

What to Expect as a Delegate to Synod

The Christian Reformed Church in North America is a denomination made up of people and congregations across the United States and Canada. It is governed by an annual assembly that includes representatives from a classis—regional groupings of the congregations. This annual meeting is called *synod* and is a time of worship, prayerful discernment, discussion, and decision-making.

Each synod is made up of up to 196 delegates: a combination of four ministers, elders, and deacons from each of our 49 classes (plural of classis). Sometimes, individuals have expressed apprehension toward allowing their name to be considered by their classis as a delegate to synod. We hope that what follows can answer questions you may have, alleviate worries, and provide you with a clear overview of what to expect at synod so that you can prayerfully consider this important and oftentimes rewarding opportunity!

What is synod and what does it do?

The *synod* of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is an ecclesiastical (church) assembly of delegates that provides governance and leadership for the members, congregations, classes, agencies, and ministries of the CRCNA. The term *synod* is derived from the Greek word for “assembly” or “meeting.”

Synod fills an essential denomination-wide governance and leadership role alongside the regionally delegated authority of the church *classes* and the locally elected church *councils*. The primary responsibilities of synod are listed on pages 1-2 in the *Rules for Synodical Procedure* on the Synod Resources webpage (crcna.org/SynodResources).

Why should I serve as a delegate?

There are many benefits to participating as a synod delegate. First, synod is an aspect of being church together—when synod delegates come together, the church comes together. It’s history goes all the way back to the ancient ecumenical councils where the decisions that still guide us as believers today were made. It is intended to bring together Spirit-led delegates from every corner of the CRCNA to listen for God’s leading of our denomination. It is a great honor to be selected from among the thousands of Christians in your classis. Second, delegates are given the opportunity to hear and experience the joys and the excitement of ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. You have a front row seat to the story of God’s work in and through 1,000 churches and their joint ministries. Third, the work of synod impacts the future of the church—our denomination. Your ability to listen to the Holy Spirit through your prayers, studies, and thoughts will contribute to the decisions that you make with your fellow delegates to help the CRCNA follow the call of Jesus in our churches and joint ministries. So, while synod is not for everyone, most delegates report being very blessed to have experienced and led the church in such a broad and intentional way!

What is the time commitment and cost involved?

Delegates receive the *Agenda for Synod* in late April and are asked to complete their registration so that the Synodical Services Office can plan for their participation. Because delegates are assigned to an advisory committee that is responsible to review a particular portion of synod’s agenda, delegates should focus on reading materials for their advisory committee work prior to arrival at synod. This may take several hours. In addition, delegates are asked to listen to a series of orientation segments prior to synod. These orientation materials help to prepare delegates so that

they know what to expect from their time at synod. Synod meets in person for a full week in June (usually beginning the second Friday though the following Thursday). In order to be ready to start meetings on the Friday, delegates are asked to arrive by the Thursday, or even Wednesday in some cases, before. This year there may be an opportunity for some delegates to come early for a prayer meeting as well. The Synodical Services Office covers the cost of travel, lodging on campus, and meals during synod.

What is a typical schedule for the week of synod?

Delegates and advisers to synod are expected to participate fully in the gatherings/meetings of synod.

Following the convening session on Friday, delegates meet in their respective advisory committees for the rest of the day into Saturday. Sunday is reserved for the Synodical Worship Service. Synod meets in plenary session (all delegates and advisers) all day Monday and the following days until adjournment on Thursday afternoon. During these plenary sessions, delegates hear the reports of advisory committees and deliberate on the recommendations presented to the assembly.

What is a synod advisory committee?

The officers of the previous year's synod (Program Committee) appoint each of the delegates to an advisory committee (approx. 20-24 members ea.) to address a specific section of synod's agenda. The officers also appoint a chair and reporter (normally experienced delegates) to the advisory committees. The chair will lead the committee through the respective materials assigned and help make arrangements for any guests scheduled to meet with the committee. The reporter records the committee's recommendations along with any agreed upon background by the committee. The reporter also presents these recommendations to the full assembly for consideration by way of the "advisory committee report." The names, number, and scopes of advisory committees can change from year to year, but some typical examples include committees focused on Synodical Services, Education and Candidacy, and Global Missions, and others.

What are "rules of order?"

Synod conducts itself using an agreed upon set of rules of order to help ensure a smooth flow to the discussions of the business at hand. The "Rules for Synodical Procedure" (found at crcna.org/SynodResources) provide definition and explanation of rules of order such as what is a main motion, a motion to amend, a motion to defer, calling the question, and so forth. While it is helpful to review these rules before you attend synod, please know that there are others who will also be unfamiliar with these procedural rules. You'll learn more about the rules during the orientation before synod begins. In addition, you will find many gracious people in your committees and around your table in plenary sessions who can answer questions and assist you throughout the week.

Do I need to be computer savvy?

Every synod attendee should have some basic comfort with computers. Delegates are expected to participate through a Google-based "Synod Site," including marking themselves present for roll call, voting, and using a speaker queue. If this sounds intimidating, have no fear . . . our tech staff is near! Not only do we have well qualified staff to assist you well before your arrival at synod, we offer "loaner" devices during synod—you don't need to have your own device to be delegated to synod. Upon arrival at synod, our IT staff will take the time to sit with you and teach you how to start up the device, save quick links for easy use, and ensure your comfort with the device before synod meetings.

What if I am new on council or don't have a lot of experience attending classis meetings?

This is totally ok. If you have a love for the Christian Reformed Church and its ministry, you'll be in excellent company! Attending synod will further awaken your passion for the church. Your delegate orientation will provide explanation of the various rules prior to synod. And you should feel free to address questions ahead of time to synod@crcna.org, and during synod you can contact synodical staff through the synod site with any questions. We are passionate about synod and truly look forward to answering questions from the most basic functions to the spiritual depths!

What is a typical "pre-synod" timeline?

January – March

- Classes appoint four delegates and alternates to synod during their winter meetings

March 15

- Synod Credentials and Delegate Information forms due to the Synodical Services Office

April

- Initial "Welcome" email is sent from Synodical Services Office in early April
- Email sent to delegates and advisers regarding access to the Synod Site (all business conducted via this Site)
- *Agenda for Synod* available in digital version mid-April
- Program Committee (officers of the previous synod) meets mid-April to make assignments to the advisory committees
- Important synod information is posted to the Synod Site late-April for delegate response
 - o Review Program Committee Report (contains delegate assignments to advisory committees and materials assigned)
 - o Plan travel (refer to Travel Guidelines before booking flights)
 - o Complete synod delegate and adviser Registration Form (due by mid-May)
 - o Submit nominations for synod officers (due by mid-May)
 - o Watch/listen to synod orientation series
- Log-in to Synod Site by end of April

May

- Delegate and Adviser registration and nominations for synod officers due mid-May
- Synod *Agenda Supplement* is posted (be sure to read—considered with the *Agenda for Synod*)

June

- Synod gathers in person

What if I'm appointed as the alternate delegate?

Alternate synod delegates should "be at the ready" in the event that the regular delegate is unable to attend the meetings of synod (with the approval of the Synodical Services Office or the officers of synod after elected). Prior to synod, if a delegate realizes they are unable to attend synod, they communicate with their stated clerk of classis, who contacts the Synodical Services Office. We take into consideration feasibility for the alternate to attend (timing, cost of flights, etc.). The alternate is contacted with the request to attend if applicable and provided with all the necessary information for the meeting.

An alternate would serve on the advisory committee that the regular delegate had been assigned to. An alternate serving in place of the regular delegate votes both in the advisory committee and in the plenary sessions.

Alternate delegates should familiarize themselves with the synod agenda materials when they are posted to www.crcna.org/synodresources to be prepared in the event they are asked to serve - which at times can be just days before the meeting.

Note that classes are not allowed to arrange ahead of time for a delegate and alternate to switch partway through synod. Delegates who know they will miss more than a few hours of synod should give their seat to their alternate for the entire week.

What advice do former synod delegates give to first-time delegates?

While those of us focused on synod daily might not agree with everything in the comments below (such as just blurting things out), the truth is that synod is *yours* as delegates, not *ours* as staff, officers, etc. (Well, it's really *God's*, but you get it.)

Don't be afraid to ask questions about what's going on. Synod is very procedural and runs by a specific set of rules, so if you're feeling confused, there's a 100% chance that someone else is also confused and is afraid to ask for clarification. Speak up for their sake! *John M.*

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Pray a lot!

The place to help shape what is done is in your committee meeting, and those start on Day 1. Come prepared to offer your input.

It's a deliberative body, not a political contest. Come with an open mind, a listening ear, and an understanding heart.

At meal times, eat with strangers.

If you are reticent to offer an idea, just blurt it out. If you can't wait to share your idea, keep it to yourself.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

Pack a large towel!

Have a cool ringtone for those embarrassing moments when you forget to silence your phone. *Rod H.*

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Ask your church to pray for you. Come to Synod ready to listen. Pray. *Sheri B.*

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Read. Watch. Listen. Think. Pray. Speak.

Read as much as you can from the agenda and other denominational material to learn about present and past decisions.

Watch as much as you can. Body language. Movement within the body of delegates. It speaks volumes about what they are feeling.

Listen to words and emotions. To arguments and hopes. Passions and desires.

Think about what is said and acted.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to move powerfully. For God's will to be done. For love to flow. For unity.

Only after all this should you speak. *Richard B.*

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Read the whole agenda and speak up/ask questions during advisory committee sessions. That is where you will have the greatest impact. *Roger S.*

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Prepare! As much as you can, familiarize yourself with much of the Agenda before synod. *Doug M. and Scott G.*

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Read the Agenda, celebrate what God is doing among us, and as you encounter things among us that you're less thankful for: pray for God's grace to love His church--your church--our church--deeply and well. Then, take a deep breath and squint harder to see how God might just be moving among us anyway (as well as how the Spirit might be lovingly calling us to change)! But do remember: your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (including agency staff, "the denomination," and people you deeply disagree with) are not the enemy. By God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, we're all in this thing together! *Anthony E.*

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Read ahead of time - do your homework and ask lots of questions before you arrive - and watch the orientation videos - they are really helpful! And pray . . . for wisdom, humility and surrender. *Elizabeth V.*

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In our fast changing world and in dedicating yourself to Jesus, try to have fewer fixed expectations and be truly open minded and hearted to listen not just for views and perspectives that you are comfortable with, but for promptings of Holy Spirit, Scriptures, sisters and brothers that could be calling you to change your mind, your thinking and your previous devotions. *John T.*

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Read the materials carefully, including the orientation materials and Rules for Synod **before** you arrive at Synod. *George M.*