

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 192 delegates: one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer from each 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 opportunity!

Why should I serve as a delegate?

Synod is the church—when synod delegates come together, the church comes together. Delegates hear and experience the joys and the excitement of ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. The work of synod impacts the future of the church—our denomination. The decisions that you make, the things that you bring to the table, the ideas that you share all have an impact on the future of our church.

What is the time commitment and cost involved?

Delegates receive a printed *Agenda for Synod* in late April and are asked to complete their registration so we can plan for your arrival. 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. Synod meets for a full week (Friday through the following Thursday). The Synodical Services Office covers the cost of travel, lodging, and meals during synod.

What is a typical synod schedule?

First-time delegates, especially, are encouraged to attend an orientation session before synod begins on Friday morning with opening worship and election of officers. The remainder of Friday and most of the day Saturday are spent in your assigned advisory committee. Sunday is a "no business" day, reserved for the Synodical Worship Service and learning opportunity through workshops offered. 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 CRC ministries 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. 20-25 members) to address a specific section of synod's agenda. The officers also appoint a chair and reporter (normally experienced delegates) to the advisory committees, who lead the meeting and record the recommendations of the committee. These recommendations are later presented to the full assembly for consideration. Examples of advisory committees include Synodical Services, Education and Candidacy, Congregational Services, Financial Matters, Interdenominational Matters, and Study Committees.

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 main motion, motion to amend, 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 many other first-time delegates. You will find many gracious people in your committees and at or around your plenary table who can answer questions and assist you throughout the week.

Do I need to be computer savvy?

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, 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 convenes. Every synod attendee participates in the “Synod Site” orientation, including practice voting and use of the speaker queue.

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

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. There is business to attend to during synod—addressed first within advisory committees (each delegate participates on a committee), then presented to the full body of synod for consideration and many times decision. Synod and its officers are guided by the “Rules for Synodical Procedure” (described above in “rules of order”), providing means for order in how it conducts its meetings. Your delegate orientation will provide explanation of the various rules prior to synod.

What is a typical “pre-synod” timeline?

January – March

- During their winter meetings, classes appoint delegates to synod

March 15

- Synod Credentials and Delegate Information forms due

April

- Initial email is sent from Synodical Services Office in early April
- Email sent regarding access to Synod Site by mid-April
- Program Committee meets mid-April to make assignments to the advisory committees
- Important synod information is posted to Synod Site mid-April for delegate action
 - Review Program Committee Report (assignments of advisory committees)
 - Plan travel (refer to Travel Guidelines before booking flights)
 - Complete delegate and adviser to synod registration form (due by mid-May)
 - Submit nominations for synod officers
 - Watch/listen to synod orientation series
- *Agenda for Synod* available mid-April
- Log-in to Synod Site by end of April

May

- Delegate and Advisor registration and nominations for synod officers due mid-May

June

- Synod convenes

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

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.

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 your self 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.*