

Classis Central US of the URCNA

Meeting Report

Convening at Community Reformed Church of Schererville, Indiana — March 15-16, AD 2018

A colloquium doctum, an emeritation, joint devotions and meals with the Midwest Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 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 Community Reformed Church in Schererville, and convened by Faith URC of Beecher, Classis Central US convened its 44th meeting at 4:00 pm on Thursday, March 15, concluding just before supper the following day.

Topping the meeting's business on Friday morning was the *colloquium doctum* (doctrinal conversation) of Rev. Jon Bushnell, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Prinsburg, Minnesota. A *colloquium doctum* is an exam used for ministers ordained in another denomination who wish to be available for call in our federation. The request for the exam originated with the Sioux Center United Reformed Church which is contemplating extending a call to Rev. Bushnell to be their next pastor. Rev. Bushnell acquitted himself well and was declared by classis to be eligible for a call in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

A portion of Friday afternoon was spent addressing pastoral concerns facing the consistories. The first was a request for concurring advice in the decision of the Immanuel URC of De Motte, Indiana regarding the emeritation of their pastor, Rev. Thomas Wetselaar for reasons of health. Rev. Wetselaar is the longest serving pastor in Classis Central US, having been a part of it since its inception. He has served faithfully as a pastor for 30 years. He was ordained at the Prairie City, Iowa CRC in 1987 and also served the Sumas, Washington CRC before coming to Bethel CRC in De Motte in 1994. He is the organizing pastor of the Immanuel URC which formed in 1995 and has served there since. He was granted a leave of absence in August of last year because of chronic ill health that prevents him from fulfilling all the duties of a minister. Classis concurred in the decision to grant emeritation and offered words of encouragement and a prayer of thanksgiving for his ministry and for God's continued blessing on Rev. Wetselaar and his wife Patty as they enter a new phase of their earthly pilgrimage. Rev. Wetselaar hopes to remain active in some aspects of ministry.

Classis also gave advice to a congregation struggling how to deal with a family which desires to be part of the church but are not willing to have their children baptized. In another situation, classis gave advice to a consistory that they may proceed to the second step of church discipline.

Delegates spent a portion of their meeting hearing updates on church plants and chaplaincy efforts overseen by consistories in Classis Central US. It was announced that US Army Chaplain Andrew Spriensma was recently deployed to the Middle East for five or six months and prayers were solicited for his safety and effective ministry to our troops. The mission outreach in Chicago Heights is growing through multiple Bible study groups, and the church plant in Quito, Ecuador has grown to encompass worship services in two locations. Classis urged the churches to continue to support these two mission outreaches with their gifts and prayers.

A highlight of our time together was the fellowship enjoyed with our brothers of the Midwest Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which met concurrently with us in the Community Reformed church building. We enjoyed meals together on Thursday evening and at Friday noon and supper. We had joint opening devotions together at 8:30 am and 1 pm on Friday. In the morning, Rev. John Vermeer, of the URC, led the assembled brothers with a meditation on the unity of the church based on Ephesians 2:11-22. In the afternoon, Rev. Shane Lems, of the OPC, gave a meditation on the intercessory prayer of our Savior that our faith not fail, based on Luke 22:32. In all our singing, we sang selections from the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal which is being jointly published by the URC and OPC and is scheduled to go to press on Monday, March 19. We rejoiced to hear that over 30,000 pre-publication copies have been ordered with about 18,000 of those from URC congregations.

We also were pleased to receive greetings from Mr. Jacob Kuik of Classis Manitoba of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and Rev. Jonathan Haney, who brought greetings from the Midwest Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Greetings were also received by letter from the Ohio Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The URC and OPC brothers also benefited together from a continuing education lecture given on Thursday evening and open to the public. Teaching Elder (of the PCA) Tim Geiger, President of Harvest USA, spoke on the topic, "Ministering to Those Struggling with Pornography Use, Same-Sex Attraction, or Gender Confusion." He spoke about the need for the church to deal with these issues, the obstacles that prevent effective ministry, the real problem afflicting those who struggle, and the answer to that problem. He made available many resources for ministry in this area. More information can be obtained at harvestusa.org.

Mr. Gerald Swets provided Classis with a brief update on the work of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad. Later, Rev. Todd De Rooy 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 alternate stated clerk was elected, Rev. Doug Barnes, and a new alternate church visitor was elected for the east side of classis, Rev. R. Andrew Compton. Mr. Grant Diekevers was elected to serve on the classical Church Planting and Advisory Committee (CPAC) replacing Mr. Dave Buursma.

The next meeting of Classis Central US is slated to start Monday evening, September 10, 2018. The consistory of Oak Glen in Lansing, Illinois has been designated the convening consistory. A candidacy exam is anticipated, Lord willing.

Classis wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the members of Community Reformed Church and Rev. James Oord for their gracious hospitality; to the consistory of Faith URC, Beecher and Rev. Todd Joling for their work in preparing for this meeting; and to Rev. Jody Lucero for his commendable service as chairman.

For further information, contact Rev. Ralph A. Pontier, Stated Clerk of Classis,
by telephone at 641-627-5174 or by e-mail at classiscentralus@gmail.com