

Synod Schererville 2007
Press Release
United Reformed Churches in North America

Synod Schererville



Friday, 13 July 2007

PALOS HEIGHTS, IL – Synod Schererville 2007 of the United Reformed Churches in North America concluded as it began: with words aimed at unity.

Having convened on Monday evening, July 9, with worship that called them to express their unity in the faith, delegates to Synod 2007 wrapped up their business on Friday, July 13, by addressing their manner of seeking unity with other federations.

That latter task included addressing calls for revised rules on ecumenical relationships and an invitation for another federation to unite with them.

Revised Rules for Ecumenical Relations

When they convened, delegates to Synod 2007 faced a pair of requests to change the URC's guidelines for ecumenical relationships.

The URC's relationships with other federations are governed by its Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, which includes three phases.

- ✓ Phase One calls for correspondence and dialogue between the URC and another federation, so that mutual understanding and appreciation might grow between them.
- ✓ Phase Two brings another federation into a "sister-church" relationship in which the URC recognizes it as a true church and encourages closer relationships between the two federations. In its pre-synod form, this phase was explicitly declared to be "in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity."
- ✓ Phase Three calls for movement into full integration between the two federations.

Both overtures facing Synod 2007 sought to alter Phase Two by removing the phrase "in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated church unity." They then called for Phase Three to become a multi-step process of preparing for and entering into full unity.

After discussion led by its advisory committee, Synod 2007 amended its rules for Phase Two by replacing the contested phrase. The rules for Phase Two now declare that: "The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, in acknowledgement of the

desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship. ..." Entering this phase would continue to require ratification by the consistories, as required by Church Order Art. 36.

The rules for Phase Three then were amended to create two steps. In the first step, a plan of ecclesiastical union would be developed to outline the timing, coordination, and integration of six broad areas of the structure and life of the two federations. The second step would involve implementing the plan of union.

Ratification by the consistories, according to Church Order Art. 36, would be required to begin both of the steps in Phase Three.

Having adopted those changes, Synod 2007 then addressed a point of possible confusion. Currently, the URC has several committees which are working to lay the groundwork for eventual union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Under the new rules, the work of those committees properly belongs to the first step of Phase Three – yet the URC has only approved Phase Two relations with the CanRC.

To clarify the relationship and safeguard the work of the committees, Synod 2007 approved an exception to the newly adopted guidelines to allow the current unity committees to continue working with their corresponding CanRC committees while the two federations continue to function in Phase Two. This work would then pave the way for the federations when the URC does move to Phase Three.

Invitation to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

Looking to another ecumenical relationship, Synod Schererville 2007 determined to reiterate an offer made by Synod Hudsonville 1999.

Synod 2007 voted to re-extended the invitation to union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the URC Church Order. The action specified that, should the OCRC accept the invitation as a federation, it would be received immediately without its ministers being required to submit to a colloquium doctum.

This invitation will require ratification by a majority of the URC's consistories before becoming effective.

Ratification Requirements

In answer to a trio of overtures, Synod 2007 adopted measures that would clarify the ratification process in the URCNA.

Currently, the URC Church Order requires ratification by a majority of Consistories for decisions to enter into ecumenical relationships with other federations (Church Order Art. 36) and ratification by two-thirds of consistories for decisions to change the church order (Church Order Art. 66).

In the past, there has been debate about whether the number of ratifications needed to meet the requirements are to be calculated from the total number of

consistories voting or from the total number of consistories in the federation. Two of the overtures requested changes to Church Order Art. 36, while the other addressed Art. 66

In answer to these overtures, Synod 2007 approved amendments to Church Order Art. 36 and Art. 66 which specify that the number of consistories required for ratification shall be judged according to the number "of the *synodically-approved* Consistories in the federation."

With this change, a consistory which declines to ratify a measure under Art. 36 or Art. 66 effectually counts against ratification.

Joint Venture Agreement

Addressing some of the difficulties of being a bi-national federation of Churches, Synod 2007 took steps to ensure that the URCNA's Canadian congregations are able to satisfy requirements of the Canadian government for transferring funds between churches.

Chief among those steps was the creation of a Joint Venture Agreement for the URCNA (Canada) and the URCNA (US), creating a legally recognized connection between URC congregations in both nations.

In line with the terms of this agreement, Synod 2007 appointed five members to the U.S. Board of Directors of the URCNA. A Canadian Board of Directors had already been appointed.

Synod appointed the Consistory of Bethany URC in Wyoming, MI, to implement the Joint Venture Agreement.

Other Matters

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

- Synod elected Mr. Bill Konynebelt to a second term as stated clerk and Rev. Dennis Royall to a second term as alternate stated clerk.
- Synod referred to the churches a selection of proposed liturgical prayers and a shortened form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The churches will be asked to review, evaluate and provisionally use them, communicating their questions and comments to the Liturgical Forms Committee.
- Synod received greetings by fraternal visitors from the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church in America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Encouragement was also given by fraternal delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

May God receive all of the glory, and may His Church be blessed, by that which has been accomplished by Synod Schererville 2007.