

INTERDENOMINATIONAL MATTERS

Chair: Rev. Steven Zwart
Reporter: Rev. Phillip S. Leo

I. Board of Trustees

A. *Materials*: Board of Trustees Report (section II, A, 2), pp. 23-24

B. *Privilege of the floor*: Mr. Chris Van Spronsen, chair of the Board of Trustees; Dr. Steven R. Timmermans, executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed

C. *Note*: The Program Committee of Synod 2017 has scheduled the showing of a video describing three options related to the collaboration between the CRC and RCA. This will be followed by a guided discussion format for small groups of delegates.

II. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

A. *Materials*

1. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee Report (including Appendices A-E) pp. 329-64
2. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee Supplement

B. *Privilege of the floor*: Dr. Jim Payton, chair; and Dr. Steven R. Timmermans

C. *Recommendations*

1. That synod express its gratitude to Mrs. Sharon Jim and Dr. Jay Shim for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.
2. That synod designate the Christian Reformed Church in Sierra Leone as a church in dialogue with the CRC (Appendix A).

Grounds:

- a. The CRC in Sierra Leone made this request to the CRCNA.
 - b. The CRC in Sierra Leone is a child of the World Renew and Christian Reformed World Missions evangelism efforts that began in 1980 and gave birth to a growing church in 2005.
 - c. This action would be a fitting response to a story of great plans, tremendous obstacles, and, through it all, God's faithfulness.
3. That synod receive the report on the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category provided by the EIRC (Appendix C).
 4. That synod receive the report on the Contemporary Testimony category provided by the EIRC (Appendix D) and adopt the following recommendations:

- a. That synod adopt the following definition for the category of contemporary testimony:

A contemporary testimony is a dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRCNA—its congregations and members—as a statement that is essential for a given time period. It is useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship. As such, it must periodically be reviewed if it is to speak contemporaneously and perhaps (1) be revised if authorship belongs to the CRCNA or (2) be provided newly revised accompanying explanatory material if authorship belongs elsewhere. It may ultimately gain confessional status, pending synodical approval, although such a possibility should not be considered a criterion for adopting a statement as a contemporary testimony.

Grounds:

- 1) This definition comports with previous synodically approved descriptions of a *contemporary testimony*.
- 2) This definition clearly differentiates a *contemporary testimony* from a *confession*.

- b. That synod place *Our World Belongs to God* in the newly defined category of contemporary testimony.

Grounds:

- 1) This action is consistent with the role *Our World Belongs to God* has served in the Christian Reformed Church since its adoption.
- 2) This action would provide needed clarity when considering the Belhar Confession's recategorization as a contemporary testimony.

5. That synod place the Belhar Confession in the newly defined category of contemporary testimony.

Grounds:

- a. This is consistent with Synod 2016's recommendation to recategorize the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony in the CRCNA.
- b. The Belhar Confession is a gift from the churches in the global south and is "useful for study, faith formation, teaching and worship." We receive it as a contemporary testimony, not a confession.

6. That synod approve discontinuance of the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category.

Grounds:

- a. The category is confusing to our ecumenical partners; "ecumenical" does not fit if no denomination other than the CRCNA embraces it.
- b. Based upon the Belhar Confession being placed in the category of contemporary testimony, the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category is no longer in active use.

7. That synod adopt the following revised mandate of the *ad hoc* group considering the new category of affiliation, assigned by Synod 2016 (addition provided in bold):

To consider creation of a new category of affiliation **and/or a revision to current ecumenical categories** by which a (non-Canadian and United States) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA.

Ground: Initial work by an *ad hoc* group has indicated the need to reconsider current categories before consideration of an additional category because our current categories

- a. fail to capture the full range of interactions of CRCNA churches and ministries with ecumenical partners.
 - b. are not always responsive to missional initiatives and needs that arise in the ministry of CRCNA congregations and agencies.
 - c. are not always immediately meaningful to other denominations.
8. That synod take note of the fulfillment of the instruction to the executive director by Synod 2016 regarding “areas of collaborative partnership in ministry with Koreans in Korea” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 839).

III. Related matters

A. Materials

1. The Belhar Confession
2. Church Order Supplement, Article 5, p.13
3. *Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp.448-58
4. *Acts of Synod 2012*, Article 56, pp. 766-67
5. *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp.913-4

B. Recommendation

Subject to adoption of a new category “contemporary testimony,” that synod instruct the executive director to explore *whether*, and if so *how*, establishing the new category of contemporary testimony and placing *Our World Belongs to God* and the Belhar Confession in it, might impact the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Supplement, Article 5) and report back no later than Synod 2019.

Grounds:

- a. The proposal of Synod 2016 to “re-categorize the Belhar Confession to the same status as that of a contemporary testimony in the CRC—same as *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 913-4) is not clear about whether adding the Belhar Confession to the newly defined category of contemporary testimony necessitates that it be included in the Covenant for Officebearers.
- b. The current text of the Covenant for Officebearers resulted from a lengthy process of prayer, discernment, and dialogue (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp.448-58). Weighing the merits of any revisions to such a substantive document should not be performed under the time constraints within which an advisory committee must work.
- c. Clarifying *how* the category of contemporary testimony relates to the Covenant for Officebearers would help the CRCNA consider how other Reformed expressions of the Christian faith are useful within our current context (e.g., *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*, The Barmen Declaration, The Westminster Confession).

IV. Response to Overtures 13-19

A. Materials

1. Overtures 13-19, pp. 435-46, and Supplement
2. Overture 18 (item 4), p. 445

B. Recommendations

1. That the above actions constitute synod's answer to Overtures 13-17, 18 (items 1-3), 19.
2. That synod not accede to Overture 18, item 4, to amend the Rules for Synodical Procedure related to confessional revision.

Grounds: Church Order Supplement, Article 5, C, 6 states: "A revision of the confessions shall not be adopted by synod until the whole church membership has had adequate opportunity to consider it."