

# NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL

Press Release

November 27, AD 2017

The 43<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 14, 2017 on the campus of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Chairman Rev. Bartel Elshout led the opening devotions during which the delegates and guests sang heartily from Psalm 67, *O God to Us Show Mercy*.

NAPARC is composed of 13 member churches (denominations or federations of churches) which together represent about 3,600 organized and mission congregations and about 584,000 members including baptized covenant children. Each member church may send up to four delegates and they meet annually “to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”<sup>1</sup>

Member churches of NAPARC are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Église réformée du Québec (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Representatives of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) attended as invited observers.

The basis of NAPARC’s fellowship is “Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the first orders of business was the election of officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Dr. S. Steve Park of the Korean American Presbyterian Church, and as Vice-Chairman, Rev. David Kim of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin). Elected as Secretary was Rev. Ralph Pontier, and as treasurer, Rev. Dr. Maynard Koerner. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually between the 13 member churches following an alphabetical listing. The vice-chairman this year is slated to serve as chairman next year, and his denomination is asked to host the following year.

A large portion of time was spent on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning with each member church giving an oral report on the state of its church. Following each report delegates could ask questions and a designated delegate led the group in prayer for the church that had reported. One theme was repeated in several reports, that the work of missions is thriving among the churches.

On Tuesday evening, Rev. Mark Kelderman of the Heritage Reformed Congregations (the host church this year) led a devotional service. He encouraged the assembled with a message based on Revelation 1.

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<sup>1</sup> NAPARC Constitution, III. Purpose

<sup>2</sup> NAPARC Constitution, II. Basis

On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, a discussion took place on four topics suggested by member churches. The topics were:

1. How important is organic union among dissimilar NAPARC denominations? For example, do the denominations which focus on a specific ethnic/linguistic group in North America really need to merge with other NAPARC denominations?
2. What denominational distinctives presently exist as obstacles to organic union? (Examples: exclusive psalmody, delegated or non-delegated assemblies of synods, strict subscription or good faith subscription, unique denominational histories, etc.)
3. What denominational distinctives should be considered as valid obstacles to organic union under biblical scrutiny?
4. Discuss the possibility of a structure that allows for both distinctives and organic union.

The discussion revealed different ideas about the importance and feasibility of organic (organizational) union, but also a common commitment to giving visible expression to that unity which is already ours in Christ. The discussion was helpful in reminding delegates of the two-fold purpose of NAPARC, but also of its limitations. NAPARC continues to provide a venue for its member churches to talk with one another corporately and bilaterally, and to hold out before each other the ecumenical imperative of Scripture. It has strengthened fraternal bonds and spurred greater cooperation in missions, diaconal services, theological education, and youth ministry.

On Wednesday evening, Rev. Dr. Joel Beeke gave an inspirational address, “An Earnest Call to Help Restore Family Worship among Our Church Families.”

In addition to the annual meeting of the Council, NAPARC sponsors consultations where representatives of member churches gather to discuss cooperation in a specific area of ministry. For more than thirty years, there have been annual world mission consultations in September of each year. This year’s Council appointed hosts and convenors for three other consultations. The OPC was asked to host, and Mr. David Nakhla to convene, a consultation on relief and diaconal ministry. Mr. Nakhla is the part time administrator of OPC’s Committee on Diaconal Ministries. The ARP was asked to host, and Rev. Dr. Kyle E. Sims to convene, a consultation on theological training. The ERQ was asked to host, and Rev. Ben Westerveld to convene, a consultation on youth ministries.

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday Noon and provides time slots for bilateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the member churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for member churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled to be hosted by the Korean American Presbyterian Church in the Philadelphia area on November 13-15, 2018.

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