

Christian Reformed speak up for peace, stall on women: Conscientious objector standards urged

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The theologically conservative Christian Reformed Church, in its first major statement on war in two dozen years, urged its churches to raise moral questions with governments about weapons of mass destruction and preemptive military actions.

Delegates at its synod also asked the denomination's executive director to inquire about standards or requirements for Christian Reformed members serving in the U.S. military to be recognized as conscientious objectors in certain conflicts.

A majority of the delegates, who ended their seven-day meeting June 16 in the CRC headquarters city of Grand Rapids, Michigan, called on its agencies and congregations "to promote and actively engage in international initiatives for building peace with justice," according to the CRC Web site.

On issues relating to women's roles in the church, some observers said the synod delegates took one step forward and one backward. The step back this year was to continue the church's ban on women serving as delegates and to suspend the right of women to be synod deputies, who provide input to delegates.

Nevertheless, delegates voted to remove the word "male" in the requirement for ministers appointed by churches and regional bodies, or classes, subject to confirmation by the next synod. Since 1995 the local entities have been allowed to waive that requirement, with the result that 40 women have been ordained.

"The burden of proof has shifted to those who want to exclude women from ministry," Mary Hulst, the first woman pastor of a CRC church in the U.S., told the *Grand Rapids Press*.

In another action, the synod gave its congregations the green light to worship with Today's New International Version of the Bible, published by Zondervan, despite sharp criticism from several delegates who said the TNIV's gender-inclusive language twists scripture in order to seem politically correct. Focus on the Family founder James Dobson and several Southern Baptist leaders denounced the translation when it was first published in 2002.

Countering objections, Jeffrey Weima, a Calvin Theological Seminary professor of New Testament, said, "You may not like it, but we live in a culture where the word 'man' is no longer heard in a generic fashion."

Also, delegates spent about three hours June 14 to tone down a 1563 Protestant doctrine in the Heidelberg Catechism declaring the Catholic mass "a condemnable idolatry"—a troublesome phrase in Catholic-CRC relations. Two years ago, the synod declared that the controversial passage no longer should apply as written. In a complicated compromise, a study committee proposed keeping the passage but putting it in brackets, accompanied by a footnote explaining that members are not required to recognize it.