



Synod 2020 Canceled Due to COVID-19

APRIL 8, 2020

Out of an abundance of caution and in light of many restrictions related to travel and public gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision has been made to cancel Synod 2020.

To reach this conclusion, a special meeting of the Program Committee of Synod (officers of last year's synod), the executive committee of the Council of Delegates, Rev. Kathy Smith (CRCNA polity adviser), and Rev. Dirk Van Eyk (pastor of the convening church of Synod 2020) took place on Friday, Apr. 3. This group considered several options ranging from holding synod as usual to attempting to hold the meeting via video conference.



"There was consensus among the group that it is not safe for synod to meet in person—there would be significant risk to the health and well-being of delegates and their families. In addition, borders are closed, airlines have cut schedules, and we are unsure at this point of the use of the Calvin University campus," said Colin P. Watson, Sr., acting executive director of the CRCNA.

In addition, the nature of synod as a deliberative body, with work being done both in advisory committees and as a full group, precludes that a virtual meeting is not a viable option.

After weighing several options, the group made a recommendation that was then forwarded to the full Council of Delegates to decide by electronic vote.

"The COD includes representatives from each CRCNA classis as well as four at-large members," explained Rev. William Koopmans, president of last year's synod. "Since this group has been tasked with governing for the denomination when synod is not in session, and is representative of each of our classes, it was this group that needed to make the final decision. Given the complexity of the arrangements needed to hold a synod, it was also imperative a decision be made now and not later."

The full COD, in turn, voted to approve “that Synod 2020 be canceled due to the current COVID-19 crisis, and that the COD hold a special meeting (virtually) to address any matters that cannot wait until Synod 2021.”

“Undoubtedly, there are many areas of loss that can be identified in not having a synod,” said Koopmans. “For me, as chair of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, one of the most obvious losses is the challenge that this presents in maintaining and advancing robust relationships with other denominations with whom we have ecumenical relations.”

“This is the first time in the CRC’s more than 160-year history that synod has been canceled,” added Watson. “While this is disappointing news and joins with other losses that we grieve in the wake of COVID-19, we remember that God’s church will and does go on. We do not need to have a denomination-wide meeting in order for God’s kingdom work to continue.”

As a next step, the Program Committee of Synod 2020 — who also served as officers of Synod 2019 — will meet with senior CRCNA staff to review all the material prepared for the *Agenda for Synod 2020*. They will determine which items cannot wait a year to be dealt with by Synod 2021.

“In general, we want the majority of items to be deferred so that they can be dealt with by the full deliberative body that is outlined in our Church Order,” explained Koopmans. “At the same time, there are some items, such as approval of ministerial candidates and appointments to boards and committees, that simply can’t wait a full year.”

It is within the mandate of the COD and is consistent with the CRCNA *Church Order* that the Council of Delegates can act for synod in matters that cannot await action by the synod itself (see Church Order Art. 33-b).

“Please join me in offering a prayer of concern for our world amid the current circumstances that have led to the need for making this decision, and also a prayer of gratitude for the way God has provided for us to continue kingdom work even in the midst of this crisis,” said Watson.

A list of matters to be addressed by the special meeting of the Council of Delegates in June will be made available following the decisions of the Program Committee. Stories reporting the outcome of that meeting, will also be shared on crcna.org/synod as they become available.

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