah 6:16, along with prayer and song, prior to lunch. He emphasized the importance of simply inviting acquaintances to worship, where they will encounter the ancient paths of God's truth.

After lunch, Rev. Phil Vos led the brothers in considering the truth of God's Word from Psalm 84, which emphasizes the blessing of drawing near to the Lord in the midst of our weakness. Rev. Vos then led the men in prayer and song.

Rev. Patrick Jok from the Sudanese Reformed Churches greeted the assembly, rejoicing that the Lord allowed him to be present despite a challenging time of travel. Rev. Jok lamented the violence and instability that has afflicted South Sudan, yet he noted the Lord's blessing in seeing growth in the churches and Christian schools. Rev. Jok also presented a request to the URCNA from the SRC for coaching and mentoring, so that the a good foundation can be laid for their churches. Rev. John Van Eyk responded, leading the assembly in prayer for the SRC.

Delegates spent most of the early afternoon wrapping up advisory committee work, reconvening in mid-afternoon.

Upon resuming their meeting, the delegates heard from Rev. Jonathan Kruis, who brought greetings on behalf of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. He expressed appreciation for the fellowship between the RPCNA and the URCNA, particularly in light of the pessimism and discouragement that sometimes seems to be the spirit of this age. He also commended the resources of the RPCNA, including Geneva College and the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Responding, Rev. Todd De Rooi led the assembly in prayer for the RPCNA.

The delegates then returned to their pre-lunch business, debating two overtures which sought to change the manner in which URC synods are held. Instead of each consistory delegating two men to synod, as now is done, each classis (regional assembly) would delegate six ministers and six elders, resulting in a much smaller assembly. This was aimed at promoting better deliberation and stewardly use of resources. Those favoring the current practice emphasized the value of involving a larger number of delegates, thereby promoting fellowship and unity among the churches. Ultimately, the proposed change was defeated.

Another debate centered around the proposed adoption of pastoral advice aimed at helping the churches to better grasp the relationships between church, state, and family, as well as the calling of Christians regarding those relationships. An advisory committee recommended not adopting this pastoral advice, arguing that the advice in question was not an adequately comprehensive summary of biblical and confessional truth regarding the topic. This proposal, too, was defeated.

The afternoon session was wrapped up by Rev. Bill Boekestein, who led the brothers in considering the truth of Psalm 121, in prayer, and in singing.

The day wrapped up with a number of the URCNA's missionaries and church planters addressing the assembly, encouraging the brothers with reports of the work being done on a variety of mission fields. Truly, the fields are white for the harvest!