

Report on meeting of Classis Central US of the URCNA

Convening at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa — September 12-13, 2011

A candidacy exam, a pair of songbook overtures, and the sharing of concerns and causes for praise filled the hours of a recent meeting of the URCNA's Classis Central US.

Meeting at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Classis Central US convened its 31st meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 12, concluding by mid-afternoon of the following day.

Topping the meeting's business was the candidacy examination of Mr. Aaron Verhoef, a Pella native and graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary and Redeemer University College.

Mr. Verhoef was examined in only one of the candidacy exam's eight areas, having sustained the other seven at an April meeting of Classis. Following the examination and a brief discussion of his performance, Classis concurred with the Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church (Pella) that Mr. Verhoef had sustained his exam and could be declared a candidate for the ministry in the URCNA.

Since graduating from MARS, Mr. Verhoef has provided pulpit supply for Covenant Reformed Church of Newton, N.J., and for the Doon (Iowa) URC, among others. He and his wife, Hannah, reside in Newton and recently welcomed the birth of their first child, Natalie.

A pair of overtures seeking changes to the 2010 Hymn Proposal of the Psalter Hymnal Committee also captured Classis' attention.

Brought by Hills URC and Lynwood URC, the overtures sought the modification of some songs, removal of others, and the addition of some hymns from the 1976 Psalter Hymnal which were omitted from the Hymn Proposal.

Both overtures were approved by Classis. They therefore will be sent to the Psalter Hymnal Committee for their consideration.

Another overture brought about a change in how Classis Central US honors the Form of Subscription. To this point, first-time delegates to classis have been asked to sign the Form of Subscription, indicating their commitment to teach and defend the doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity, rejecting all errors that stand against that doctrine.

An overture brought by Covenant Reformed Church of Kansas City sought to change this procedure by requiring the reading of the Form at the start of each meeting. Delegates would respond by rising to indicate their agreement. This overture was approved, after an amendment to require delegates arriving late to likewise indicate their agreement.

This change has the effect of more strongly and publicly emphasizing Classis' commitment to the Three Forms of Unity. It also brings the practice of Classis Central US into conformity with the practice of URC synods.

A fourth overture, also from the Kansas City Consistory, sought to amend Art. 39 of the URCNA Church Order. That overture was not approved.

Delegates spent a portion of their meeting hearing updates on church plant and chaplaincy efforts overseen by consistories in Classis Central US.

An exciting new outreach project was presented by the Consistory of Immanuel URC of DeMotte, Ind. Overseen by the consistories of Immanuel and Faith URC of Beecher, Ill., the "Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary" program will offer college-level theological education to inmates at the Danville Correctional Center in Danville, Ill. Danville is about 100 miles south of DeMotte and Beecher.

Growing out of an existing visiting ministry at the Danville prison, the educational program arose from inmates' desire to dig deeper into the truths of God's Word. The program will use curriculum developed by Rev. Allen Vander Pol, a URC minister who serves as a missionary professor with Miami International Seminary (MINTS).

Elder Mark Van Der Molen of DeMotte said the two consistories are working to form a board of directors, raise funds, and find a full-time director to serve at the prison. He said officials within the Illinois Department of Corrections are excited about the program and have been quite helpful in securing approval for it. He asked for prayer, as the final steps are taken to launch the program.

The Faith URC Consistory also gave an update on the work of Rev. Andrew Spriensma, an Army Chaplain who has been serving the troops at Fort Jackson in South Carolina for about three years.

The Spriensma family welcomed their third child, Josiah, in August. They are preparing for a new assignment that will take the family to Germany this winter. The Faith Consistory asks for prayers for Rev.

Spriensma's work to meet the spiritual needs of our soldiers. They also encourage prayers for Michelle and the rest of the family, as they prepare for their upcoming move overseas.

Classis also heard reports by the Consistory of Cornerstone URC of Sanborn, Iowa, regarding the work of the Covenant URC church plant in Prinsburg, Minn.; and by the Consistory of the Hills (Minn.) URC regarding the work of the Sioux Falls, S.D. church plant. Further information about these works can be found on their websites: www.covenanturc.org for the work in Prinsburg, and www.sfurc.org for the work in Sioux Falls.

A good portion of Tuesday was spent addressing pastoral concerns facing the consistories. Most of these cases were addressed in a closed session, allowing the consistories to describe the details of the situations in order to seek specific advice for ministering to those held captive by sin.

During a public session, the Lynwood URC Consistory sought counsel regarding the procedure for dismissing an associate pastor to serve in a federation with which the URC has no relationship.

Until recently, Rev. Phil Tjoelker served as a church planter under Lynwood's oversight. When the Tinley Park, Ill., work closed, Rev. Tjoelker was invited to serve as a church planter with the Reformed Episcopal Church. Classis advised Lynwood's Consistory to proceed with its plan to formally release his credentials to the REC.

Classis also offered feedback to Rev. Jody Lucero regarding his work on a committee established by Synod London 2010 to investigate the idea of establishing a missions coordinator for the URCNA.

Rev. Lucero said the committee has completed a survey of how other NAPARC federations handle missions. It now is considering the wisdom of proposing the formation of a federation-wide missions committee, the chairman of which would serve as a full-time coordinator. Neither the committee nor the coordinator would have oversight authority. Instead, they would be tasked with encouraging cooperation, prayer and involvement in URC missions.

In response to this suggestion, delegates raised some concerns and asked questions that will help the committee to continue its deliberations.

Looking outward, delegates were pleased to receive greetings from Rev. Lee Johnson on behalf of the South Central Classis of the RCUS, who joined the assembly for its deliberations and for fellowship. Classis received written greetings from the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS, Classis Manitoba of the CanRC, and the Midwest Presbytery of the RPCNA.

Rev. Paul Ipema provided Classis with a brief update on the work of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad. Later, Rev. Dan Donovan updated Classis on the work of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. Representatives of Classis' other committees also brought brief updates.

A new stated clerk will be taking up his duties starting in November.

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker was appointed to succeed Rev. Doug Barnes, who has served as stated clerk since January of 2005. The assembly expressed its thanks to Rev. Barnes for his work, which he regarded as a distinct privilege.

Released from his duties as clerk, Rev. Barnes was appointed to serve as a church visitor for the western part of classis, succeeding Elder Marv Hoogland of Orange City. Rev. Bradd Nymeyer was reappointed to serve another three-year term as church visitor.

The next meeting of Classis Central US is slated to start on the afternoon or evening of April 10, 2012. The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church of Kansas City, Mo., is the convening consistory.

Classis wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the members of Covenant Reformed Church of Pella for their gracious hospitality; to the Consistory of Hills URC for its work in preparing for this meeting; and to Rev. Spencer Aalsburg and Rev. John Vermeer for their commendable service as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively.