Christian Reformed Church

Agenda for Synod 2021

Synod 2021 will not meet as planned, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Program Committee for Synod 2021 (officers of Synod 2019) will prepare a list of matters from this agenda that cannot await action by Synod 2022, and a special meeting of the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America will take place in June 2021 to decide on those matters. Other matters in this agenda will be deferred to the agenda for Synod 2022.

Agenda for Synod

2021

Christian Reformed Church

June 11-12, 15-16, 2021
via Zoom teleconference

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PREFACE

The Council of Delegates (COD) of the CRCNA at its meeting on February 19, 2021, considered a report from the Program Committee of synod (officers of Synod 2019) regarding the meeting of Synod 2021 amid the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. After lengthy deliberation, the COD decided to cancel Synod 2021 and, as in 2020, to hold a special meeting of the COD on June 11-12 and 15-16 to address matters on synod's agenda that cannot await action by Synod 2022.

At its meeting in February, the COD also decided to defer consideration of the study report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality until Synod 2022. As a result, that report will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2022* rather than in this agenda. *Note:* The report remains accessible online at crcna.org/SynodResources. References to page numbers in the human sexuality report, as noted in various overtures in this agenda, reflect the pagination of the report posted online.

This *Agenda for Synod 2021* is provided as a historical snapshot of what God has continued to do in our ministries and denomination as a whole throughout the past year. The reports of the ministries, agencies, and institutions of the CRCNA, along with responses via overtures and communications, provide an important reminder of God's work among us, especially during this unusual ministry year as churches, classes, boards, and committees have adapted to meeting virtually rather than in person to carry out the mission of the church.

We are grateful to First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, and their pastor, Rev. Mark Vande Zande, for extending the invitation to synod to meet on the campus of Dordt University in June 2021 and to help commemorate their congregation's 150th anniversary in the CRC. Rev. Vande Zande was to serve as the president pro tem of synod until the election of the officers of Synod 2021. We also give thanks for the planning work of the administration and staff of Dordt University toward hosting the meeting of synod in June. We regret that we will not have the opportunity to gather as delegates, advisers, and staff on Dordt's campus to celebrate, deliberate, and give thanks to God for blessing our denomination over the past year.

Recognizing and acknowledging God's sovereignty over all things, our continuing prayer is that, even in our current circumstances, God's people will draw ever closer together as the body of Christ—though this closeness may not be physical. May we, as we gather virtually, and eventually in person, continue to be united in prayer, compassion, and love—leading to a deeper experience of unity in the entire CRCNA.

May we honor and hold to the words of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are

in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Indeed, may we be brought to complete unity in Christ as we do his work. May God bless us all with his abundant love.

Colin P. Watson, Sr.
Executive Director of the CRCNA

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES REPORT

The Council of Delegates (COD) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) began its service of interim governance on behalf of the CRC's annual synods after being appointed by Synod 2017. COD delegates represent the CRC's forty-nine classes. There are also four at-large members. Together they gather—this past year via video conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic—to address the mission and ministry of the CRCNA on behalf of synod. The ministry matters addressed by the COD include agency matters with regard to ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International [BTGMI]) and Resonate Global Mission, along with matters concerning Congregational Services ministries of the CRCNA—each of the entities being governed by the COD.

The COD presents the following report as a summary of its work in the interim since its special meeting June 11-12 and June 16-17 in lieu of Synod 2020, which did not meet because of the pandemic.

I. Introduction

A. Governing on behalf of synod

The COD functions with a constituent-representative model of policy governance. Policy governance suggests a board's role is to see that the organization achieves what it should, avoiding the unacceptable (via the concept of limitations), all on behalf of its constituents. (Read more about the constituent-representative model in the COD Governance Handbook at crcna.org; search "COD Governance Handbook.")

This constituent-representative model of policy governance provides a "link between the organization's board and its constituents. The constituents are represented on the governing board and participate in policy development and planning."[1] For these purposes, the term *constituents* refers to CRCNA members.

Similar to all forms of policy governance, there is clear differentiation between board activity and staff/administrative activity. Those serving on the COD are not invited into management functions. Staff/administrative members do not chart the direction and set the policies for the denomination, but they serve as implementers, working within the contours of COD-set policies toward the goals and limitations identified by the COD in conjunction with the CRC constituency. Moreover, as the COD sets direction and evaluates the effectiveness of outcomes, staff and administration are always attentive to context, making recommendations and providing analysis to the COD in ways that consider national contexts, diversity, and the like.

This model flows from CRCNA church polity as described in Church Order Article 27-a: "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and

[1] Bradshaw, P., R. Hayday, R. Armstrong; "Non-profit Governance Models: Problems and Prospects," paper originally presented at ARNOVA Conference, Seattle, Washington, 1998.

> domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated."
>
> In other words, ecclesiastical authority begins with congregations and is delegated to classis and then to synod. Church Order Article 27-a is balanced by Article 27-b: "The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the classis"—emphasizing the authority of the broader assemblies, which are made up of officebearers who represent Christ's authority in those assemblies as they make decisions for the broader church. The role of officebearers in each of these assemblies is significant in Church Order Article 1-a: "The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that officebearers are 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up' (Eph. 4:12), and to do so 'in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities."
>
> As an ecclesiastical governance entity serving in the interim of synod, the COD provides governance by means of the authority delegated to it by synod and with its synodically elected membership representing classes or serving in at-large capacities.
>
> (COD Governance Handbook, section 1.1: Governance)

The mandate and functions of the Council of Delegates as adopted by synod are outlined in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook (at crcna.org, search "Council of Delegates").

Some COD members also serve as the directors of the CRCNA Canada Corporation, the CRCNA U.S. Corporation, the ReFrame Canada Corporation, and the ReFrame U.S. Corporation. These legal entities (Canada and U.S.) interact via joint ministry agreements to govern ministry that is shared across the border between the ReFrame corporations and the CRCNA corporations. In fall 2019 the directors of the CRCNA and BTGMI Canada Corporations alerted the Council of Delegates to organizational implications of charitable laws in Canada, which necessitated immediate interim action to comply with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). The COD continues to work on a proposed new structure that would bring the denomination into better alignment with CRA regulations (see section II, A, 8 of this report for an update on restructuring).

The Council of Delegates met four times via video conference since May 2020—in June 2020 to address matters on behalf of Synod 2020, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see section II, A, 1 for action requested re the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020); in October 2020; in December 2020 for a special listening session; and in February 2021. The COD is scheduled to meet again via video conference in May 2021. The COD's agenda is processed both by the legal corporations mentioned above and by the full ecclesiastical body of the COD. The agenda items are first reviewed by one of five committees: Congregational Ministries; Global Missions Ministries; Mercy and Justice Ministries; Ministry Plan, Communication, and Synodical Services; or Support Services. These committees hear and study reports regarding the mission, vision, and values of our various ministries; the ways our ministries are integrated into a ministry (strategic) plan and are evaluated; the financial status, administrative leadership, and organizational health in each ministry-priority area; and the ways in which the COD responds both to synod and constituents. Committees present

their recommendations for review and feedback first to the four corporations (CRCNA and ReFrame Canada Corporations, and CRCNA and ReFrame U.S. Corporations) and then to the full COD for information and any required action. In addition, the COD oversees the work of the executive director of the CRCNA.

Nearly all of the matters addressed by the COD affect the full CRCNA as one denomination in two countries. In compliance with Canadian regulations, the Canadian corporations review and approve all actions relative to providing effective national direction and control for collective ministry activities and, as necessary, address the nonecclesiastical matters that relate directly to uniquely Canadian issues and matters of law. The same is done by the U.S. corporations. The COD, as synod's agent, is grateful for the opportunity to serve the entire church.

B. Tasks carried out on behalf of synod

A significant part of the COD's work over the past year reflects the *continued* response to synodical instructions (Synod 2020 was unable to meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic) directed to either the COD or the executive director in conjunction with the COD. An outline of the various instructions, organized by ministry-priority area, is provided in the following.

1. Faith formation

   Note: The COD received no additional assignments in this ministry-priority area.

2. Global mission

   Note: The COD received no additional assignments in this ministry-priority area.

3. Gospel proclamation and worship

   Note: The COD received no additional assignments in this ministry-priority area.

4. Mercy and justice

   Addressing Abuse of Power (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 794-99)

   a. **Guardian Committee:** "That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service. Consideration should be guided by the following features, which draw on good practices in other sectors of society for preventing and responding to all forms of abuse of power." (See section II, A, 17 and Appendix A.)

   b. **Monitoring by the COD**: "That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to ensure implementation by . . . monitoring progress at each meeting of the COD . . . making necessary adjustments in specific plans . . . and reporting to synod. . . ." (See section II, A, 17, b, 4.)

   c. **Nondisclosure Agreements:** "That synod direct the executive director to . . . review the history of nondisclosure agreements within the CRC

. . . develop a policy . . . develop good practices and protocols . . . [and] develop a reporting and accountability mechanism. . . ." (See section II, A, 17, b, 1.)

d. **Prevention of Abuse in CRCNA Offices** and **Conflict of Interest Dynamics:** "That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to review the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff, the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant, and mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints. A review should be informed by careful listening to persons who found the processes helpful and persons who did not." Further, "that synod mandate the Council of Delegates to examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest." (See section II, A, 17 and Appendix A.)

e. **Recordkeeping: "**That synod mandate the Council of Delegates and executive director to put in place a system of recordkeeping of cases that come to the attention of any level of church authority, to allow for the analysis of patterns and trends over time, without compromising the confidentiality of individual persons. Collection of data should include some record of responses and outcomes, as well as reporting of incidents." (See section II, A, 17, b, 3.)

f. **Strengthening Safe Church Ministry: "**That synod mandate the executive director to oversee a review of the adequacy of safe church policies for follow-up in reported cases that involve church leaders. Findings and actions taken by the executive director shall be reported to the Council of Delegates to ensure that the CRCNA is exercising due diligence to prevent repeat occurrences or transfer of abusive leaders to other churches. The review shall consider best practices in church abuse-prevention ministry." (Coming by way of the COD Supplement Report.)

Diversity Report (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 829): "The executive director will continue to request an annual diversity report from each agency and ministry and will include a summary of these reports in the report to the [COD] each February." (See section II, A, 6.)

Safe Church Reporting (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 476): "That synod instruct the executive director to have Safe Church Ministry report annually through the Council of Delegates to synod regarding the number and names of classes with and without Safe Church teams, and the number of congregations with and without Safe Church teams and policies." (See the report of Safe Church Ministry, section III.)

5. Servant leadership

Note: The COD received no additional assignments in this ministry-priority area.

6. Other areas

Evaluation and Prioritization (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455): "That synod instruct the Council of Delegates and the executive director to continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities." (See section II, B, 5.)

Heritage Hall and Historical Committee Mandate (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 761): "That synod instruct the COD to work with the Historical Committee to review their mandate and clarify the continued relationship between the committee and all of the stakeholders." (See section II, A, 11.)

Ministry Plan (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 630): "That synod give 'concept endorsement' to the goals and strategies attached (*Agenda for Synod 1997*, pp. 54-61), which the agencies will use to work toward implementation of the strategic plan." (See sections II, B, 1-2.)

C. Meetings of the Council of Delegates

After reporting in the *Agenda for Synod 2020* the decision of the Council of Delegates to hold its meetings in person *unless there were no other choice*, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all groups large and small to meet online. For the past year the COD has held its regular meetings virtually, beginning with the May 2020 meeting, and plans to do so through May 2021. In addition, the COD will meet virtually in June 2021 in lieu of synod, which has again been canceled, to address any matters on the *Agenda for Synod 2021* that cannot await a decision by Synod 2022. (See more regarding this decision made by the COD in section II, A, 2 of this report.) The forced online meeting format over the past year has shown the COD that it is possible to meet via video conference, but the in-person format is still missed for large-group deliberations and small-table conversations. Interpersonal relationships are not fostered through the virtual format. The members of the COD look forward to engaging with one another face-to-face in October 2021, Lord willing!

D. COD membership

The members of the Council of Delegates from the classes include B. Bernard Bakker (Eastern Canada), Bev Bandstra (B.C. South-East), Jesus Bayona (Southeast U.S.), Gary D. Bos (Columbia), Rachel Bouwkamp (Grandville), Wayne Brower (Holland), J. Harold Caicedo (California South), Paula Coldagelli (Wisconsin), Samuel Cooper (Toronto), Heather Cowie (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Wendell Davelaar (Northcentral Iowa), Fernando L. del Rosario (Central California), Bruce DeKam (Northern Michigan), Andy de Ruyter (B.C. North-West), Paul R. De Vries (Thornapple Valley), Peter J. DeVries (Yellowstone), Michael Ten Haken (Lake Superior), Sherry Fakkema (Pacific Northwest), Laurie Harkema (Lake Erie), Jeanne Engelhard (Grand Rapids East), Jill Feikema (Illiana), Drew Sweetman (Muskegon), Sheila E. Holmes (Hackensack), Thomas Byma (Greater Los Angles), Lora A. Copley (Red Mesa), Michael D. Koetje (Kalamazoo), Michelle J. Kool (Alberta North), William T. Koopmans (Hamilton), Jose Antonio (Tony) Lara (Arizona), John R. Lee (Iakota), Daudi Mutisya Mbuta (Grand Rapids North), Brian L. Ochsner (Central Plains), James Roskam (Georgetown),

Roger Y. Ryu (Hanmi), Roger W. Sparks (Minnkota), Arnie J. Stolte (Northern Illinois), David A. Struyk (Grand Rapids South), Samuel D. Sutter (Atlantic Northeast), Arie Vander Zouwen (North Cascades), Mark Vande Zande (Heartland), Tyler J. Wagenmaker (Zeeland), Ralph S. Wigboldus (Huron), Jei Wilson (Chicago South), and George R. Young (Hudson).

The following persons are serving as interim delegates until Synod 2021 can act on their appointments (included below): Wendy de Jong (Niagara) and Frederick Wind (Quinte).

Four at-large members also serve the COD. They include Elsa Fennema (U.S.), Greta Luimes (Canada), Aaltje Van Grootheest (Canada), and Melissa Van Dyk, who is serving as interim Canada at-large member until Synod 2021 acts on her appointment.

The denomination's executive director (Colin P. Watson, Sr.) serves ex officio as a corporate trustee of the CRCNA and ReFrame Ministries U.S. Corporations and as a member of the Council of Delegates (without vote). The executive director is invited as a guest to the meetings of the CRCNA and ReFrame Corporations based in Canada.

Classes Rocky Mountain and Ko-Am presently have vacancies on the COD due to moves away from these regions by their respective delegates. The COD anticipates presenting nominations to fill these two vacancies by way of the COD Supplement.

In addition, two guests from the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees (Victor Chen and Charles Veenstra) and two guests from the World Renew Board of Delegates (Rachel Conley and Andrew Geisterfer) attend the COD meetings and serve on a COD committee. These nonvoting COD guests are given privilege of the floor during meetings. COD member Fernando L. del Rosario from Classis Central California also serves as a member on the Calvin University Board of Trustees, providing a valuable link to this CRCNA institution.

The following serve as officers of the COD and of respective corporations for the 2020-2021 term:

1. COD officers: Paul R. De Vries, chair; Andy de Ruyter, vice chair; Timothy Bosscher, treasurer; Aaltje van Grootheest, secretary.

2. Corporation officers

   a. CRCNA Canada Corporation: Andy de Ruyter, president; Michelle J. Kool, vice president; Aaltje van Grootheest, secretary; Greta Luimes, treasurer.

   b. CRCNA U.S. Corporation: Paul R. De Vries, president; Sheila E. Holmes, vice president; Samuel Sutter, secretary; Gary D. Bos, treasurer.

   c. ReFrame Ministries Canada Corporation: Andy de Ruyter, president; Michelle J. Kool, vice president; Aaltje van Grootheest, secretary; Greta Luimes, treasurer.

   d. ReFrame Ministries U.S. Corporation: Paul R. De Vries, president; Sheila E. Holmes, vice president; Samuel Sutter, secretary; Gary D. Bos, treasurer.

3. Executive Committee: Gary D. Bos; Heather Cowie; Andy de Ruyter; Paul R. De Vries, chair; Laurie Harkema; Michelle J. Kool; John R. Lee; and Aaltje van Grootheest. Colin P. Watson, Sr., serves ex officio.

E. COD nominations

The nominee presented to Synod 2020 for the Canada at-large position withdrew prior to her appointment, leaving a vacancy in the at-large position. The COD was pleased to identify and appoint in the interim Melissa Van Dyk, who was present as a guest until her appointment in October 2020. The COD recommends Melissa Van Dyk for appointment as a Canada at-large member to serve a modified first term through June 30, 2023, eligible for reappointment.

> *Melissa Van Dyk* is a member of First CRC, Vancouver, British Columbia. She is employed as a manager at Hastings Chaplaincy and Outreach at Union Gospel Mission. She has served as treasurer and board chair for Diaconal Ministries Canada and as treasurer for the British Columbia leadership development network. She has also served as secretary for the local Strata Council. Currently she is serving as deacon and as council treasurer at First CRC, and she is a member of the Ecclesiastical Officer Position Description Task Force. She also served as an officer at Synod 2019.

Prior to the fall meetings of the Council of Delegates, the COD received the resignation of Robert Loerts (Niagara). Classis Niagara submitted the name of Wendy de Jong, who was appointed by the COD as an interim delegate in February 2021 and is being recommended to synod for appointment. Her first term will conclude June 30, 2023, and she will be eligible for reappointment to a second term.

> *Wendy de Jong*, a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC, St. Catharines, Ontario, serves as the administrator of Jubilee Fellowship CRC. She is currently serving as the stated clerk of Classis Niagara and as a member of the classical ministerial leadership team (8 years) and of the Classis Niagara safe church team (6 years).

In summer 2020, the COD also received the resignation of Gloria Melenberg (Quinte). Classis Quinte submitted the name of Frederick Wind, who was appointed by the COD as an interim delegate in October 2020 and subsequently is being recommended to synod for appointment. He is filling out the first term of the previous delegate, which concludes on June 30, 2021; he will be eligible for reappointment to a subsequent term of three years.

> *Frederick Wind*, a member of Hebron CRC in Whitby, Ontario, is a retired economist and policy analyst. He previously has served on boards or committees for the All Ontario Diaconal Conference, Diaconal Ministry of Eastern Canada, the World Ministries board, Citizens for Public Justice, Christian Stewardship Services, and Durham Lifelong Learning. Currently he serves on the finance committee of Citizens for Public Justice. He has also served numerous terms as a deacon, and he has served as chair of council and of his congregation's refugee committee.

The COD Nominating Services Committee works from an adopted rotation of concluding terms for the current COD membership—ideally eight or nine members conclude their term of service with the board each year to provide continuity. Over the next year, some members will be serving out their terms from previous board service (transitioning from the CRCNA Board of Trustees, the ReFrame Ministries board, or the Resonate Global Mission board) with a shortened term rather than two full terms (six years) on the COD.

Concluding service to the Council of Delegates in June 2021 are the following members:

Central California	Fernando del Rosario
Chicago South	Jei Wilson
Columbia	Gary D. Bos
Eastern Canada	B. Bernard Bakker
Georgetown	James Roskam
Hudson	George R. Young
Thornapple Valley	Paul R. De Vries
Toronto	Samuel Cooper
Canada at-large	Aaltje van Grootheest

The COD recommends that synod express its gratitude to these members for their faithful service and significant contributions to the denomination during their tenure on the Council of Delegates.

James Roskam (Georgetown) and George R. Young (Hudson) are completing a first term on the COD. Both delegates have decided not to serve a second term on the COD. The COD recommends that synod appoint the nominee from Classis Georgetown below to a first term of three years. A nominee for the Classis Hudson position will be presented by way of the COD Supplement.

The COD recommends the following nominees from the classes indicated for appointment to a first term of three years on the Council of Delegates:

Classis Central California

Mark VanDyke is the lead pastor at Almond Valley CRC, Ripon, California. Rev. VanDyke has served on the classical ministries leadership team for Classis Pacific Northwest, classical ad hoc committees, the Seoul Cluster Oversight Committee, and a subcommittee concerning the discipline of an ordained minister. Currently he is serving on his congregation's new church development committee. He has previously served on the council of Sumas (Wash.) CRC for four years and on the council of Almond Valley CRC for five years.

Classis Chicago South

Kyle Dieleman is a member of Faith CRC in Tinley Park, Illinois. He is presently an assistant professor of history at Trinity Christian College. He has served as a board member for Geneva Campus Ministry and is an ordained minister of the Word. He previously served as an interim pastor for the Leighton (Iowa) CRC and the Tracy (Iowa) CRC.

Classis Columbia

Rob Toornstra is the pastor of Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Oregon. He has served on denominational and classical youth committees. Currently he is a member of the EPMC Admission and Standards Committee. He has served for eight years on Classis Columbia's classical ministries leadership team. He is also serving a second term on the board of directors for International Theological Education Ministries (ITEM).

Classis Eastern Canada

Daniel Meinema is the pastor of Hebron CRC in Renfrew, Ontario. Previous experience includes service on the classical youth ministry team (Alberta North) and the classis ministries leadership team (Alberta North and Eastern Canada). He has also served as synodical deputy for Classis Eastern Canada. He currently serves on the diaconal ministries committee (Eastern Canada), the Ethics Committee for Renfrew Victoria Hospital, and the Ministerial Association of Barrhead, Alberta, (as chair).

Classis Georgetown

Jeanne Kallemeyn is a member of Georgetown CRC in Hudsonville, Michigan. In addition to having worked for Hudsonville Christian Middle School and Georgetown CRC, she is retired from working for the CRCNA's Pastor Church Resources after twelve years. She previously served as a deacon at Georgetown CRC and is currently serving as an elder.

Classis Thornapple Valley

Casey Jen is a member of Princeton CRC in Kentwood, Michigan. He has previously served as a volunteer for the Heritage Hall Archives, has been a delegate to synod, and has served on an ad hoc facilities advisory group. He served as a deacon, an elder, and as clerk of his church council. Currently he is serving on the classical ministries team of Classis Thornapple Valley.

Classis Toronto

Michael Irshad is a member of Crosspoint CRC in Brampton, Ontario. He is a master tax professional with H&R Block in Canada. His committee experience includes being a member of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) at Forman Christian College in Pakistan. He was elected as secretary of the local SCM group and later appointed as secretary of the National SCM. He served as a board member of the Karachi YMCA and also as their honorary internal auditor. In his second term on the board, he was elected treasurer. He served as well on the executive committee of the Scripture Union Pakistan, a parachurch organization of the Council of Churches in Pakistan. He has also been an active participant in planting a successful church in a remote village. Locally, he has served as a deacon with additional responsibility as secretary and treasurer of the diaconate, as clerk of council, and as a member of the 50th anniversary celebration committee for his church. He currently serves on the classis finance committee.

Note: A nominee for the retiring Canada at-large position will be presented for appointment by way of the COD Supplement.

The COD recommends the following members for reappointment to a second term of three years: Roger Y. Ryu (Hanmi), Wayne A. Brower (Holland), Ralph S. Wigboldus (Huron), John R. Lee (Iakota), Roger W. Sparks

(Minnkota), Sharon E. Fakkema (Pacific Northwest), Frederick Wind (Quinte), Paula Coldagelli (Wisconsin), and Tyler Wagenmaker (Zeeland).

F. Salary disclosure

At the directive of synod, the Council of Delegates reports the following salaries for senior CRCNA, ReFrame Ministries, and Resonate Global Mission staff directly employed by the Council of Delegates:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
E1	1	1	0
E2	4	3	1
E3	4	4	0

Synod 2014 adopted a salary administration system that uses a salary range *target* and a minimum of 85 percent of that target. In addition, the COD recently adopted a revised salary structure with fewer levels than the previous structure. Salary ranges within which the agencies will be reporting actual compensation for the current fiscal year are as follows:

2019-2020 Salary Grade and Range Structure

	U.S. Range		Canadian Range	
Level	Minimum	Target	Minimum	Target
E1	$148,000	$185,000		
E2	$133,559	$166,949	$127,261	$159,076
E3	$113,186	$141,482	$111,514	$139,392
H	$95,920	$119,900	$95,580	$119,475
I	$81,288	$101,610	$81,924	$102,405
J	$68,888	$86,110	$70,218	$87,773
K	$58,380	$72,975	$60,185	$75,232
L	$49,474	$61,843	$51,586	$64,482

II. Activities of the COD

A. Polity matters

1. Special meeting of the Council of Delegates in June 2020

   The Council of Delegates acted on behalf of Synod 2020 (cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to decide matters identified by the Program Committee of synod (officers of Synod 2019) that could not await decision until Synod 2021. The minutes of the special June 2020 meeting were recorded in the *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2020*, sent to the churches and posted at crcna.org/SynodResources. The COD presents the Minutes of the Special Meeting of June 2020 for ratification.

2. Feasibility of the meeting of Synod 2021

   The COD considered at length the report and proposal of the Program Committee regarding the feasibility of the meeting of Synod 2021, given the continuation of restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the COD reviewed a number of concerns expressed in correspondence regarding the meeting of synod and the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. It was noted that there was polarity in the opinions expressed between protecting the health and well-being of

individuals and protecting the health and well-being of the denomination. The COD also considered that the meeting of synod should ensure full participation from both U.S. and Canadian delegates, and, given current border and travel restrictions, it seemed highly unlikely that Canadians could be physically present at synod in Iowa in June. The COD decided the following with regard to the meeting of Synod 2021:

a. To cancel the meeting of Synod 2021 and to hold a special meeting of the Council of Delegates in lieu of synod (in June) to address any matters on synod's agenda that cannot wait for decision until the meeting of Synod 2022.

b. To defer consideration of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality until Synod 2022.

c. To task the Program Committee of synod with deciding which matters remaining on the agenda for Synod 2021 should be addressed by the special meeting of the COD in June 2021.

3. Interim appointments

On behalf of synod, the COD has ratified the following classical appointments of synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies* and has appointed the following World Renew board delegates:

Appointment	Classis	Member	Alternate	Term
Synodical Deputies	Lake Superior	Rev. Harrison A. Newhouse	Rev. James T. Petersen	2023(1)
	Niagara		Rev. Janet A. Ryzebol	
	Quinte		Rev. Kenneth M. deBoer	
	Toronto		Rev. Richard E. Grift	
World Renew	Illiana	Mr. James Groen		2023(1)
	North Cascades	Ms. Linda German		2023(1)

*Terms of alternate synodical deputies run concurrent with those of the synodical deputies.

4. Classes that have declared that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis

In accordance with the instructions of Synod 2007, the executive director keeps a list of classes that, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis. Although some of these classes have developed their own regulations regarding the permissibility of women officebearers participating in classis meetings, some classes have adopted a decision to declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis. A list of these classes may be obtained by contacting the office of the executive director.

5. Annual report on gender and ethnic diversity on denominational boards

Data for the board diversity report (with regard to gender and ethnic diversity) for the 2020-2021 year has been received from the denominational boards (Council of Delegates, Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University, and World Renew). In addition, data from the World Renew Joint Ministry Council (JMC) is included along with data from the World

Renew Board of Delegates. *Note:* The JMC is elected from the membership of the World Renew Board of Delegates.

There are presently 164 denominationally appointed board members (not including the JMC count), and the JMC, elected from the World Renew Board of Delegates, has 15 members. So, among a total of 179 members, 62 (35%) are women, and 27 (15%) are people of color. The data received from the boards for the 2020-2021 board term reflects an *increase* of 1 percent in delegates who are women and a *decrease* of 1 percent in delegates who are persons of color, as compared to the 2019-2020 reporting year.

Individual board diversity makeup is also reported in light of synod's goal of having *at least 25 percent ethnic minority membership*. The board membership of Calvin Theological Seminary is 24 percent ethnic minority; Calvin University, 10 percent; World Renew (JMC), 13 percent; and the COD, 18 percent.

6. Annual report on denominational efforts to address ethnic diversity and racial justice

   At the instruction of Synod 2013, each CRC agency, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin University are asked to submit to the executive director, as part of their strategic plan, diversity goals and timelines in their leadership, administrative, and regional ministry teams. This annual report was received by the executive director, and the compliance and progress were reported to the Council of Delegates in February.

   In addition, the director of synodical services regularly reminds and encourages stated clerks and denominational boards to seek ethnic diversity in nominating people to serve on denominational boards and as delegates to synod. We need to be diligent in continuing to increase diversity.

7. Advisers to Synod 2021

   a. Young adult representatives

      Since 2009 synod has welcomed the engagement of youth and young adults (18- to 26-year-olds) in the current issues faced by our denomination and has sought to raise up leadership within the church through the appointment of young adult representatives to participate in the deliberations of synod. These individuals bring a valuable and unique perspective to the issues we face as a denomination by listening, engaging delegates during advisory committee meetings, and offering input on matters that arise in plenary.

      Prior to the decision of the Council of Delegates in February to cancel the meeting of Synod 2021, the COD had appointed the following persons to serve as young adult representatives to synod (* indicates service in this capacity in 2019). Several of these individuals were also appointed to serve in 2020, but Synod 2020 was canceled as well. We express gratitude for their commitment and gracious willingness to serve the denomination in this way. *Note:* Only six of the seven young adult representatives needed were appointed at the February 2021 meeting of the COD.

* Rebecca Bokma
Amy DeJong
Alaina Kats Puckett
* William Krahnke
Leah Sweetman
David VanDokkumburg

b. Ethnic advisers

Determination of the need for the appointment of ethnic advisers to synod is based on a rolling three-year average (greater than 25) of ethnically diverse delegates appointed to synod. Due to a decrease in the diversity of synod delegates, the Council of Delegates appointed the following two ethnic advisers to Synod 2021: Pablo D. Canché and Albert M. Sideco. Due to the cancellation of synod, these individuals will not be called to serve in this capacity this year. We are grateful for their willingness to offer their unique perspectives to the issues before synod, and they will be invited to serve Synod 2022 if they are able.

8. Denominational structure and senior leadership

a. Mandated Structure and Leadership Task Force (SALT)

As reported by way of the COD Supplement to Synod 2020, in continuation of the address of structure in light of Canadian charitable-law requirements, three task forces have been appointed to develop, respectively, a senior leadership position description for (1) an ecclesiastical officer who can help shepherd the denomination forward, (2) an executive director for CRCNA-Canada, and (3) an executive director for CRCNA-U.S.—all of whom will work collaboratively on shared ministry and make decisions about joint ministry agreements for shared programs. The COD reviewed the proposed position descriptions for these roles in October 2020 and received the endorsement of the CRCNA Canada and CRCNA U.S. corporations, respectively, regarding their nation-specific position descriptions. Subsequently the COD took action as follows:

- Endorsed the work of the Ecclesiastical Officer Task Force. *Note:* The COD endorsed the "basic contours" of the report to inform the completion of the two proposed executive director position descriptions. The reports of the Canada Executive Director Job Description Task Force and the Task Force to Propose the Executive Director U.S. Position Description were received as information by the COD and referred to the following new task force.
- Appointed a new task force to incorporate the feedback of the Council of Delegates and to ensure that the three reports/position descriptions are complete and compatible, meet the demands of our Reformed polity, and address other relevant ecclesiastical considerations; that the three position descriptions include reviews by the CRCNA Human Resources offices in Canada and the U.S. to ascertain the use of appropriate language to reflect desire for inclusiveness; and that a final report be presented to the COD in February 2021 for recommendation to synod.
- Referred the following to the new task force as part of its mandate:
  - Obtain legal reviews from Canadian and U.S. legal counsel.
  - Consult the leadership of standing committees as well as denominational leadership to ensure that each of the position

descriptions are properly supported and accurately account for existing tasks/needs and that any and all budget staffing implications are accounted for.

- Consider *Synodical Clerk of the CRCNA* among a range of options for the naming of the position previously described as "ecclesiastical officer." (The task force did not achieve consensus regarding an alternative to the title *ecclesiastical officer,* which tends to be defined as a role that functions to promulgate policy and regulations regarding the ecclesiastical aspect of a society's activities.)
- Request that synod instruct the executive director of the CRCNA to suggest updates to the *Rules for Synodical Procedure* and the *Church Order and Its Supplements* reflecting these structural changes and proposed positions as provided in the report of the task force and the work of the COD.

The Council of Delegates plans to consult with a Canadian conflict-of-interest lawyer to review matters that may have the potential for conflict of interest and how best to manage such conflicts. The COD also considered inclusion of a recommendation in its final report that synod implement use of the denominational Conflict of Interest Policy (adopted by the Council of Delegates) for delegates to synod.

Six COD members, two members from the CRC at large, and two ex officio (nonvoting) members were appointed in late October to the new Structure and Leadership Task Force (SALT) and asked to complete their work by the time of the COD meeting in February 2021. In late November, however, the mandate of the task force was expanded to include an analysis of legal opinions received by the COD. This addition to the mandate presented a challenge for the team to accomplish its tasks by the time of the February COD meeting. The SALT team provided the COD with a progress report in February and plans to submit a final report for the May meeting of the COD.

The final SALT report will be presented to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to ensure that the CRCNA is tax compliant. The task force has developed a preliminary model of three senior leadership positions to be further developed: Executive Director-Canada, General Secretary (CRCNA), and Chief Administrative Officer. In the process of developing the position descriptions, governance is being considered with regard to the standing of the agencies, their accountability, and how they are managed. The report will give attention to organizational "hygiene"—care and tending (such as the legislation of synod for its smooth running).

b. Senior leadership transition

Given the realization that the SALT report will not be considered by the COD until May 2021 and that consideration and subsequent approval of a proposed new structure will be deferred to Synod 2022, Colin P. Watson, Sr., indicated his willingness to continue serving as executive director until June 30, 2022. John Bolt, scheduled to retire in July 2021 as director of finance and administration, also expressed his

willingness to extend his retirement and thus assist the denomination until June 30, 2022. The COD accepted these offers with thanks.

c. Approval of "deputy to the executive director"

At the same time that the COD considered the offer of Colin Watson to extend his service as executive director, the COD considered his request for assistance with U.S. ministry leadership by way of a *deputy* to assist during the interim period until 2022 (with some help from other ministry leaders, he has been filling two roles—executive director and director of ministries and administration—over the past year). The appointment of a deputy for the coming 18 months would alleviate a void in leadership from 2021 to 2022 and would help a new person transition into the position in July 2022. The CRCNA U.S. Corporation authorized the executive director, with final approval of the nominee by the CRCNA U.S. Corporation officers, "to appoint a deputy with responsibility for U.S. ministry operations in lieu of replacing the vacant position of the director of ministries and administration, effective until at least June 30, 2022." (The CRCNA Canada Corporation approved extending its interim directorships until June 2022).

9. Inspire 2021

In response to an extensive survey and consideration of concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, Inspire 2021 has been postponed for one year until August 2022 as a hybrid model (primarily in-person with some virtual elements). The planning took into account the original intent of the conference to be a denominational *gathering*—a coming together to share ideas, collaborate, and celebrate—which would be difficult to do virtually. A virtual only "Inspire Light" will be offered in 2021 to pique interest in attending the denominational conference in 2022. Visit crcna.org/Inspire for more information.

10. Syncretism report

The COD received updates on the address of syncretism. The executive director shared that engagement has centered on building connection with Indigenous ministries, primarily in Classis Red Mesa. Unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the efforts—the Navajo Nation has been significantly adversely affected by the pandemic, with great loss of life. The COD learned that Rev. Reggie Smith, diversity director, has been connecting with Rev. Stanley Jim, who is providing pastoral care in the context of the pandemic within the Navajo Nation. Rev. Jim's work is evolving into ministry-centered intercultural navigation. Intention is for a deep, long, relational approach in conversations and in developing relationships. The development of leadership in Classis Red Mesa is robust, but it has been noted that the Navajo Reservation has only one minister of the Word at present. This area needs our earnest prayer!

The COD also heard that the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Centres have been serving on the front lines during this year of pandemic and need our prayers and support. Together with them, the CRCNA is embarking on a "Hearts Exchanged" process to equip Reformed Christians

to engage with Indigenous people as neighbors in a fulsome and humble way that builds trust and transformation. Two cohorts (one in Eastern Canada and one in Alberta) have begun this process.

11. Historical Committee mandate

    The work with the Historical Committee to review their mandate and clarify the continued relationship between the committee and the organizational stakeholders of the archives in Heritage Hall—that is, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the CRCNA (including but not limited to the CRC's Historical Committee)—paused in 2020 due to the pandemic. More recently, the Historical Committee asked that the COD clarify how it interprets Synod 2019's instruction about the role of the Historical Committee in providing "shared oversight" of the archives.

    The COD considered the request and communicated to the Historical Committee that it recognizes that Synod 2019 spent much time and attention on this issue. The COD noted (1) that synod recognizes that the Historical Committee continues to be a valued partner as outlined in the Governing Policy of the Hekman Library (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 626-32), and (2) that synod is not ceding oversight but is delineating that the oversight should be shared between the Historical Committee and the other stakeholders of Heritage Hall.

12. Revisions to letters of call for ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors

    Pastor Church Resources presented to the COD in February revisions to the letters of call for commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word, which the COD approved for posting. Churches and stated clerks can access the revised letters of call at crcna.org/StatedClerks.

13. Ministry presentations at synod

    For presentations to synod by CRC ministries, a rotation schedule reflecting the denomination's five ministry priorities was implemented by synod in 2018. On the schedule for 2021 are presentations on Global Mission from the following ministries: ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission. (See also section II, B, 5 of this report regarding ministry evaluations.)

14. Report of the COD Appeal Review Committee; D. Lowe and M. Szto (Queens CRC, Jamaica, N.Y.) Personal Appeal to Synod 2020

    The COD, acting in lieu of Synod 2020, considered a personal appeal to synod by D. Lowe and M. Szto (Queens CRC, Jamaica, N.Y.) regarding a decision of Classis Hudson, and mandated an appeal review committee to review all materials and report back to the COD in October. Subsequently the Council of Delegates, meeting in executive session, took the following actions in October 2020 in response to the appeal review committee report and to recommendations regarding the personal appeal.

    a. The COD ruled the first item of the appeal out of order in accordance with Church Order Article 30-a and its Supplement, section B, 1.

Grounds:

1) In light of the decision of Classis Hudson on September 17, 2019, relative to decisions of 2013 and the absence of an appeal within 90 days, this item should not be considered.
2) The relevant decisions of Classis Hudson in 2013 were not appealed until several years after the decision.

b. The COD ruled not to sustain the second item of the appeal.

Grounds:

1) Whereas the appeal states that "Classis Hudson mandated the merger of QCRC with another church by the artificial deadline of December 15, 2020, under threat of Classis Hudson taking control of QCRC's valuable property in New York City by that date or earlier," the actual decision of Classis Hudson was "that classis direct the active QCRC members in regular attendance to initiate a dialogue with the leadership of Covenant of Grace PCA (CoG) for the purpose of negotiating a detailed plan to formally unite the two congregations on the existing site, resulting in the formation of one congregation in all respects under applicable civil and ecclesiastical laws and regulations upon such terms and conditions as they shall negotiate, within the parameters, terms, and conditions set forth in this resolution; and that classis humbly request CoG's session to be open to the requested dialogue" (Classis Minutes, Jan. 23, 2020, p. 7, item #3).
2) While Scripture and the Church Order state that one church shall not lord it over another church, it does not appear that this is the situation here. The decisions of classis present a reasonable process to help the active members of Queens CRC flourish.

The COD also included its hope that both parties in this matter can resolve their differences in Christian love and find mutually beneficial ways of moving forward for the greater good of the kingdom. The COD asks for God's gracious blessing on Queens Christian Reformed Church and Classis Hudson.

The COD recommends that synod approve the work of the COD with regard to the personal appeal of D. Lowe and M. Szto (Queens CRC, Jamaica, N.Y.) regarding a decision of Classis Hudson.

15. Appeal of a decision of synod

A letter of appeal, outlining four grounds for the appeal, was submitted to Synod 2021 regarding a matter that was adjudicated by Synod 2019. The executive director has the authority to make a ruling on the submission (re whether substantial and new grounds have been presented). The executive director may also seek the input and support of the Council of Delegates regarding his/her judgment of the appeal. The COD expressed its support of the executive director's proposal to decline the appeal submitted to Synod 2021.

16. Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee (JCC) hears appeals from a decision made by a council, a classis, or an agency of the Christian Reformed Church if it is alleged that an action violates the Church Order or the agency's mandate. The procedures followed by the Judicial Code Committee are set forth in Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c. The committee's members from both Canada and the United States include people with legal expertise, clergy, and nonclergy.

a. Membership

Synod 2014 adopted guidelines stating that the composition of the JCC reflect the diversity of the denomination and provide balance in expertise among its members (trained in law, ordained as minister of the Word, nonordained/nonlaw background). In addition, terms have been staggered to provide continuity to the work of the committee.

One member of the committee, Eun-Joo Gloria Dykstra, resigned from service on the committee in summer 2020. In addition, another member of the JCC, Rev. Henry Jonker, passed away in December 2020 following a brief illness.

The COD, in the interim of synod, appointed Dexter W. Young to the JCC to fill out the term of Eun-Joo Gloria Dykstra, with a first term concluding June 30, 2021. The COD recommends that synod reappoint Dexter W. Young to serve a subsequent term of three years (until June 30, 2024):

Dexter W. Young is a retired attorney and member of Golden Gate CRC, San Francisco, California. He served as an active leader of the congregation's junior high group for eighteen years. In addition, he served in children's ministry and as a member of the mission committee.

Due to the vacancy left on the committee after the passing of Rev. Jonker, the COD recommends that synod, by way of exception, extend the term of Rev. Aldon Kuiper, who was scheduled to conclude service in 2021, for one year (until July 1, 2022) to fill the unexpected vacancy. The COD is grateful to Rev. Kuiper for his willingness to extend service on the Judicial Code Committee.

Another member of the JCC, Roberta Vriesma, is completing a second term in 2021 and is not eligible for reappointment. It is recommended that synod express gratitude for her years of service to the denomination.

The COD Nominating Services Committee, on behalf of the COD, solicited nominees for the anticipated vacancies of a minister of the Word and a nonordained/nonlaw position on the JCC. The COD recommends that synod appoint two new members to the Judicial Code Committee for a first term of three years from the following slates of nominees:

Minister of the Word position

Richard Bodini is serving as a minister of Heritage Fellowship CRC in Brampton, Ontario. He previously served on the Canadian National Gathering planning team, the King's University Board of Trustees, the classis ministry committee (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), the

classis executive (Toronto), and the classis race relations committee (Toronto). He is currently serving on classis executive ex officio as stated clerk of Classis Toronto.

Daniel De Graff is the pastor of Baldwin (Wis.) CRC. He previously served on the Good Samaritan Society advisory board in Corsica, South Dakota, and on the classical ministry leadership team for Classis Iakota. He has also assisted with online candidate exams. He has served as president of the Corsica CRC/Grace Reformed union church council. Rev. De Graff is in an advisory role to the education, music, safe church, and worship committees at Baldwin CRC.

Nonordained/nonlaw position

Kim Rhodes, a member of Modesto (Calif.) CRC, is employed as an office manager at Rhodes Financial Group. She has served as president of PEO Reciprocity and as president, vice president, and secretary of the local PEO chapter. She has also served on the Modesto Parent Participation Preschool Board, the Sylvan Improvement Club Board, and the Modesto CRC search committee, as well as serving as deacon. Currently she serves on the Modesto CRC congregational life and outreach committee in addition to serving as a fundraising and events volunteer for Without Permission.

Anita Veldhuisen Slomp, a member of West End CRC in Edmonton, Alberta, is currently employed as a conflict resolution practitioner/mediator and restorative justice facilitator. She has served as chair of the local Parent Teacher Advisory association and on her church's worship and liturgy committees. She also served as an elder and deacon at West End CRC. Currently she is serving on the classis interim committee for Classis Alberta North and on the healthy church task force.

b. Reappointments to second term

The Council of Delegates recommends the following JCC members for reappointment to a second term of three years: Edward Bosveld and Cindy de Jong.

17. Addressing Abuse of Power—responses to Synod 2019 directives (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 794-99)

a. Report of Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee

After many months of work and preparation, and after receiving feedback and approval on sections of its report in October 2020, the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee of the COD presented its final report in February (included as Appendix A). The COD provides the following as updates to the various decisions of Synod 2019 in its response to the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee (2019).

Included in the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee report are a series of recommendations adopted by the CRCNA Canada and U.S. Corporations in October 2020 dealing with training provided for CRCNA staff and suggesting changes to the CRCNA Employee Handbook (in its three versions for Canadian staff, U.S. staff, and international staff). Also adopted by the corporations in October are

changes to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy and proposed restorative justice practices for use as additional support for claimants.

The COD received the final draft report and recommendations from the ad hoc committee in February, including a recommendation for the formation of a Dignity Team. The Council of Delegates presents the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee report (Appendix A) in response to directives of Synod 2019 for adoption by synod.

b. Updates on other specific matters

The COD also received updates on the following specific matters coming from Synod 2019 and not addressed within the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee report:

1) Policy on nondisclosure agreements

The COD received and adopted the following update provided by the executive director regarding the policy on nondisclosure agreements:

There are three scenarios in which there would be nondisclosure agreements (NDAs): (1) a position is eliminated in which the person is let go; (2) a position is ended due to performance issues not related to treatment of another individual; (3) a position is ended amid behavioral concerns raised about an employee's treatment of (an)other individual(s). For point 3 above, an NDA may be called for, but we will want to make sure that the separation happens in a way that does not do further damage to the individuals involved. There would be different levels of review for each scenario: Scenario 1 – review by HR; Scenario 2 – review by HR and some administrative leadership; and Scenario 3 – review by HR, executive director, Safe Church Ministry, COD executive committee, and legal counsel.

2) Abuse prevention resources for culturally diverse churches

Resources for culturally diverse churches are being addressed in the following ways:

- A translation team with diverse representation from ethnic communities in the CRC has formed.
- The CRCNA website now has contextualized translation capability—the infrastructure is in place and the process of building translated sites is ongoing.

3) Recordkeeping

The COD received a report from the executive director regarding increased collaboration between Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources on recordkeeping. A question was raised about tracking global data (anonymized) and specific data on *actors of concern*. It is an expectation that the proposed Dignity Team (grouped with the ministries of Congregational Services) would help set appropriate procedures for data tracking.

4) Implementation and monitoring

The COD is committed to continually monitoring the progress and ensuring implementation of the decisions of Synod 2019 to aid in the prevention of the abuse of power in CRCNA leadership. This is a standing agenda matter for the COD's Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee.

18. Response to communication from author of Overtures 9, 10, and 11 in the *Agenda for Synod 2020*

The author of Overtures 9, 10, and 11 to Synod 2020 sent correspondence to the COD with a request that the overtures not be deferred until Synod 2021. At the request of the COD, the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee prepared a response, noting the work regarding abuse of power that is already being accomplished. It is the intent of the COD to offer this response to the synod advisory committee assigned to consider these three overtures.

19. Unity and diversity engagement

The COD received a disturbing report during its February meeting regarding incidents of bullying, name-calling, threatening letters, and other attacks toward staff of the Office of Social Justice (OSJ), the Office of Race Relations, and other ministries working in the area of justice. Prayer is requested of all members at this time, and the COD is called to commit to the hard work of fighting systemic racism. The COD paused in its work to enter a time of lament, confession, and silent prayer. In addition to the Committee to Provide Guidance and Support for the Office of Social Justice, a consultant and the CRCNA Human Resources office are working with the staff of these ministries.

20. Publications and services

a. *Yearbook*

Following an extensive process to gather denominational and local-church information as of approximately August 31 of each calendar year, staff of the Synodical Services Office produce an annual "snapshot" each February as the CRCNA *Yearbook*. The *Yearbook* is made available in print, as a downloadable PDF (available at faithaliveresources.org), and in online format (crcna.org/Yearbook). In addition, data received from the churches, classes, and ordained personnel throughout the rest of the year is continually updated in the online *Yearbook*, often making the most current information available within a few days. The online format includes the Church Finder feature (crcna.org/church-finder), which provides maps, church service times, membership information, and links to church websites, among other helpful information. Minister service history, special days to be observed in the church calendar, and denominational ministry-share information are all linked via the online *Yearbook*.

In addition, classis and denominational statistics can also be accessed or downloaded at crcna.org/Yearbook. Among some of the statistics available in the online *Yearbook* are the total number of members (baptized and confessing) in a local congregation, number of families, number of professing members over eighteen years of

age, number of professing members, number of baptized members, number of membership transfers from other CRCs, and number of members received through evangelism and from other denominations. This data continues to present a historical record of our church and ministry together through the years.

b. *Church Order and Its Supplements* and *Rules for Synodical Procedure*

The *Church Order and Its Supplements 2020* reflects revisions to Supplements adopted by the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA in June 2020, meeting on behalf of synod. Synod 2019 also adopted proposed changes to the Church Order, and those will await the adoption of synod before implementation. The latest version of the *Church Order and Its Supplements*, published by the Office of Synodical Services, was distributed to each of the churches in early fall 2020 and has been translated into Korean and Spanish. The *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, last updated following decisions of Synod 2019 and translated for Spanish-speaking and Korean-speaking churches, is available in digital format only. Both the Church Order and the Rules for Synodical Procedure are available for download at crcna.org/SynodResources.

c. *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod*

The publication of the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* is the responsibility of the director of synodical services under the direction of the executive director. From time to time some decisions need to be made by the executive director about which material properly belongs in the *Agenda for Synod*. At times, the executive director consults with the COD or Program Committee for advice and input when materials are in question. In many cases, erring on the side of grace seems more appropriate than erring on the side of rigid regulation. Synod itself will finally decide in all cases whether material is properly on its agenda.

Synod 2019 decided that in order to improve the connection between synod and classes and churches, a summary of the *Agenda for Synod* should be sent to delegates and church council clerks with an encouragement to pass it along to church members. The summary document is usually available for distribution in mid-spring.

d. *Manual for Synodical Deputies*

The *Manual for Synodical Deputies* is distributed to synodical deputies, their alternates, and the stated clerks of classes. A revision of the manual was completed in summer 2020 by the Office of Synodical Services, reflecting suggested clarifications and updates from the Candidacy office. Anyone desiring to access or download a copy of this tool for the classes may do so by going to the stated clerk and synodical deputy webpage at crcna.org/SynodicalDeputies.

e. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*

A very helpful tool for churches and classes, the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* was updated by Henry DeMoor in fall 2019 to reflect changes made to the Supplements through Synod 2019 that have been incorporated into the Church Order. We are grateful to Dr. DeMoor for his contribution of providing a tool for use by classes,

churches, and many others working and advising on polity matters. This resource is intended as a companion to the CRC's Church Order, offering commentary and explanation of guidelines set forth and decisions made by synod over the years. The manual is available for viewing in the CRC Digital Library (crcna.org/DigitalLibrary), and print and downloadable versions are available through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org).

f. *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*

Also updated in 2020 was Henry DeMoor's *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, previously printed in 2010. This invaluable resource, providing context for the rules of the church—the "why" behind the rules—is available for viewing in the CRC Digital Library (crcna.org/DigitalLibrary), and print and downloadable versions are available through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org).

B. Program matters

A significant part of the Council of Delegates' work relates to the ministry programs, personnel, and finances of the denomination. The program and personnel details are reported to synod by way of the reports of the agencies, institutions, and ministries and via this section of the COD's report in this agenda. Additional information regarding financial matters is contained in Appendix D to this Council of Delegates Report as well as in the *Agenda for Synod 2021—Financial and Business Supplement* that will be distributed in late May. The final budget approved by the COD, including the allocation of ministry-share pledges by churches, will be presented as information to synod by way of the COD Supplement report through synod's financial matters advisory committee.

The COD provides denominational oversight on behalf of synod throughout the year. The office of the executive director serves as the primary link between the COD and the denomination's ministries. Serving within the office of the ED are the director of ministries and administration (currently vacant), the Canadian ministries director (CMD), the director of finance and operations (DFO), the director of ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International), the director of Resonate Global Mission, the director of synodical services (DSS), and the director of communications and marketing (DCM).

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC), convened by the executive director of the CRCNA, has responsibility for implementing the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church (the current version is *Our Journey 2025*), for the collaboration of the ministries, and for the review of program matters. The binational membership of the MLC is made up of executive leadership, directors of agencies, presidents of the educational institutions (or their designees), and others representing specific offices and functions. The Canadian Ministries Team, convened by the Canadian ministries director, provides leadership to the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada.

The program and financial matters processed by the COD from July through February are presented to synod as information. Any matters that require action by synod are identified within the body of this report.

1. Summary of *Our Journey 2020* (Ministry Plan)

   Fall 2020 marked the conclusion of *Our Journey 2020*—the denomination's five-year ministry plan, implemented in 2015. Also implemented with the start of *Our Journey 2020* was an *annual* denominational survey to help track progress of the ministry plan, in addition to metrics recorded along the way. Synod delegates are invited to read an executive summary of the denominational survey at crcna.org/survey/survey-results.

2. Implementation of *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

   The rollout of the new denominational ministry plan, *Our Journey 2025*, following the endorsement of the COD acting on behalf of Synod 2020, is complete. There's something about a journey that's exciting and invigorating. A promise of new horizons, new possibilities, new challenges. The Christian Reformed Church is on such a journey. It's called *Our Journey 2025*. *"Our"* because we are on it together as CRC people from congregations across the United States and Canada. *"Journey"* because we are moving ahead in our shared mission to express the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide, while also striving toward specific goals that our congregations and leaders have identified. And *"2025"* to remind us that this is just one stage of a journey that will see us living and growing together in new ways and new places by the year 2025.

   For this five-year period, we have identified four "milestones" that we wish to work toward. We desire to become congregations and communities that do the following:

   – Cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual disciplines, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.
   – Listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together.
   – Grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers.
   – Share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches in our neighborhoods as we discover how to connect with our local and global ministry contexts.

   Churches can request resources including visuals, conversation cards, and other tools that can help congregations and members feel excitement and ownership of the ministry plan in more than a theoretical way. Visit crcna.org/OurJourney to learn more about sharing in the excitement!

3. Our Calling

   Proposed by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to Synod 2014, the term *Five Streams*—changed to "Our Calling" in 2016—became a focus of the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in its collaboration, programs, and reporting. Synod 2015 adopted the five themes of Our Calling of the Christian Reformed Church (included below) to function as "ministry priorities to strategically focus and adaptively organize the work of the Christian Reformed Church in North America while respecting and building on our previous mission efforts,

history, and legacy of relationships and member support" (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680).

Faith Formation
As a community of believers, we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to nurture their faith through all ages and stages of life.

Servant Leadership
Understanding that the lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish, we identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God.

Global Mission
Called to be witnesses of Christ's kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world.

Mercy and Justice
Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God.

Gospel Proclamation and Worship
Believing that faith comes through the hearing of God's Word, we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and seek to worship him in all that we do.

Consistent with prior actions of both adopting the five streams and then relabeling them as "Our Calling," we note that these ministry priorities are being utilized to communicate more effectively what the CRC members and ministers, congregations and classes, and ministries and agencies are called to do. The *Annual Ministry Report* (see crcna.org/MinistryReport), the *Agenda for Synod*, and introductory brochures all utilize this categorization. Further, the Council of Delegates committee structure and committee mandates reflect these priorities.

4. CRC agency, institution, and congregational services reports
The Council of Delegates is responsible for submitting a *unified* report to synod composed of individual segments provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The individual reports of the CRC ministries appear in the following pages of this *Agenda for Synod*.
These reports portray the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church both locally and around the world. As you read these materials, we invite you to give thanks to God for ministry opportunities and for the thousands of staff and volunteers throughout the church who are living and sharing the gospel.

5. Ministry evaluation
Synod 2018 instructed the COD and the executive director "to continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year

cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455).

In response to this directive, the COD adopted a policy to ensure continual evaluation of all agencies and ministries over a four-year cycle according to the five ministry priorities. The agencies and ministries are required to have comprehensive and strategic program goals and objectives and, by means of fitting evaluation and assessment approaches, to provide annual outcomes in their reporting year.

Synod will be asked to review and approve evaluation reports with regard to Global Mission from the following ministries: ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission (Appendix B).

6. Ratifying the appointments of ministry directors

   Upon learning of the announced retirements of two ministry directors and of a requested change in position for a third ministry director at its October 2020 meeting (directors of Safe Church Ministry, Candidacy, and Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, respectively), the COD implemented appropriate search processes. However, due to the immediacy of filling two of the positions, the COD gave its executive committee the authority to ratify the appointments in the interim between the fall and winter COD meetings. Each of the following appointees met with and shared with the COD in February about their journey toward coming to work in their respective new roles.

   a. Safe Church Ministry director

      The executive committee ratified, on behalf of the Council of Delegates, the appointment of Rev. Amanda Benckhuysen as the director of Safe Church Ministry, effective January 25, 2021.

   b. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry director

      The executive committee of the COD, on behalf of the Council of Delegates, met with and ratified the appointment of Rev. Timothy L. Rietkerk as the director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, effective January 19, 2021.

   c. Director of Candidacy

      At its February 2021 meeting, the COD ratified the appointment of Rev. Susan E. LaClear as the director of Candidacy (effective April 5, 2021).

   The Council of Delegates recommends that synod express the gratitude of the denomination to Bonnie Nicholas and David Koll in their retirements and to Sarah Roelofs as she fills a new role for Chaplaincy and Care Ministry.

7. ReFrame Ministries Foundational document

   The COD was presented in February with the ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International) Foundational document (Appendix C), which includes the agency's vision, mission, core values, and strategy statements. The COD endorsed the document and recommends that synod receive it as information.

8. Revised missionary support program

Resonate Global Mission prepared and presented to the COD revisions of the missionary support program. It is noted that the revisions are managerial in nature, not requiring approval by the COD or synod. Resonate received the broad support of missionaries regarding the revisions. The current missionary support program, approved by Synod 2014, has been successful in fielding and supporting missionaries. However, it was noted that many CRC churches have misunderstood the missionary support program approved by Synod 2014 and believe that direct giving to missionaries supports the entire cost of the missionary program. In reality direct giving to missionaries and their projects covers 66 percent of the total cost of Resonate's Career Staff Missionary Program while general giving (including ministry shares) covers the remainder of costs.

The COD received the revised missionary support program report as information and recommends that the next synod (2022) hear a brief report and presentation by Resonate on raising missionary support as a follow-up to decisions on missionary support approved by Synod 2014.

9. Church Planting Definition and Strategy Changes

At the recommendation of Resonate Global Mission, the COD endorsed the following definition of *church planting* to be used in all CRCNA denominational contexts:

> Planting churches is a missionary endeavor to form new Christian communities of faith-churches—from persons currently outside of existing established Christian communities for the purpose of discipling the new community in the ways of Jesus to be witnesses to the world in both word and deed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the COD endorsed strategies for church planting, including the categorization, funding, and credentialing of church plants and church planters to aid Resonate in its work.

10. Ministry Support Services

a. Shared ministry services

The staff of Ministry Support Services (MSS) is responsible for *The Banner,* Faith Alive Christian Resources, Libros Desafio (Spanish-language resources), and a number of professional services that support CRC ministries. These services include marketing, order and subscription processing, call center, editorial services, translation, rights and permissions management, design and web services, purchasing, and distribution. At any one time, more than 100 projects are in process, and thousands of words are being combined with design elements for publication via paper or pixels. The call center handles about 20,000 phone calls per year, in addition to processing online orders, email, and live chats on various CRCNA websites.

In the interest of consistent style, branding, and quality presentation, MSS has supported CRC communications staff in creating guides for Brand Standards and Editorial Style.

During the past year, Ministry Support Services staff managed the transition to a new website for crcna.org, including all of the

Congregational Services ministries. By using a common platform, we are able to save money and share functionality across all of the sites.

b. *The Banner*

The Banner, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, currently prints and distributes more than 75,000 copies of its paper version. Website pageviews average more than 75,000 per month, and more than 6,000 people have signed up to receive the weekly *Banner* email. Our efforts on social media also help to ensure that *Banner* content is available to anyone in a variety of forms.

The Banner app is available for free download on iPhone and Android devices (thebanner.org/App); monthly, the app is receiving more than 7,500 pageviews.

We are most thankful for a huge show of support from *Banner* readers, as nearly 6,000 donors gave more than $460,000 for the annual appeal fundraiser in 2020.

c. Faith Alive and Libros Desafio

Although Synod 2013 approved the dissolution of the Faith Alive Christian Resources board and noted the necessary transition regarding critical functions of Faith Alive to MSS, MSS continues to sell and reprint resources that were already published. As those products grow older, and without new products to take their place, sales continue to decline. Sales are currently just under $1 million per year, compared to about $3 million in 2013. Similarly, Libros Desafio has ceased publishing new titles but continues to sell and reprint the backlist; sales are about $180,000 per year.

Christian Reformed congregations continue to receive a special "CRC discount" in comparison to what churches of other denominations pay. In addition, the CRC Digital Library allows anyone attending a Christian Reformed congregation free access to most Faith Alive titles online. And, when the pandemic hit, we provided CRCs with free, online access to *Dwell Digital* (other churches pay up to $500 per year to access these Sunday school curriculum resources). All of these initiatives are intended to help Christian Reformed churches make full use of these resources that they helped to publish.

d. The Network

Over the past decade the Network has become one of the CRC's most-visited websites where people involved in their local church can connect—with each other and with denominational staff—about the "nuts and bolts" of ministry. Ministry Support Services oversees the site with a half-time community manager. Launched in 2010, the Network (crcna.org/Network) celebrated its 10-year anniversary in February of 2020.

In the very next month the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and churches turned to The Network to support each other as they reinvented nearly every aspect of congregational life and ministry. As well, denominational ministries were able to support churches by posting resource lists, how-to articles, and blog posts about doing ministry during COVID. Traffic to the site averaged 116,000 pageviews per month during 2020—an increase of 33 percent over the prior year.

C. Financial matters

1. Introduction

   In order to assure that synod has the most up-to-date and accurate financial information, detailed financial data will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2021—Business and Financial Supplement,* which will be made available to the delegates at the time synod convenes. This supplement will include financial disclosure information, agency budgets for fiscal year 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). In addition, synod will be asked to approve a schedule for one or more above-ministry-share offerings for the ministries of the denomination, a quarterly offering for World Renew (in lieu of ministry-share support), and a listing of requests for accredited organization status for recommendation to the churches. Additional financial information and/or recommendations will also be included in the Council of Delegates Supplement report later in May.

2. Reimagining Ministry Shares update

   Since the adoption of the new ministry share system in June 2020, churches have received tools and information to educate them about the new system (e.g., a letter outlining three options for each congregation to consider making its pledge: last year +5%; $350 per member; or 10% of the congregational budget). Pledges were slow to come in, so classes were encouraged to remind churches of the deadline and need for pledges. At the time of the February meeting, staff noted significant changes in giving levels, both reductions and increases.

III. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Paul R. De Vries, chair of the Council of Delegates; Andy de Ruyter, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Colin P. Watson, Sr., executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Council of Delegates, Re-Frame Ministries, or Resonate Global Mission are discussed.

B. That synod grant all requests for privilege of the floor by the COD, agencies, educational institutions, standing committees, and study committees of synod contained within the reports to Synod 2021.

C. That synod approve all requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2021.

D. That synod by way of the ballot appoint persons previously appointed as interim COD classical delegates to a modified first term (I, E).

E. That synod thank COD members who are retiring from or concluding service on the Council of Delegates for their faithful service and significant contributions to the denomination (I, E).

F. That synod by way of the ballot elect new members to the COD from the nominations presented to a first term of three years and reappoint members to a second term (I, E).

G. That synod ratify the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2020, acting in lieu of Synod 2020 (II, A, 1).

H. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the COD for synodical deputies, alternate synodical deputies, and the World Renew Board of Delegates (II, A, 3).

I. That synod take note of the action of the COD to accept with gratitude the offers by Colin P. Watson, Sr., and John Bolt to delay retirement until June 30, 2022; and that synod take note of the CRCNA U.S. Corporation's authorization of the executive director "to appoint a deputy with responsibility for U.S. ministry operations . . . until at least June 30, 2022" (II, A, 8, b-c).

J. That synod take note of revisions made to the letters of call for commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word, available at crcna.org/Stated-Clerks (II, A, 12).

K. That synod approve the work of the COD with regard to the personal appeal submitted to Synod 2020 by D. Lowe and M. Szto (Queens CRC, Jamaica, N.Y.) regarding a decision of Classis Hudson (II, A, 14).

L. That synod approve the COD's interim appointment of Dexter W. Young to the Judicial Code Committee to fill out the term of Eun-Joo Gloria Dykstra (until June 30, 2021) and reappoint Dexter W. Young to a subsequent term of three years (II, A, 16, a).

M. That synod, by way of exception, extend the term of Aldon Kuiper, who was scheduled to conclude service in 2021, for one year (until July 1, 2022) on the Judicial Code Committee to fill the unexpected vacancy left by the passing of Henry Jonker (II, A, 16, a).

N. That synod express gratitude to Roberta Vriesma for her service to the Judicial Code Committee (II, A, 16, a).

O. That synod by way of the ballot elect two new members to the Judicial Code Committee, as presented, to a first term of three years; and that synod reappoint the members listed to a second term (II, A, 16, a-b).

P. That synod adopt the Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee report (Appendix A) and the following recommendations contained within the report in response to directives of Synod 2019 (II, A, 17, a):

1. That synod adopt the following recommendations dealing with training to be provided for CRCNA staff:

    a. That synod approve that training in restorative justice practices, interpersonal relationships, and others should be offered for CRCNA staff.

    b. That synod instruct that the online training related to discrimination and harassment be reviewed regularly (not less than every three years).

2. That synod take note of the following changes adopted by the COD with regard to the CRCNA employee handbook (in its respective versions for Canadian, U.S., and international staff).

    a. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

"Complaint Resource Persons" are designated individuals who can act as a neutral resource for anyone who is considering initiating a complaint, and who can explain the various options. They are not involved in the investigation; nor do they act as advocates for either party. Communications between a potential complainant and a "Complaint Resource Person" are confidential, and the decision on whether or not to use this resource is up to a complainant. "Complaint Resource Persons" are identified on the website at [to be determined].

b. Add the following subhead and paragraph to the employee handbook:

   Representation

   Throughout all of the steps of the complaint process, a complainant may choose to have another person accompany them as an advocate and/or for support and assistance.

c. Replace the current wording about "Unfounded allegations" with the following, to be added to the employee handbook:

   Unfounded allegations of harassment may cause both the accused person and the CRCNA significant damage. However, disciplinary measures will never apply to a complainant for bringing a complaint (*unless a complaint is brought with malicious intent and the evidence supporting this is compelling and undeniable*).

d. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   No one involved in the complaint process in good faith, including as a complainant, witness, adviser, representative, investigator, or decision maker, will be subject to any negative consequences for such involvement.

e. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   At any time during the investigation of a complaint the parties may, by mutual agreement, explore different options for resolution including mediation, restorative justice practices, or other alternate dispute-resolution methods [*Note:* These alternative options are not defined in the handbook. The various options and how to access them would need to be identified].

f. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   If necessary, a complainant may request reasonable support to ensure a safe working environment. Requests may include, but are not limited to, requesting an alternative reporting relationship during the investigation, or working in a different area/department during the investigation. Requests should be made to the director, the executive director, or the designee carrying out the investigation. However, the CRCNA reserves the right to reject requests depending on the nature of the incident(s) in question and the reasonableness of the requests being made.

g. Add the following paragraphs to the employee handbook:

   Investigations (as described below) will be carried out by a director, the executive director, or their designee. Investigations should not

be carried out by the direct supervisor of the parties involved in the dispute. The investigator should not be someone in a position to have any direct power or influence over the career progress of the parties involved, and must be at arm's length from the parties involved.

Depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an external investigator. The decision about whether to do so will be made by the executive director, with the same rights of appeal as exist in the Grievance Resolution process (below).

Any concerns about who conducts the investigation, including concerns about the identity of the investigator, whether they are internal or external, and any other fairness or bias concerns, may be raised by the complainant at any time before the investigation process begins.

h. Instruct that the complaint processes in the employee handbook be reviewed regularly (not less than every three years).

i. Approve the proposed process regarding what happens after an investigation is complete and add the following to the employee handbook:

   1) that the investigator shall make a written report of their findings (which could include options or recommendations)
   2) that the investigation report shall be submitted to the HR director and the executive director
   3) that the HR director or the executive director shall determine what, if any, discipline is forthcoming
   4) that the investigation report and any other evidence compiled by the investigator is placed in a sealed, confidential file, and that access to the file is restricted to the HR director or the executive director
   5) that only the outcome of the investigation shall be made available in written form in files that are available to the complainant and the accused

j. Urge that the definitions in the handbook policies be as broad as possible and that they address actions such as behavior that is belittling or demeaning.

3. That synod take note that the COD adopted changes to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

4. That synod approve of the restorative justice practices described in this report as an additional support for the claimant.

5. That synod approve the examination and evaluation of conflict of interest or bias in this report and approve the criteria and process suggested for the use of experts outside of CRCNA staff.

6. That synod approve the proposed purpose and composition of the Dignity Team as outlined.

7. That synod approve the placement of the Dignity Team as reporting to the director of Congregational Services.

8. That synod declare that this report and its recommendations fulfill the instructions of Synod 2019 regarding a review of the training and support for CRCNA staff and regarding conflicts of interest or bias (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 795-96) and dismiss the ad hoc committee.

Q. That synod take note of the additional updates provided within the COD report on addressing directives of Synod 2019 regarding the abuse of power (II, A, 17, b):

1. Policy on nondisclosure agreements
2. Abuse prevention resources for culturally diverse churches
3. Recordkeeping
4. Implementation and monitoring

R. That synod encourage classes and churches to make use of the *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan) resources, including visuals, conversation cards, and other tools to aid in engaging in the excitement and ownership of the ministry plan (II, B, 2).

S. That synod approve the evaluation reports presented by ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission with regard to the Global Mission calling area (II, B, 5; Appendix B).

T. That synod (1) take note of the ratification by the COD of three new ministry directors (Amanda Benckhuysen, Timothy L. Rietkerk, and Susan E. LaClear) and (2) express gratitude on behalf of the denomination to Bonnie Nicholas and David Koll in their retirements and to Sarah Roelofs as she fills a new role for Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (II, B, 6).

U. That synod take note of and receive the ReFrame Ministries Foundational document in Appendix C as information (II, B, 7).

V. That the next synod (2022) hear a brief report and presentation by Resonate on raising missionary support as a follow-up to decisions on missionary support approved by Synod 2014 (II, B, 8).

W. That synod take note of the following definition of *church planting* to be used in all CRCNA denominational contexts (II, B, 9):

> Planting churches is a missionary endeavor to form new Christian communities of faith-churches—from persons currently outside of existing established Christian communities for the purpose of discipling the new community in the ways of Jesus to be witnesses to the world in both word and deed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

X. That synod receive as information the condensed financial statements of the agencies and educational institutions (Appendix D).

Council of Delegates of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Paul R. De Vries, chair

Appendix A
Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee Report

I. Introduction

Synod 2019 accepted the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee and adopted these instructions, among others (*Acts of Synod 2019,* pp. 795-96):

> That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to review the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff, the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant, and mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints. A review should be informed by careful listening to persons who found the processes helpful and persons who did not.
>
> That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest.

At the July 2019 meeting of the COD's executive committee, this action step was recorded:

> The executive committee is assigning to two or more COD members and/ or others suitable for the task to address these instructions and work with the director of HR to do so for the first [re adequacy of training and support for CRCNA staff] and the director of Safe Church for the second [re potential conflicts of interest in safe church prodedures]. This team will also refine a mandate for the Guardian Committee [see section C, 3, k, 4, *Acts of Synod 2019,* p. 798]. The ED will bring updates to the Sept. Exec. Committee.

The ad hoc committee is composed of the following members:

- Maureen Beattie, HR, Canada
- Michelle De Bie, HR, United States
- Frank DeVries
- Violetta Diamond
- Sherry Fakkema
- Elsa Fennema, chair
- Bookie Gates
- Bonnie Nicholas, Safe Church Ministry director
- Kathy Vandergrift

II. Mandate and composition

A. Mandate

With the assistance of the United States and Canadian directors of Human Resources (HR), this working group will review the following:

- the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff,
- the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant
- mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints

In addition, with the assistance of the director of Safe Church Ministry, this working group will do the following:

– examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures, and
– evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest [and if a need is determined, develop a set of criteria for when to call in an outside expert and develop qualifications for such outside experts].

Finally, this working group will craft a mandate for the Guardian team requested by Synod 2019: "That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service" (Article 64).

B. Composition

No more than two COD members with experience in addressing abuse of power situations.

At least two CRC members (not part of the COD) with experience in addressing abuse of power situations.

The United States and Canadian directors of HR and the director of Safe Church shall be ex officio members for the aspect of the mandate explained above.

C. Background: Recommendations on creating a culture to prevent abuse of power (adopted by Synod 2019—*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 798)

1) That synod affirm the following as core values for the culture within the CRC:
   – mutual respect for every person as created by God and equally responsible to respond to God's call to use their gifts for God's mission in the world, including the ongoing work of building God's church
   – an understanding of servant leadership that emphasizes mutual submission as a corrective to the hierarchical tendencies within our culture
   – mutual accountability through checks and balances built into governing structures

2) That synod affirm the importance of care in the use of language within church assemblies, with attention to the impact of language that harms the ability of others to fully exercise their gifts and calling.

3) That synod refer this report to the Classis Renewal Advisory Team to consider how the role of regional pastors and church visitors might be strengthened to foster a respectful culture and support churches with early assistance in situations that may give rise to concerns about abuse of power.

4) That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service. Consideration should be guided by the following features, which draw on good practices in other sectors of society for preventing and responding to all forms of abuse of power:
   – The mandate would include the use of a range of measures designed to allow early intervention in response to complaints, including mediation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice tools.
   – The mandate would include concerns about abuse of power that may cross lines between the denomination, classes, and individual churches. The team might serve an "ombudsperson" role within the internal human resources system and for cases that cross jurisdictions, without violating CRC governance of the local church by the local council.
   – Position holders outside the "chain of command" within the established organizational and management structure would help to foster confidence because they are "independent" but accountable through reporting

to the Council of Delegates and through their ability to bring issues to the attention of the Council of Delegates if needed.
  - The role of the team would be reviewed after three years for effectiveness, as part of the follow-up to this report.

D. The ad hoc committee's work

The ad hoc committee, finally constituted and diverse, met together for the first time in June 2020, acknowledging that our God whom we serve is a compassionate and caring God. God is not to be feared or avoided. God is in fact "God with us." Knowing that, we worked with compassion, love, and justice for those affected by this mandate. We began by reviewing our mandate and the handbooks for Canadian staff, United States staff, and international staff of the CRCNA. Reading these handbooks, we realized where changes needed to be made and that other issues needed to be addressed. We also noted that we had parallel tracks—one for Human Resources and one for Safe Church Ministry.

This report will discuss the following:

- Examinations of training for CRCNA staff
- Review of the handbooks for CRCNA staff
- Review of the CRCNA's discrimination and harassment policy
- Restorative justice practices
- Conflict of interest or bias
- Dignity and respect

III. Examination of training for CRCNA staff

With the assistance of the United States and Canadian directors of HR, the committee was able to review and take online training related to discrimination and harassment. The training has been in existence for about three years and is in the process of revision. Human Resources requires all staff to participate in the online training annually. One module is general for all staff, and a second is specific to supervisory staff. We reviewed the training and believe it does an adequate job of covering the necessary topics; however, we noted that the focus is on compliance and limiting legal risks to the organization. The training is an "off the shelf" product, and thus we recognize its limitations.

A. The task force has asked, and Human Resources has readily agreed, that a preface will be sent to all staff stating that our explicit purpose in providing this training goes beyond merely legal aspects. The statement will explain our heartfelt desire as Christians to provide a safe environment for all staff, as well as to provide appropriate mechanisms to address concerns if/when they do arise.

B. We also learned that other training is required, and we recommend that training in restorative justice practices, interpersonal relationships, and other areas should be offered—especially to staff in managerial positions.

Recommendation: That synod approve that training in restorative justice practices, interpersonal relationships, and other areas should be offered for CRCNA staff.

C. We agreed that training should be reviewed regularly (not less than every three years).

Recommendation: That synod instruct the ED to regularly review the online training related to discrimination and harassment (not less than every three years).

IV. Review of Handbooks for CRCNA staff

A. Introduction

The committee spent time discussing how an employee may bring a complaint and if there is protection from reprisal for the complainant. We agreed that we are looking to dismantle a culture that has tended to press and victimize the victim. Due to our present culture, will we see more complaints going forward? Are we having our eyes opened that we should be ready to preserve a person rather than a culture? One of our goals is to come out of this saying that a person who comes bringing a complaint is doing something good for the church. The person is pointing out areas where the church needs to improve.

With such questions before us, the committee reviewed the CRCNA staff handbooks and discussed the inadequacy of provisions for support to a complainant. We noted improvements to be made, and two members of the committee agreed to work on this, using the Canadian handbook as a guide because Canadian law states that this area needs to contain very specific language.

The committee reviewed the CRCNA handbooks for U.S, Canadian, and international staff, paying specific attention to the portions of these polices relating to discrimination and harassment complaint processes. Committee discussion was also informed by more detailed information from two witnesses who had come forward earlier to the Abuse of Power committee.

Common patterns in their experiences were as follows:

a. Lack of clarity about process and support when the witnesses disclosed what happened to them
b. The persons involved in the investigative process were part of the witnesses' daily working relationships, making it difficult to carry out their work.
c. The defendant spoke to them about issues and process in an intimidating way while the investigation was ongoing.
d. Bias because of position and/or perceived bias in decision making
e. The witnesses were made to feel disloyal to the CRC because they filed a complaint.
f. Failure to restore healthy workplace culture through the process

Both persons left employment with the CRCNA because of workplace culture, in spite of favorable performance reviews, strategically significant roles, and satisfaction with the substantive ministry work they were doing.

Gaps in record-keeping prevented the possibility of seeking input from others with a positive experience with this system, and the context of the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to hear from a broader group. At the same time, there was a strong convergence among the factors identified for

attention during the committee's initial review of policy documents and the evidence gathered from these witnesses' experiences. As a result, the committee decided to propose improvements now to address known issues and to suggest regular evaluations with input from users of the system.

After its review and discussion, the committee identified specific areas in the policies where changes could either strengthen the support for a complainant, or assist in avoiding potential conflicts of interest in dealing with complaints. The recommended modifications to the policies and the rationale for those modifications are set out below.

As noted earlier, the committee focused its review on the wording in the handbook for Canadian staff because of a requirement for specific language by Canadian law. The recommended changes to the wording in the Canadian handbook are set out below, and section IV, E below (Review of Appendix I from Canadian handbook) includes those changes. The committee recommends that the same basic changes be made to the handbooks for U.S. and international staff.

The committee also identified other aspects of the polices which, in its view, ought to be modified. Although these aspects were outside of its specific mandate, the committee sees them as potential problems that should be addressed, some of them on an ongoing basis. These aspects are also identified below.

B. Adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant

The committee had concerns about some of the wording in the handbook and its weakness in supporting a person who might want to make a complaint. Outlined below are the various areas we considered, along with a recommendation to strengthen support in each area.

1. Resource/Adviser

   People contemplating bringing a complaint could benefit by having access to expert advice and information about the CRCNA's policy and procedures, as well as on harassment and discrimination in general.[1] Ideally, this adviser is

   – a neutral expert, who can explain the various options.
   – someone who should be separate from the person designated to receive and investigate complaints.
   – someone who should not act as an advocate for either party.
   – someone who is not liable to pressure from within the organization.[2]

[1] The handbook for U.S. staff (pp. 15, 16) refers to "Safe Coordinators," who are not defined by position or role, but seem to be identified as a resource. (There is no such reference in the handbook for Canadian staff).

[2] Possible options for complaint resource persons in Canada include the following:

1. Joint Health and Safety Committee members (to receive additional training)
2. Suggestions regarding persons used as Safe Coordinators in U.S.
3. Canada Corporation board member
4. Other official person (with additional training) designated as an "ombudsperson"

Safe Church Ministry staff

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **"Complaint Resource Persons" are designated individuals who can act as a neutral resource for anyone considering initiating a complaint, and who can explain the various options. They are not involved in the investigation; nor do they act as advocates for either party. Communications between a potential complainant and a "Complaint Resource Person" are confidential, and the decision on whether or not to use this resource is up to a complainant. "Complaint Resource Persons" are identified on the website at [to be determined].**

2. Advocate/Support Person

   It is not clear from the handbooks whether complainants can have an advocate or support person with them to support them in navigating the complaint process. We advise that people involved in any internal complaint/resolution process should be allowed to have someone accompany them and represent them if they wish.[3]

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **<u>Representation</u>**
> **Throughout all of the steps of the complaint process, a complainant may choose to have another person accompany them as an advocate and/or for support and assistance.**

3. "Disciplinary measures"

   Under "Disciplinary measures" in the handbooks, the same weight/emphasis is given to disciplinary measures for both "discrimination" and for "unfounded allegations" (a brief paragraph for each). This does not support legitimate complaints and may, in fact, be perceived as discouraging persons from pursuing them.

Note: **The COD in October 2020 adopted the following revision to the employee handbook – replace the current wording about "unfounded allegations" with the following:**

> **Unfounded allegations of harassment may cause both the accused person and the CRCNA significant damage. However, disciplinary measures will never apply to a complainant for bringing a complaint (unless a complaint is brought with malicious intent and the evidence supporting this is compelling and undeniable).**

4. No penalties for being involved in complaint

   It should be clearly stated that there are to be no reprisals for being involved in a complaint in any part of the process (as complainant, witness, adviser, representative, investigator, decision maker, etc.)

[3] This should not be the Complaint Resource Person, who is a neutral expert to assist someone considering whether to bring a complaint, and who should not act as an advocate for either party.

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **No one involved in the complaint process in good faith, including as a complainant, witness, adviser, representative, investigator, or decision maker, will be subject to any negative consequences for such involvement.**

5. Alternate dispute resolution possibility

   The handbooks do not refer to the possibility of mediation or any other dispute-resolution mechanism (i.e., other restorative processes) to address the complaint. Particularly in circumstances where parties will continue to work together after a complaint is addressed, reference to these types of options is strongly advised.

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **At any time during the investigation of a complaint the parties may, by mutual agreement, explore different options for resolution, including mediation, restorative justice practices, or other alternate dispute-resolution methods. [*Note:* These alternative options are not defined in the handbook. The various options and how to access them would need to be identified.]**

6. Safeguarding the environment during the investigation

   We suggest that, during a complaint process, alternate working arrangements should be made available if advisable and possible. This is to provide additional support and a safe work environment for a complainant while an investigation is ongoing. Options may include implementing an alternate reporting relationship, or working in a different area/department during that time. The goal is to ensure, to the extent possible, that the complainant does not incur extra stress or feel penalized for making a complaint.

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **If necessary, a complainant may request reasonable support to ensure a safe working environment. Requests may include, but are not limited to, requesting an alternative reporting relationship during the investigation, or working in a different area/department during the investigation. Requests should be made to the director, the executive director, or the designee carrying out the investigation. However, the CRCNA reserves the right to reject requests depending on the nature of the incident(s) in question and the reasonableness of the requests being made.**

C. Mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints

The terms *conflict of interest* and *bias* are often used interchangeably. Procedural fairness requires that decision makers are impartial (that there is no bias or reasonable apprehension of bias). Bias occurs where a person has an actual interest in one result or favors one party over another (actual bias), or

might objectively appear to favor one result or party over another (apparent bias).

The employee handbooks identify who carries out investigations.[4] They prohibit the direct supervisor of the parties from being involved. The handbooks also state that the CRCNA reserves the right to vary the process, stating that "depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an outside Investigator."

Some best practices:

- The investigator should not be anyone seen as "taking sides."
- The investigator should not be someone in position to have any direct power or influence over the career progress of either party.
- In addition, the investigation must be impartial, timely, fair and thorough, and the investigator must be, at the very least, at arm's length from the parties involved. The latter is crucial to avoid any real or perceived bias or favoritism, as allegations of such a nature can undermine and erode confidence in the findings of what may otherwise be a valid and thorough investigation.

In deciding whether an external investigator is used, the factors to consider could include the nature of the complaint, whether potential legal issues are involved, whether there are patterns of recurring issues, etc.

Note: **The COD adopted the following in October 2020 to be added to the employee handbook:**

> **Investigations (as described below) will be carried out by a director, the executive director, or their designee. Investigations should not be carried out by the direct supervisor of the parties involved in the dispute. The investigator should not be someone in a position to have any direct power or influence over the career progress of the parties involved, and must be at arm's length from the parties involved.**
>
> **Depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an external investigator. The decision about whether to do so will be made by the executive director, with the same rights of appeal as exist in the Grievance Resolution process (below).**
>
> **Any concerns about who conducts the investigation, including concerns about the identity of the investigator, whether they are internal or external, and any other fairness or bias concerns, may be raised by the complainant at any time before the investigation process begins.**

[4] Canadian handbook, p. 13: director, executive director, or designee; U.S. handbook, p. 16: director of HR (unless directly involved). The policies should clearly identify who decides whether the investigator is internal or external, and should also identify that this decision can be challenged.

D. Additional comments

In reviewing the policies in the handbooks, the committee noted additional changes that should be made. Although these changes do not relate directly to support for a complainant or concerns about bias, they would assist in providing clarity to all involved in the complaint process.

1. The complaint processes in the handbooks should be regularly reviewed.

   The handbooks vary in terms of when the policies are reviewed,[5] and it is unclear when/if these reviews take place and how comprehensive any such review is. Since culture, definitions, personnel, and concerns are regularly evolving, it is imperative that policies be current and relevant to be progressive in dealing with matters.

   In addition we note the following:

   a. The regular review of the policies should include receiving input from those who have been involved in the complaint process.

   b. Revisions should be informed by reviewing aggregate information about the use of the complaint process. This could include a summary of the number and type of complaints received, along with information, where relevant, about how the complaint was handled and what lessons have been learned. Any confidential information, including personal identifying information, should not be included.

   Recommendation: That synod instruct the ED to regularly review (not less than every three years) the complaint processes in the employee handbook.

2. The process regarding what happens after an investigation is complete ought to be made clear (including clarifying who receives a copy, who decides on discipline, etc.).

   The details about what happens once an investigation is complete are not clearly identified in the policies. Parties involved in a complaint should know the specifics of the process. For example, the policies should include the following types of information (to be adjusted depending on the actual steps in the process):

   a. that the investigator shall make a written report of their findings (which could include options or recommendations)
   b. that the investigation report shall be submitted to the HR director and the executive director
   c. that the HR director or the executive director shall determine what, if any, discipline is forthcoming
   d. that the investigation report and any other evidence compiled by the investigator shall be placed in a sealed, confidential file, and that access to the file is restricted to the HR director or the executive director
   e. that only the outcome of the investigation shall be made available in written form in files that are available to the complainant and the accused

[5] The policies in the Canadian and international handbooks call for an annual review. There is no specified review of the policy in the U.S. handbook. A detailed review of the policies should be conducted periodically to ensure the policies reflect current best practices and are relevant and supportive to any complainants.

Recommendation: That synod approve the proposed process regarding what happens after an investigation is complete, and adopt the following to be added to the employee handbook:

a. that the investigator shall make a written report of their findings (which could include options or recommendations)

b. that the investigation report shall be submitted to the HR director and the executive director

c. that the HR director or the executive director shall determine what, if any, discipline is forthcoming

d. that the investigation report and any other evidence compiled by the investigator shall be placed in a sealed, confidential file, and that access to the file is restricted to the HR director or the executive director

e. that only the outcome of the investigation shall be made available in written form in files that are available to the complainant and the accused

3. The definitions in the polices should be as broad as possible, and it should be clear that they address actions such as behavior that is belittling or demeaning.

   The definitions of *discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual solicitation,* and *workplace harassment* found in the policies vary. Some of them are based on applicable legislation, whereas other definitions are fairly broad and include "catch-all" phrases.

   The CRCNA ought to be proactive in identifying and addressing discrimination or harassment of any sort. In addition to providing required legislated definitions of these terms, the policies should identify particular actions and behaviors that could fall within those definitions.[6]

   Recommendation: That synod urge that the definitions in the policies be as broad as possible and that they address actions such as behavior that is belittling or demeaning.

E. Review of Appendix I from Canadian handbook

The following text from the handbook for Canadian staff of the CRCNA incorporates the recommended changes described in section D above (~~strikethrough~~ indicates deletions; *italics* indicates additions).

> The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is committed to providing a work environment that ensures every employee is treated with dignity and respect and afforded equitable treatment.
>
> The CRCNA will not tolerate conduct that violates employees' dignity and respect. The CRCNA also strives to create an equitable work environment.
>
> All employees are responsible for encouraging an atmosphere of mutual respect and for preventing and discouraging harassment and abuse from taking place.

[6] For example, the U.S. handbook specifically identifies and defines "microaggressions" as being covered by the policies. See also the Mennonite Church of Canada's Policy against Racial, Sexual, and Other Harassment, which is more detailed in some areas but less so in others.

Human Rights Code Protections

Discrimination

The Human Rights Code provides that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, or disability.

The CRCNA is a Christian organization primarily engaged in serving the interests of Christians who wish to carry out their Christian ministry. As such, the right to equal treatment without discrimination is limited only to the extent that discrimination in employment is reasonable and bona fide because of the nature of employment with the CRCNA.

Harassment

The right to equal treatment in employment includes the right to be free from harassment in the workplace by the employer or agent of the employer or by another employee because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, or disability.

Harassment in this context is defined as engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

Such harassment includes but is not limited to threats, intimidation, displays of racism, sexism, unnecessary physical contact, suggestive remarks or gestures, offensive pictures or jokes. Undirected harassment can also occur. This is the display of offensive materials or graffiti and the use of language including the types of remarks referred to above, but with no specific person being the target of the materials or the comments.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment may be one or a series of incidents involving unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

As defined by Canadian law, "sexual harassment" means any unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours or any other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that the perpetrator knows or ought to know is unwelcome. Sexual harassment occurs when (1) submission to such advances, requests, or conduct is made either implicitly or explicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; (2) submission to or rejection of such advances, requests, or conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting the individual; or (3) such advances, requests, or conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact or behaviour of a sexual or gender-specific nature. Some examples of sexual harassment include unwelcome sexual flirtation, touching another employee in an offensive manner, and implicit or explicit requests for sexual acts or favours. Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual or social interest in another employee after being told that the interest is unwelcome, graphic, or suggestive; comments about an individual's dress or body; verbal comments of a sexual nature; or sexually degrading words to describe an individual.

By its very nature sexual harassment is difficult to precisely define. It is therefore important to remember that sexual harassment may occur in very subtle ways. Simple gestures or body language may amount to sexual harassment if it is of a sexual nature.

Sexual Solicitation
Sexual solicitation is any verbal, written, or implied proposition or advance made by a person in a position to confer, grant, or deny a benefit or advancement to another person where the person in a position to confer, grant, or deny a benefit or advancement knows or ought reasonably to know that it is unwelcome.

Reprisal, as it relates to sexual solicitation, means any negative action or the threat of any negative action by a person in a position to confer, grant, or deny a benefit for the rejection of a sexual solicitation.

Occupational Health and Safety Act Protections
Workplace Harassment
In addition to the right to be free from harassment under the Human Rights Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Act defines workplace harassment as engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

Workplace harassment may include but is not limited to threats, intimidation, displays of anger, yelling, shunning, unnecessary physical contact, suggestive remarks or gestures, offensive pictures or jokes. Undirected workplace harassment can also occur. This is the display of offensive materials or graffiti and the use of language including the types of remarks referred to above, but with no specific person being the target of the materials or the comments.

Workplace harassment also includes bullying. Bullying is repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individuals that involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile work environment.

Workplace harassment does not include the exercise of normal managerial functions such as the giving of workplace direction, constructive criticism, corrective actions, or discipline in appropriate cases.

Application of This Policy
This policy applies to all those working for the CRCNA, including employees, volunteers, board members, and visitors. The CRCNA will not tolerate discrimination or harassment whether engaged in by fellow employees, volunteers, board members, or visitors of the CRCNA. The CRCNA will not tolerate sexual solicitation as defined under the Human Rights Code.

"Complaint Resource Persons" are designated individuals who can act as a neutral resource for anyone who is considering initiating a complaint, and who can explain the various options. They are not involved in the investigation, nor do they act as advocates for either party. Communications between a potential complainant and a "Complaint Resource Person" are confidential, and the decision on whether or not to use this resource is up to a complainant. "Complaint Resource Persons" are identified on the website at [to be determined].

Complaint Process
The complaint process may be initiated in any of the following circumstances:
- If you believe you have been discriminated against or harassed or are the object of an unwelcomed sexual solicitation.
- If you believe you have witnessed discrimination, harassment, or sexual solicitation.
- If CRCNA management believes that discrimination or harassment has taken place.

In any of these circumstances, the complaint process may be initiated by resolving the situation informally or through the formal procedure.

At any time during the investigation of a complaint the parties may, by mutual agreement, explore different options for resolution, including mediation, restorative justice practices, or other alternate dispute resolution methods. [Note: These alternative options are not defined in the handbook. The various options and how to access them would need to be identified.]

No one involved in the complaint process in good faith, including as a complainant, witness, investigator, or decision maker, will be subject to any negative consequences for such involvement.

Representation
Throughout all of the steps of the complaint process, a complainant may choose to have another person accompany them as an advocate and/or for support and assistance.

***Note:* You may choose not to exercise the Informal Procedure if you are not comfortable with it.**

Informal Procedure
The informal procedure may be commenced in one of two ways:
– Confront the individual personally or in writing, pointing out the unwelcome behaviour and requesting that it stop.
– Discuss the situation with the individual's supervisor or director, or discuss the situation with your supervisor or director.

If the individual is not confronted in writing or if the situation is discussed with a supervisor or director, it is always advisable to keep records of the discussions and to confirm the discussion in writing (email is preferable).

If you are asked by a coworker to stop a behaviour which they consider unwelcomed, you should assess your behaviour carefully. Even if you did not intend to offend, your behavior has been perceived that way, and you should change your conduct. An apology to the offended person may also be appropriate. Failure to change your conduct may expose you to investigation and disciplinary measures. If you believe the concerns of your coworker are unfounded or made in bad faith, you should report this to your supervisor or director, who will make a record of your report. This person may assist in analyzing your conduct. You should keep a record of your recollection of any incidents that may have been taken as offensive.

Formal Procedure
The formal procedure is commenced by making a written complaint. The written complaint must be made using the approved incident form and delivered to the director of Human Resources and to the individual's supervisor or director, or delivered to your supervisor or director. Incidents involving a director may be reported to the executive director. The complaint should include the following:

– the approximate date and time of each incident reported
– the name of the person or persons involved in each incident
– the name of any person or persons who witnessed each incident
– the steps that have already been taken regarding the complaint
– a full description of what occurred in each incident

Written complaints must contain a statement that the complaint and/or details of the complaint may be provided to the person complained about. Written complaints must also contain a statement that the information contained in the complaint is true and complete.

Investigator
Investigations (as described below) will be carried out by a director, the executive director, or their designee. Investigations should not be carried out by the direct supervisor of the parties involved in the dispute. The investigator should not be someone in a position to have any direct power or influence over the career progress of the parties involved, and must be at arm's length from the parties involved.

Depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an external investigator. The decision about whether to do so will be made by the executive director, with the same rights of appeal as exist in the Grievance Resolution process (below).

Any concerns about who conducts the investigation, including concerns about the identity of the investigator, whether they are internal or external, and any other fairness

or bias concerns, may be raised by the complainant at any time before the investigation process begins.

Investigation
Investigations will be commenced if the formal procedure is invoked or if discrimination, harassment, or sexual solicitation comes to the attention of the CRCNA. Investigations will generally follow the process outlined below. However, the CRCNA reserves the right to vary the following procedure depending on the nature of the incident(s) in question.

~~Investigations will be carried out by a director, the executive director, or their designate. Investigations should not be carried out by the direct supervisor of the parties involved in the dispute. Depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an external investigator.~~
Investigations will generally include the following:

- informing the accused individual of the complaint
- interviewing the person making the complaint, any person involved in the incident, and any witnesses named (generally, the person[s] complained about will be given an opportunity to understand the nature of the complaint prior to being interviewed)
- interviewing any other person who may have knowledge of the incident(s) complained about or any other similar incident(s)
- detailed written, signed statements from persons being interviewed. Written statements shall be signed and include a statement that the information contained in the statement is true and complete.
- a written report outlining the investigator's conclusions. Written reports outlining the investigator's conclusions will be kept by Human Resources for a period of no less than seven years.

Management personnel must cooperate with each other in order to facilitate an investigation.

If necessary, a complainant may request reasonable support to ensure a safe working environment. Requests may include, but are not limited to, requesting an alternative reporting relationship during the investigation, or working in a different area/department during the investigation. Requests should be made to the director, the executive director, or the designee carrying out the investigation. However, the CRCNA reserves the right to reject requests depending on the nature of the incident(s) in question and the reasonableness of the requests being made.

Disciplinary Measures
If it is determined by the CRCNA that any employee has been involved in discrimination against another employee, harassment of another employee, or sexual solicitation of another employee, immediate disciplinary action will be taken. Such disciplinary action will involve, at a minimum, a formal warning but **may result in immediate dismissal without further notice**.

Unfounded allegations of harassment may cause both the accused person and the CRCNA significant damage. However, disciplinary measures will never apply to a complainant for bringing a complaint (unless a complaint is brought with malicious intent and the evidence supporting this is compelling and undeniable).

Confidentiality
All complaints, reports, or evidence regarding harassment or sexual solicitation will be kept in strict confidence, except as follows:

- Disclosure of the information may be necessary to investigate the allegations.
- Disclosure of the information may be necessary to respond to any legal or administrative proceedings arising out of or relating to the report.
- Disclosure of the information may be necessary to prosecute any legal or administrative proceedings arising out of or relating to the report.
- Disclosure of the information may be required by operation of the law.

Policy Review
The CRCNA will review this policy on an annual basis.

Training/Orientation
All new employees will receive training and orientation with respect to this Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

V. Restorative Justice Practices

A. Introduction

Realizing that complainants and many others affected by or involved in abuse of power experience broken relationships, we looked for possible ways in which these relationships might be healed. One way can be to build community and heal relationships through restorative justice practices. The restorative justice movement began with Mennonite Christians in search of a better response to injustice. They started with a biblical understanding of justice and shalom, centered in the need for accountability, reconciliation, and peace. It is in that desire to pursue shalom in the community that we encourage the people involved to seek restoration.

B. Biblical foundation

The Old Testament Jewish law that set up the system of forgiveness and of restoring property, goods, and slaves back to their original households was an imperfect way of making the law more forgiving. And still today the law is highly imperfect. It can never make broken persons whole again, and it can never punish enough to suit the offended. Resolving wrongs and holding people responsible for actions, however, are essential parts of living in community.

Jesus takes the idea of grace and transforms it when he introduces a different relationship with God. He offers a relationship of love and grace as he teaches in parables and through healings. He offers a different way of living, one of forgiveness, of settling disputes within the church community.

Looking at the healings described in the Gospels can help us see how Jesus is teaching restoration. After all, healing leprosy is most restorative to the patient and his family, who can now live together again as a family and in community. Healing diseases and physical disabilities results in restoration back into the community, along with the dignity of supporting oneself and no longer being the brunt of ostracization and ridicule.

Galatians 5 teaches what it means to live in love and not by the confines of the law. We need to recognize how profound this treaching is because Paul, who wrote Galatians, was highly educated in the Jewish law. He had held it in high regard, and his behavior before conversion was to exact retribution on every Christian he could find to stamp out the new teachings of the Christian community. But Jesus stops him, literally in his tracks, and then restores Paul to the community of Christians. Paul understood the Jewish laws so well that, as he wrote Galatians, he could present the arguments for what restricts us and what frees us. The letter to the Galatians is one of Paul's best arguments for living differently after receiving Christ. What's more, Paul concludes with the gifts of the Spirit, explaining who we are called to be out of thankfulness to God for restoring us to himself through God's gifts, not because we deserve it but because God offers grace.

Grace is the greatest offer of restoration we will ever receive. Grace includes saying "I'm sorry for my part in a dispute that got out of hand." Grace includes allowing wrongs to be set right on an even scale again. Grace includes my offering forgiveness that I don't want to offer at all. Restorative justice involves the working out of grace and forgiveness, supporting the wronged person and holding the wrongdoer responsible but also letting God decide how this process will affect each person's life and relationships.

C. Need

We live in a time of great division. Many of our classes, churches, and even families are struggling with conflict that can come when people disagree on matters of great importance to them. Too often such disagreements can lead to hurtful words, harmful actions, and ultimately broken trust and relationships.

D. Goals

Synod 2018 encouraged the Christian Reformed Church in North America to work on the process of reconciliation. Restorative justice practices can transform division so that it can be healing and fruitful instead of destructive. Restorative justice practices are habits of a community that seek to understand each person's experience, to respect and welcome differences, and to view conflict as inevitable and as an opportunity for transformation and strengthened relationships. Restorative justice practices can lead to reconciliation. They point to a way of life that implements how God in Jesus Christ continues to restore humanity to its original intent—love God above all, and one's neighbor as oneself.

Restorative justice practices are about healthy human relationships. They connect with who we are as human beings created in the image of God. And the Creator, Redeemer, and Advocate/Comforter are in perfect relationship as the divine Trinity.

Restorative justice practices focus on personal accountability, community involvement, and resolution (shalom). Restorative justice sees human relationships as its starting point. The restorative practice approach helps resolve conflicts and reduce tensions to nurture healthy relationships that are basic to life and ministry. Just as we believe that Christ saves us from sin, so we believe that Christ restores relational brokenness that separates people. This process renews the experience of God-given shalom while maintaining the dignity and worth of each person.

E. Process

Restorative justice practices begin by asking who has been most affected by the harm done, who is the harm-doer, and what must be done to resolve the impact of the harm to all parties concerned—victims, offenders, and the community. Repairing damage in order to restore relationships is neither quick nor easy. Restorative justice is about rebuilding broken relationships.

Restorative practices are not limited to formal processes, such as restorative conferences or family group conferences, but range from informal to formal. On a restorative practices continuum the informal practices include effective statements that communicate people's feelings, as well as effective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others. Impromptu restorative conferences, groups, and circles are somewhat

more structured but do not require the elaborate preparation needed for formal conferences.

A word of caution is also necessary. Restorative justice practices could be spaces in which revictimization could happen, and every situation of conflict is different. We should make every effort to create safe and proactive restorative systems within our congregations, classes, and denomination. This would entail employing restorative justice practices organically and within our policies.

F. Anticipated results

The results of restorative conferences, groups, and circles can truly be transformative. Restorative justice practices, if fully embraced, will resolve conflicts more readily and in a more grace-filled manner than using some other techniques. Circles do require hard work and a commitment to be honest and to express painful feelings and experiences. There is no short-cut to avoid the commitment and effort required to work through difficult issues.

G. Resources

justice.crcna.org/restorative-justice-resources
iirp.edu/restorative-practices/what-is-restorative-practices
Eric Kas <ekas@crcna.org>
Restorative justice in Canada: rjlillooet.ca/documents/restjust.pdf
History on the Church Council on Justice and Corrections: ccjc.ca/about/history/
Restorative justice resources: ccjc.ca/restorative-justice-resources/
PDF from Canadian government about restorative justice: csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/092/fsrjjr-1-eng.pdf
General restorative justice blog (Howard Zehr): emu.edu/now/restorative-justice/
IIRP Graduate School, Defining Restorative, Section 4.3

VI. Conflict of interest or bias

With the assistance of the director of Safe Church Ministry, this working group will do the following:

- examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures
- evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest [and if a need is determined, develop a set of criteria for when to call in an outside expert and develop qualifications for such outside experts].

A. Introduction

As noted earlier in this report, two claimants told their stories to the Abuse of Power committee (see section IV, A). There was bias present when their cases were investigated. The people involved in the investigative process were the same people, church leaders, who were involved with them in the workplace. They were intimidated by the accused and perceived as causing harm to the Christian Reformed Church. The need for outside sources to investigate and handle these cases was evident to this committee.

B. Potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures

We have found it helpful to use the term *bias* rather than *conflict of interest*. Hopefully there is common interest in maintaining a healthy church culture where power is never abused but used in ways that help everyone flourish. However, biases and alliances come into play in the work of safe church ministry. For example, when complaints come up against church or ministry leaders, there is a strong tendency to uphold the persons in leadership positions. These people are given our affirmation and support by virtue of their position. Respect and trust are assumed by their credentials, by ordination status, or by a recognized leadership role in the church. In addition, each church as an institution also possesses an assumed trust and respect.

When someone comes with a complaint against a church leader, they are often perceived as working against the church, hurting the reputation of the leader as well as the community. The person bringing a complaint may feel powerless in coming forward against a church leader and a well-respected institution. It's easy for them to be perceived as the "troublemaker" or the one causing harm. They may fear retribution. Many who have suffered abuse within a church context have expressed that the harm they experienced in the process of bringing a complaint forward was far worse than the original harm of the abuse itself. Many choose instead to walk away from their church, or even from their faith, rather than to enter a process that will cause further harm. This should not be so. Instead, it is important for churches to foster a culture that encourages claimants to come forward when power is misused. The church needs to listen, to pay attention to these voices. A claimant is an asset to a church, offering a gift, the opportunity to become better as we learn to respond appropriately. Those with the courage to come forward with a complaint can teach us how to live into our calling to be light in this world and to share the good news of God's love with people who suffer. Gratitude is the appropriate response to those who come forward with a complaint about abuse of power.

Safe Church consults with individuals and churches in many different kinds of situations of abuse. Of course, criminal and legal situations, such as assault, domestic violence, or child abuse are best handled by the proper authorities. There may be a role for the church in walking alongside during such times, but that is not what we are addressing here. Many situations involving abuse of power cannot be easily identified as physical or sexual abuse, and yet the harm done in either case is real. Emotional abuse is even more difficult to define because a particular behavior may receive different interpretations from and have completely different impacts on different people. There is great value in using a restorative framework for resolving many such less-well-defined situations of abuse of power and conflict. A restorative framework engages the claimant, the one accused, and persons in the church community who have been affected, giving voice to all parties.

For allegations of physical or sexual abuse that involve a church leader, Safe Church offers the Advisory Panel Process. A flow chart of the Advisory Panel Process is available at network.crcna.org/safe-church/app-advisory-panel-process-flow-chart. The advantages of this process include bringing an allegation into a more neutral place, to a panel of trained safe church team members who understand abuse dynamics and impacts and who have no prior association to those directly involved in the allegation. This process

avoids bias. Many have affirmed the value of this process, noting that they felt that their allegation was heard and taken seriously. Though the process is designed to avoid bias and make it easier to bring an allegation forward, it can break down when the report goes to the church council, where bias may exist. The decision may be appealed to classis and also to synod, and yet even in those places there may be perceived bias.

In the years 2016 -2019 three situations moved forward to an Advisory Panel Process. Other situations fit within the process guidelines, but the process did not go forward for various reasons. One of the reasons expressed in several of these situations was that the claimant didn't believe the process could be fair in the contexts of council, classis, and synod. Some of these situations were handled in other ways. In other situations, claimants simply walked away from their church, the CRC, or even their faith. Records about what happened in those situations are incomplete. Work is being done to establish a system and policies of record keeping that can alleviate this problem. It is intended that the new record-keeping strategy will be developed by the proposed Dignity Team upon appointment.

The CRC is therefore in an exceedingly vulnerable position. We have an institutional responsibility to address harm that is caused by our own church leaders in our own church communities. To neglect this is to ignore our moral responsibility. Moreover, it is dangerous to place ourselves in this risky position at a time when society is holding institutions more accountable than ever before. We've seen what can happen when long-hidden allegations become public, with devastating effects for institutions involved in neglecting their duty to respond.

C. The need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest

There may be times, especially in situations of high conflict, where the current processes and systems available are not sufficient to ensure that a fair process can be provided to someone bringing a complaint against an ordained church leader. In these situations the assistance of an outside organization, with expertise that is not available internally within the CRC, may be able to bring a measure of resolution that would not otherwise be possible.

The decision to bring in outside assistance is not an easy one; nor does it come without cost. Such situations cannot be anticipated. It is our hope that, given our commitment in this area, funds could be made available for this purpose, as when other unplanned expenses arise. We offer the following considerations toward determining when undue bias would prevent a fair process from taking place:

1. Criteria for when to refer to an outside organization

    a. Direct lines of position or supervision significantly increase the risk of bias toward the claimant or the accused.

    b. Ongoing interpersonal relationships prevent those in a decision-making capacity from being objective. This includes family associations.

    c. When there is strong cultural affinity, homogeneity, or group association that is not shared by the claimant or, alternatively, by the accused, that can prevent an objective or fair process.

d. A fair process is made difficult when decision-making power resides with only a very few people and is maintained by tactics such as coercion or threats, or, when there is evidence of negative consequences toward persons who disagree with those in power.
e. Outside assistance may be necessary when aspects of the complaint require specific professional assessment that is beyond the scope of what can be offered internally within the CRC.

2. Suggested process for requesting outside assistance

A written request by the claimant or the accused must clearly state the reason for requesting an outside referral. The executive director, in consultation with a safe church representative (i.e., classis safe church coordinator, or team leader) and/or a classis representative (i.e., church visitor or regional pastor), will make a final decision. Safe Church Ministry will maintain a list of preferred organizations for referrals, which will be reviewed annually by the COD.

VII. A culture of dignity and respect

A. Introduction

Respect for the dignity of each person, as equally created and called by God to contribute to the life of the church, is one of the core stated values of the CRC. Building and maintaining a culture that embeds that value in all its activities and expressions, the core of abuse prevention is a shared responsibility. When incidents happen that erode, infringe upon, or violate dignity and thereby do harm to someone, there needs to be a place to go for help to address the wrong done and to restore respectful relationships.

The report of the Addressing Abuse of Power Committee recommended a focused means to respond to less tangible and less clearly defined abuses of power that occur within CRC circles and fall between or outside the scopes of the systems addressed elsewhere in the implementation plan. The main focus for implementation is to strengthen mainstream systems through a code of conduct and training; strong, consistent, and clear policies and processes; and regular monitoring and reporting. This proposed additional role is designed to complement those systems, not to duplicate or substitute for the inclusion of abuse prevention throughout CRC management and governance systems.

To be effective and to avoid confusion, it is important to be clear about

– the nature and purpose of this role
– what it is not intended to be
– its mandate and mode of operation
– its composition and place in governance structure

B. Nature and purpose of this role

The following descriptors help to clarify what is a new concept within the CRCNA.

1. Nimble, less formal response to prevent deeper damage to relationships

This role is intended to provide a place to go for help regarding infractions that hurt persons and damage a culture of respect and dignity and that fall between or outside the scopes of defined systems for addressing

abuse of power. Responses would be restorative, problem-solving, not punitive, or not requiring heavy documentation and complex processes, and so on.

This role will have a preventative function through presence and helping to set a tone of respect, as outlined in the core values of the CRC.

If persons approach with matters that should be addressed by other existing processes, they would be referred to the appropriate contact points, not add a layer to them.

2. Pastoral response

   The primary stance will be a pastoral response, similar to the role of a chaplain, aiming to provide care for all affected persons in a timely way to resolve problems and restore healthy relationships as quickly as possible and with as little damage as possible.

3. Small, nimble structure

   This role would be fulfilled by a team of three persons, not a large committee or permanent staff. A team is needed because consultation between persons with different perspectives is important for effective responses to what can be sensitive dynamics, even if the incidents presented are not major infractions. This team of three should ensure a combination of a respected moral leader who will be taken seriously, a woman with experience of abuse, and a voice from the black/Indigenous/persons of color community (BIPOC) with experience, since women and the BIPOC community are more frequently affected by abuses of power within CRC culture.

   This team could be called the Dignity Team, and it would be accountable to the Council of Delegates through regular reporting on their work, with respect for confidentiality within individual cases. The team would not report on the other systems for addressing abuse of power but might identify gaps and trends to be addressed, if patterns emerge in the cases that come to them.

4. Moral authority, not power in the structures

   Persons serving on this Dignity Team would need to have high respect across the systems and be chosen not because of their positions within management structures. Similar to the role of ombudspersons, the work of this team would be independent of hierarchical management structures, reporting to the Council of Delegates.

   This team might include, for example, a respected, retired pastoral minister working with persons of a different gender or ethnic background who have experienced abuse and are trained in restorative justice practices.

C. Clarity about what this role is not intended to perform

To avoid confusion, given other recommendations, it might be helpful to identify what functions this Dignity Team is not intended to perform:

1. It is not a body to supervise or monitor other systemic measures. Monitoring and accountability functions need to be housed within the Council of Delegates to ensure that preventing abuse of power is mainstreamed throughout the CRCNA.

2. It is not a coordinating body. Coordination between branches such as Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, and other entities of the CRCNA needs to be built into the training, response, management, and governance structures.

3. It is not an appeal body for assessing decisions made through other processes established for addressing abuse of power. There are provisions for appeals of decisions within CRCNA governance. Other recommendations propose broadening and strengthening the role of abuse response panels and the inclusion of restorative justice practices at all levels. The Judicial Code Committee, another relevant appeal body, was being revised at the time of the Abuse Report in a direction that seemed consistent with the objective of an improved response to abuses of power.

D. Examples of the kinds of situations that might engage this body and how it would function

It may be helpful to consider a few examples of the kinds of incidents that might engage this body and how it would function. The Addressing Abuse of Power Committee heard repeated accounts of experiences in the following categories and found they are not addressed well by existing functions.

1. Abuse of power incidents across regular systems of accountability

   A church elder/member with strong views and a domineering style repeatedly calls and verbally belittles a staff member in the CRCNA office. In some cases comments on web-based platforms hound the person and are less-than-respectful but pass minimum standards. While direct conversation between the two parties might be preferred, as outlined in Matthew 18, the difference in real or perceived power makes that unlikely to happen. The supervisor might intervene, but that can be diplomatically difficult in the context of a ministry plan that gives high priority to staff being responsive to local churches. The situation could be escalated to the executive director, but that can also be diplomatically challenging and might not be effective, given current attitudes toward "Grand Rapids" staff. In reality, the situation is often allowed to fester, erode staff morale and productivity, and in some cases expand the problem.

   Technically, the staff person could contact the member's church council, but that is not likely to happen on their own—and chances of effective response are limited, given the history of church council responses in Safe Church cases.

   In a case like this, the best outcome might be a call to the Dignity Team, who would be in contact with both parties and facilitate constructive discussion that might end in "agreeing to disagree, but with respect for one another." At minimum, the outcome would end the "harassment" that harmed the parties involved.

2. Cases that should not be ignored but may not warrant attention in one of the formal complaint channels

   Both women and members of the BIPOC community provided evidence to the Abuse of Power committee about situations that were hurtful and not forgotten. They wished they could just approach the offending party and name the offense, hoping for a change of behavior in future similar contexts. One example is the "weaponizing of the Church Order"

in classis meetings: under the guise of long experience, a white elder uses the Church Order to effectively silence a younger black leader and leaves an impression that the black person is stupid or less Reformed. Often nothing can be done "in the moment" because statements are not technically out of order. The damage to respectful culture is done, with no evident recourse. Women reported incidents of having their authority undermined in communal settings, such as classis meetings, limiting their ability to contribute while not being able to easily address such offenses in that space.

In such situations a call to the Dignity Team might lead to bringing up the matter to relevant persons and providing wise counsel to classis leaders about respectful techniques they can use to avoid repeat experiences of intimidation.

3. Thin line between disrespect, legitimate difference in views, and different notions of how to show legitimate "authority"

A domineering male delegate to synod makes a forty-five-minute speech, repeatedly stating in an authoritative tone that women should not be present or have any voice in decisions—and no one says anything in response. The situation erodes the confidence of a first-time woman delegate and indirectly silences her agency through intimidation without any recourse or resolution.

Similar instances have occurred in relation to members of the BIPOC community. What one person defends as legitimate, strong, principled statements can amount to, on impact, disrespect of another person, damaging their ability to exercise their full agency in any given context. This situation can be especially damaging if it is repeated again and again in the same context.

Through moral suasion, the Dignity Team might help to prevent the recurrence of such incidents by encouraging persons to identify more respectful ways to voice views that differ with those of other persons present. It could also help leaders of communal sessions establish good practices that foster respect for the dignity of every person involved in a particular context.

E. Mandate and mode of operations

1. Mandate

The Dignity Team would foster a culture of full respect for all persons as equally called by God to contribute to the life of the church through a three-pronged strategy:

a. Prevention: Promote the core values endorsed by the CRCNA and be available to provide advice to all actors within the various CRC arenas on how those values translate into behaviors that fully respect everyone as we work together within existing structures. The prevention role also includes raising awareness about the team and ensuring easy, welcome access by anyone within the denomination. Awareness efforts might be done in cooperation with other ministries to ensure all members are aware of all avenues available to them to address issues relating to abuse of power.

b. Response: Respond to reports of alleged infringements and violations using restorative justice practices, with the goal of restoring right relationships, learning, and preventing repeat incidents. Response would be the biggest part of the team's work.

c. Reporting of trends and gaps: Through annual reports, the team would contribute to continuous learning for all members of the CRC and identify trends and gaps that warrant attention by the Council of Delegates or other leaders.

2. Methodologies

Specific methodologies for response would be developed by the team. They should follow best practices in the field, including respect for confidentiality/privacy, least-intrusive measures, a focus on healing rather than punitive outcomes, and so on.

If any request for help falls within the mandate of other existing mechanisms, it would be referred for follow-up through those channels, and the person raising the issue would be informed about how they could access and be supported through those channels. Protocols for referrals would be established with existing systems such as Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, the Personnel Office for staff, and the Judicial Code Committee.

3. Accountability, reporting, and monitoring trends

The team would be accountable to the COD. It would submit an annual report on its work without identifying the persons it worked with, and it would identify trends or gaps in current policies that might warrant attention by the COD. This team would be independent of the mainstream management system—any recommendations relating to mainstream management would be made only to the COD through regular reporting.

4. Three-year evaluation of the effectiveness of and the need for this team

This would be a new function within the CRCNA. As such, after three years, the COD would conduct a 360-degree evaluation, including some contact with users of this team, to determine its effectiveness and whether it is still needed. Continuation would depend on that assessment.

The evaluation might also consider the merits of a term of service. Limited terms of service are frequently used for functions of this type to help ensure independence over time.

F. Composition and qualifications

This would be a small team, allowing for consultation among its members while also being nimble.

1. Qualifications

Persons selected for this team would need to demonstrate moral authority and have a high level of respect within various CRC circles in order to be able to do this work.

The team should bring together persons with experience of abuse of power, to ensure orientation to listening and taking seriously what comes to them, and these should be persons who are respected and taken seriously by all leaders in order to bridge what is often a big gap that leads to inaction. Women and the BIPOC community would be represented on

the team of three to ensure welcome for members of those communities, which experience the most cases of abuse of power within the CRC.

All team members should have demonstrated experience and skills in direct mediation and conflict resolution.

2. Status

Team membership would not be permanent. The team's work would be recognized through a stipend, determined by the Council of Delegates, and through an allocation of funds to pay expenses and support the work. (For reference, some comparable practices regarding contracts, compensation, and cost recovery might be available with regard to the role of ministerial chaplains for staff of World Renew.)

3. Name for this team

The report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee described this new role as "a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect" (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 798). Discussions about a title for this team took this into account and raised some concerns about conveying the team's purpose well. The implementation group agreed that it would be helpful for the title to highlight *dignity* and *respect*, the core desired values the team would aim to promote and protect. The implementation group now therefore suggests that this team be named the Dignity Team.

4. Placement

The implementation group suggests that the Dignity Team would foster a culture of full respect for all persons as equally called by God to contribute to the life of the church. We agreed that it would be wise for this team to report to the director of congregational services. The work of the team would then benefit from links with the various ministries grouped under Congregational Services.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod adopt the following recommendations dealing with training to be provided for CRCNA staff:

1. That synod approve that training in restorative justice practices, interpersonal relationships, and others should be offered for CRCNA staff.

2. That synod instruct that the online training related to discrimination and harassment be reviewed regularly (not less than every three years).

B. That synod take note of the following changes adopted by the COD with regard to the CRCNA employee handbook (in its respective versions for Canadian, U.S., and international staff).

1. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

> "Complaint Resource Persons" are designated individuals who can act as a neutral resource for anyone who is considering initiating a complaint, and who can explain the various options. They are not involved in the investigation; nor do they act as advocates for either party. Communications between a potential complainant

and a "Complaint Resource Person" are confidential, and the decision on whether or not to use this resource is up to a complainant. "Complaint Resource Persons" are identified on the website at [to be determined].

2. Add the following subhead and paragraph to the employee handbook:

   Representation
   Throughout all of the steps of the complaint process, a complainant may choose to have another person accompany them as an advocate and/or for support and assistance.

3. Replace the current wording about "Unfounded allegations" with the following, to be added to the employee handbook:

   Unfounded allegations of harassment may cause both the accused person and the CRCNA significant damage. However, disciplinary measures will never apply to a complainant for bringing a complaint (*unless a complaint is brought with malicious intent and the evidence supporting this is compelling and undeniable*).

4. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   No one involved in the complaint process in good faith, including as a complainant, witness, adviser, representative, investigator, or decision maker, will be subject to any negative consequences for such involvement.

5. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   At any time during the investigation of a complaint the parties may, by mutual agreement, explore different options for resolution including mediation, restorative justice practices, or other alternate dispute-resolution methods [*Note:* These alternative options are not defined in the handbook. The various options and how to access them would need to be identified].

6. Add the following paragraph to the employee handbook:

   If necessary, a complainant may request reasonable support to ensure a safe working environment. Requests may include, but are not limited to, requesting an alternative reporting relationship during the investigation, or working in a different area/department during the investigation. Requests should be made to the director, the executive director, or the designee carrying out the investigation. However, the CRCNA reserves the right to reject requests depending on the nature of the incident(s) in question and the reasonableness of the requests being made.

7. Add the following paragraphs to the employee handbook:

   Investigations (as described below) will be carried out by a director, the executive director, or their designee. Investigations should not be carried out by the direct supervisor of the parties involved in the dispute. The investigator should not be someone in a position to have

any direct power or influence over the career progress of the parties involved, and must be at arm's length from the parties involved.

Depending on the circumstances complained about, the CRCNA may engage the services of an external investigator. The decision about whether to do so will be made by the executive director, with the same rights of appeal as exist in the Grievance Resolution process (below).

Any concerns about who conducts the investigation, including concerns about the identity of the investigator, whether they are internal or external, and any other fairness or bias concerns, may be raised by the complainant at any time before the investigation process begins.

8. Instruct that the complaint processes in the employee handbook be reviewed regularly (not less than every three years).

9. Approve the proposed process regarding what happens after an investigation is complete and add the following to the employee handbook:

   a. that the investigator shall make a written report of their findings (which could include options or recommendations)

   b. that the investigation report shall be submitted to the HR director and the executive director

   c. that the HR director or the executive director shall determine what, if any, discipline is forthcoming

   d. that the investigation report and any other evidence compiled by the investigator is placed in a sealed, confidential file, and that access to the file is restricted to the HR director or the executive director

   e. that only the outcome of the investigation shall be made available in written form in files that are available to the complainant and the accused

10. Urge that the definitions in the handbook policies be as broad as possible and that they address actions such as behavior that is belittling or demeaning.

C. That synod take note that the COD adopted changes to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

D. That synod approve of the restorative justice practices described in this report as an additional support for the claimant.

E. That synod approve the examination and evaluation of conflict of interest or bias in this report and approve the criteria and process suggested for the use of experts outside of CRCNA staff.

F. That synod approve the proposed purpose and composition of the Dignity Team as outlined.

G. That synod approve the placement of the Dignity Team as reporting to the director of Congregational Services.

H. That synod declare that this report and its recommendations fulfill the instructions of Synod 2019 regarding a review of the training and support for CRCNA staff and regarding conflicts of interest or bias (*Acts of Synod 2019,* pp. 795-96) and dismiss the ad hoc committee.

Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee
Maureen Beattie, HR, Canada
Michelle De Bie, HR, United States
Frank DeVries
Violetta Diamond
Sherry Fakkema
Elsa Fennema, chair
Bookie Gates
Bonnie Nicholas, Safe Church Ministry director
Kathy Vandergrift

Appendix B
Global Mission Evaluation

I. Introduction and overview of the Global Mission ministry priority

Synod 2015 adopted five themes to function as "ministry priorities to strategically focus and adaptively organize the work of the Christian Reformed Church in North America while respecting and building on our previous mission efforts, history, and legacy of relationships and member support" (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680). Synod 2018 instructed the executive director and the Council of Delegates "to continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle[1] all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455)." The following document is an evaluation of the Global Mission ministry priority as carried out by Resonate Global Mission and ReFrame Ministries.

Synod defines the Global Mission priority this way: "Called to be witnesses of Christ's kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world." The concepts of "kingdom witness" and church "starting and strengthening" are at the core of both Resonate's and ReFrame's ministries. Moreover, these objectives are absolutely essential for both the vitality of the Christian Reformed Church and its obedience to the command of its Lord.

As Christian influence recedes in North America (while growing in Africa, Asia, and Latin America), the CRC has the human and material resources to make a powerful impact on the world through kingdom witness and church growth. Despite facing some stiff headwinds, our two agencies are in a strong position to pursue timely, strategic opportunities for mission in

[1] Since the union (of Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions) that formed Resonate Global Mission became effective on July 1, 2017, this evaluative report will cover the three Resonate ministry years following that date: 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20. ReFrame will present on the full five-year cycle.

North America and around the world. It should come as no surprise, however, that the CRC faces sobering realities regarding patterns of evangelism, gospel-worker sending, church planting, and community engagement. The challenges for ReFrame's media ministry, though quite different from those facing the CRC in general and Resonate specifically, are nonetheless equally as daunting. Challenges facing media ministries such as ReFrame include increasingly crowded and competitive digital space, rapid technological change, strategies for connecting individual users to the life of a congregation, and the raising of funds to minister to growing audiences across North America and around the world. We trust that the following reflections may stimulate a vital discussion leading to passionate and Spirit-led action in our shared priority of Global Mission.

II. Reflecting on our calling

As historic agencies of the CRCNA, both Resonate Global Mission and ReFrame Ministries have served the Christian Reformed Church and its congregations faithfully for many decades. Resonate (formerly Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions and now joined together as one agency) celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2013, and ReFrame (formerly the Back to God Hour and until recently Back to God Ministries International) celebrated its eightieth anniversary in 2019. We give thanks for God's sustaining grace and the generosity of CRC congregations and members for supporting these agencies and their important mission work. The following section provides an overview of the synodical mandates, mission statements, and structures of the two agencies.

A. ReFrame Ministries

1. Mandate, vision, mission

   ReFrame Ministries serves as the worldwide media ministry of the CRCNA. What started in 1939 as the *Back to God Hour,* a modest radio preaching program broadcast from Chicago, has grown to be an international media ministry working with partners in ten major world languages with reach into nearly every nation of the world. As it was more than eighty years ago, ReFrame's **vision** today continues to be that God's gospel message transform the lives and worldviews of all people across the globe. Thus ReFrame's **mission** relies on the Holy Spirit's guidance in creating contextual media content and resources that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world.

   The core values that shape our mission, include the following:

   – **Humility**—We are unconcerned with ego and seek, above all, to serve God, the church, our colleagues, and our audiences.
   – **Diligence**—We are willing to roll up our sleeves and do the hard, and often unglamorous, work needed to achieve excellence.
   – **Redemption**—We believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is redeeming all of creation, so we speak with a healing and hopeful voice in all of our programming.

The strategies that shape our tactics in mission are as follows:

- **Church rooted**—We believe the Holy Spirit works through churches, so we partner with churches to build and strengthen the body of Christ.
- **Major languages**—We strive to reach the widest possible audience, so we create content in the world's most spoken languages.
- **Context driven**—We work with local partners who faithfully contextualize the gospel message and use the most effective media for connecting with diverse audiences.
- **Relationship focused**—Following the example of Christ, we seek to build long-term, discipling relationships with individual members of our mass audiences.

2. ReFrame's organizational structure

The overall administrative operation of ReFrame's national and international ministry takes place under the leadership of a director and an administrative director and a six-member, senior-leadership team. The agency's administrative functions include English programming for North America (and beyond), international ministries, and the advancement work of funding the entire ministry.

ReFrame's English-language ministry in North America produces excellent biblical and Reformed content for audiences in the CRCNA and for wider audiences throughout Canada and the United States. Under the leadership of department codirectors, ReFrame's English-language department produces and distributes six programs that seek to nurture lifelong discipling relationships for audiences of diverse ages and spiritual maturity. One of the six programs, *Church Juice*, helps CRC congregations as well as other churches employ best media practices for effective local ministry. These six programs are distributed through a variety of channels, including radio, audio and video podcasts, internet, social media, and smartphone apps.

Under the leadership of a department director, the advancement team works with the English-language ministry to build audience size while simultaneously cultivating stewardship relationships that enable the ministry to continue over generations, both in North America and around the world. The ministry's advancement channels include support from denominational ministry shares, churches, individuals, estates, and investment income generated from reserves.

Outside of North America, ReFrame serves as a catalyst and loose hub in helping Reformed and Presbyterian partners around the world to build and develop sustainable media ministries. More and more, this international ministry effort involves working with denominational partners in countries where the ministry language is spoken. In these partnerships, the local denomination forms a governing board, recruits staff, and provides financial resources as local situations allow. ReFrame contributes financial resources, media ministry expertise, and an international media-leaders fellowship. Each ministry employs the most effective delivery channels for its setting. These distribution channels currently include short-wave radio broadcasts, long-wave radio broadcasts, print,

audio and video podcasts shared through the internet, social media, and smartphone apps.

B. Resonate Global Mission: mandate, vision, mission, and structure

Resonate continues the good work of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. For more than a century, these two agencies introduced people to Christ in North America and around the world. Since 2017, Resonate Global Mission continues that partnership with churches in the United States and Canada to plant churches, do campus ministry, train and equip pastors, and develop future leaders—and to send missionaries overseas, proclaim the gospel, and forge lasting partnerships worldwide.

Resonate is an extension of your own church, and we exist to serve you and walk with you as you join God's mission in your own neighborhood and around the world (Acts 1:8). That's why Resonate exists—to serve Christian Reformed Churches in living out that mission. Our Christian Reformed congregations are our most important ministry partners. We work to *deepen* their passion for mission, *strengthen* their capacity to follow God on mission, and *amplify* their impact in their neighborhoods and around the world.

Mandate (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 464)—Resonate "shall give leadership to the denomination in its task of bringing the gospel holistically to the people of North America and the world and drawing them into fellowship with Christ and his church.

"The mandate of the agency has three aspects. The agency shall

- encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism and discipleship.
- initiate, support, and guide new-church development and other evangelistic and discipling ministries.
- develop Christian leaders."

Our Vision—What we want to see: Communities of disciples joining in God's mission as they faithfully proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus in their local neighborhoods and around the world.

Our Mission—What we want to do: Compelled by God's mission to save the lost and renew all things, we exist to engage more and more people in the Spirit's call to live out God's mission in their neighborhoods and in the world.

Our Structure and how it contributes—To support the denomination in its calling to engage in Global Mission, we join with CRCNA congregations and other partners locally and globally in forming, sending, and connecting missional leaders and communities who participate in Spirit-led holistic gospel movements. However, the communities in North America, where our congregations are located, are largely diverse, as are the communities around the world to which they send missionaries.

Imagine the context in Visalia, California, compared to that of Wyckoff, New Jersey; Woodstock, Ontario; Lagos, Nigeria; or Tokyo, Japan. Yet in all these places churches connected to the CRCNA are engaged in mission. Effective and God-honoring mission work must respond to the unique contexts of congregations as well as missionaries.

In order to respond to these missional contexts, Resonate has developed a regionalized and distributed organization that supports and deputizes missionaries, pastors, and others doing embedded ministry within regions to lead churches on God's mission. Resonate's regional structure—with six regions in North America and eight internationally—exists to serve churches and ministry leaders within their unique contexts. These teams are not only spreading the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ but are also multiplying ministry by cultivating new mission leaders and partnerships.

Other Resonate teams contribute to the effectiveness of its distributed and regionalized structure. The Mission Innovation Team develops mission initiatives that provide intentional space to cultivate and share learning from across all fourteen regions. The Mission Advancement and Mission Support Teams serve all Resonate staff members by providing logistical and financial support so that mission workers can focus on ministry.

Resonate's distributed and regionalized structure serves CRC congregations well and fits with other CRCNA ministries that are also structured regionally.

III. Evaluation of ministry results: 2017-18 to 2019-20

A. Introduction

Despite its modest size, the Christian Reformed Church is known around the world for its outsized global presence in mission work. Our heritage of domestic and global mission, our well-trained and experienced mission staff, and our commitment to a holistic vision of ministry is the basis for faithful and rich contributions to God's larger mission in the world.

None of this would be possible without the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the prayers and gifts of CRC congregations and members. Both Resonate and ReFrame applaud the desire of CRC members to learn about the kingdom results achieved through the use of both the material and human resources of our denomination. We encourage all CRC members and churches to avail themselves of the inspiring ministry stories, resources, and reports available on the websites of Resonate (resonateglobalmission.org) and ReFrame (reframeministries.org). In addition, we have provided a short summary of the key results of our agencies below.

B. ReFrame Ministries

1. Key performance indicators of staffing and capacity building

   The following list provides some indicators of what ReFrame is and what it has achieved over the past three years:

   - Staff and volunteers working together to create gospel content:
   - Number of people working in North America: 32 (4, Canada; 28, U.S.)
   - Number of people working around the world: 185 (17 countries)
   - Number of volunteers serving around the world: 304
   - A group of 7,000 prayer partners across North America and around the world who pray weekly for ReFrame audiences and their needs.

Media ministry infrastructure built and content produced and distributed in the past three years:

- Digital outreach:
  - 29 ministry websites in 9 languages
  - 67 social media sites in 8 languages
  - 5 different language smartphone apps
  - 233,000 devotional emails distributed every day
- Broadcast outreach:
  - 50 audio programs on 1,300 radio stations/Internet outlets in 10 languages
  - 36 video programs in 8 languages, reaching more than 500,000 people each month on average
  - 55 different countries with access to noninternet programs (radio, television, and print)
- Devotional resources: 4.3 million devotional tools delivered via print, email, social media, and smartphone apps in 8 languages

In short, ReFrame and its international media-ministry partners have been extremely successful in increasing content production and distribution over the past several years. A caveat should be noted, however, about the measurable spiritual impact of media ministry. ReFrame and its international ministries emphasize the importance of building relationships with its audience through meaningful follow-up. ReFrame and some of its international partners use powerful tools for tracking audience contact through email, websites, and social media apps. Across the board, metrics show that audience growth has increased significantly over the past five years. From this raw data, however, it is nearly impossible to quantify the number of conversions, growth in spiritual maturity, or an increase in church membership. Yet through the thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls received each year, we do see inspiring signs of the power of gospel media in changing lives.

2. Financial narrative

Funding for ReFrame's media outreach comes through the generous gifts of God's people received through CRC denominational ministry shares (30%), congregational offerings (5%, of which 91% are from CRC congregations), individual donors (33%, of which about 66% are from CRC members), and estate gifts (23%).[2] Roughly 73 percent of ReFrame's income comes from churches and individual donors in the United States, and the other 27 percent comes from churches and individual donors in Canada.

Over the past five years, ReFrame's total revenue has decreased by about 6 percent. This decline reflects a steady erosion of denominational ministry shares and the attrition of ReFrame's long-term, CRC-member donor base. While the number of donors has tended downward, however, the amount given by current donors has increased, demonstrating a high

[2] The percentage of CRC members giving to the agency is likely skewed, as church membership information from CRC church directories is no longer entered or updated in gift tracking software. Thus, existing church membership information is outdated.

level of commitment to this ministry. During this same five-year period, estate giving has continued to trend upward and is projected to continue on an upward trajectory for at least the next decade. Through its stewardship fund, ReFrame uses a portion of estate gifts to meet the annual budget; to initiate a variety of value-adding projects; and to take on the herculean effort of rebuilding and expanding its donor base. Building a sustainable donor base is ReFrame's greatest and most pressing challenge for long-term, sustainable ministry in North America and around the world. By the end of last year (2020), ReFrame had an email-audience subscription list of more than 500,000. ReFrame is working hard to develop and cultivate donors from these digital subscribers.

Year	Revenue	Expenses
2015/16	9,343,000	8,448,000
2016/17	8,229,000	7,892,000
2017/18	9,780,000	8,152,000
2018/19	9,692,000	7,933,000
2019/20	8,761,000	8,185,000

C. Resonate Global Mission

As an agency, Resonate exists to serve CRC congregations—to *deepen* their passion for mission, *strengthen* their capacity to follow God on mission, and *amplify* their impact in their neighborhoods and around the world. Today Resonate sends over 120 missionaries internationally, partners with more than 40 Christian Reformed campus ministries, and supports more than 40 Christian Reformed church plants. Many of Resonate's evaluative metrics track the missional engagement of CRC congregations in their local communities. However, Resonate exists also to create pathways for CRC congregations to do mission ministries that no single church or classis could do on their own. This is especially true of Resonate's international ministries. The metrics collected for Resonate's international ministries point to how God is using the CRC outside of our North American boundaries.

The evaluative reflections below are intended to celebrate successes and to highlight the challenges the CRC faces in its calling to follow the Spirit boldly into global mission in the new millennium. For example, revitalizing our CRC members and congregations for mission has been a major area of focus for Resonate—and this is an area where we need encouragement. According to the CRC *Yearbook*, 749 churches, or 70 percent of the CRCNA, did not report any members received through evangelism in 2019.

1. Main areas of Resonate's impact

   Resonate's growing impact on the Christian Reformed Church is most apparent in three main areas: planting churches, forming missional leaders, and encouraging every member to join God's mission. In the coming years Resonate will continue to build momentum for these movements. We work together with you toward the vision of all God's people living out the good news of Jesus!

a. Planting churches that kindle a passion for mission

One of the areas in which Resonate has been focusing a lot of research and experimentation is new church development. Multiplying churches is one of the biggest values that Resonate provides as a denominational agency—new churches are one of our most effective means for reaching new groups of people.

One lesson we've learned is that the key to helping a new church thrive isn't a program or even funding. The key is support from healthy churches. In fact, in areas where we've been experimenting with developing strong networks of support—called hubs—we've seen churches multiply, grow, and ignite a passion for God's mission.

- Planting churches in the U.S. and Canada: North America is rapidly becoming one of the largest mission fields in the world. Resonate serves the Christian Reformed Church to meet this challenge by resourcing church planters and new churches. Resonate is building momentum for a movement of church planting by recruiting, training, coaching, encouraging, and resourcing new churches. Despite this progress, the number of new church plants has slowed in the past two years. While there are many limiting factors (especially the COVID-19 pandemic), one critical factor is the shortage of CRC churches willing to "daughter" new church plants by supporting the planter, his/her family, and the new community of faith. For example, on the *Our Journey 2020* survey, the statement "Our congregation is involved in the birth of new churches" has shown little positive development over the past three years. Resonate is thankful to report much progress in deepening a vision for mission within other CRC entities and organizations, especially those that train and credential leaders. Casting a vision for church planting and recruiting parent churches will be a major focus of Resonate in the coming years.
- Planting churches around the world: Resonate is investing in training people to start churches that witness and proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. In partnership with the Christian Reformed Church, Resonate walks alongside church planters in countries worldwide. New churches are having an expanding, amplifying effect on God's kingdom through hundreds of church plants around the world.
- Key statistics
  - 54 North American church plants supported since 2017
  - Currently partnering with 43 new churches across North America
  - 654 new faith communities planted internationally since 2017
  - More than 18,000 people have come to Christ worldwide through the work of Resonate and its partners since 2017
  - 9,000 people currently attending new CRC congregations planted since 2011

b. Forming leaders who spur us on

Forming missional leaders is Resonate's primary strategy. A missional leader makes God's mission the priority and inspires others to join in what God is doing. A church or ministry can't thrive without effective leadership; neither can the denomination prepare for the future without empowering people to lead.

Who will be the future leaders of the church? As a denomination, we are at a critical crossroads with regard to mobilizing missional leaders. For example, Resonate has over twenty open positions for international missionaries. Many CRC congregations and classes that would like to plant churches struggle to find a candidate interested in this challenging but rewarding missional calling. Yet many CRC leaders wait years to receive a call to a local congregation or a position in chaplaincy. At Resonate, we believe God has given us the people we need—our work is to make sure they hear God's call and are prepared to follow it.

Encouraging and equipping leaders—especially our young leaders—is a crucial way Resonate works with congregations to spread the gospel. This ministry makes disciples who make disciples.

- Campus ministry: Young people discover God's plan for their life on more than 42 campuses across North America.
- Leadership training: Identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers worldwide through initiatives like seminary education, Timothy Leadership Training, and Educational Care
- Global mission education: Encouraging CRC congregations in fulfilling God's mission by training mission committees, forging partnerships, and working with young adults God is calling to mission work.
- Service and learning: Helping Christians discover God's call in their life through experiences like cohorts, vision trips, and church planting assessments and internships.
- Key statistics
  - Over 12,500 leaders completed a leadership training process with Resonate and its partners since 2017.
  - Of these, 1,440 have graduated from a Bible school or seminary.
  - 586 volunteers have served around the world since 2017.

c. Encouraging each member as a missionary

God gives us the task to proclaim his good news and calls us to reach the whole world (Acts 1:8). In Romans 12, Paul describes how we work together in the body of Christ—each one of us with different gifts. You are a part of this body of Christ, the people who serve, teach, encourage, and lead people in faith locally and beyond borders.

Yet data from the CRC's *Our Journey 2020* survey consistently indicate that CRC members find it difficult to build relationships with non-Christians, a key factor to sharing our faith in Christ wherever we are. Assisting CRC members to discover their own missional passion is a critical focus for Resonate staff members worldwide. Partnering with Resonate is an important way you can join with God's mission locally and internationally.

We are all missionaries! Each one of us has a role to play in God's mission, and Resonate works to help each Christian discern what God's plan for them may be, and to join in wholeheartedly. Here are some of the ways Resonate equips CRC members for mission.

- Strengthening churches for mission: Your congregation is one of the richest resources for mission. Resonate helps established churches to discover and unleash God's plan for their time and place. Your support is an investment in revitalizing and renewing churches.
- Cross-cultural ministry: One of the biggest opportunities we are tackling is cross-cultural ministry. All over the world we are finding opportunities to work with people from every culture and background!
- Volunteer ministries: Resonate provides volunteer opportunities to work alongside Christian leaders around the world. Members of the CRC can explore their calling through these opportunities and can grow in their relationship with Christ.
- Sending missionaries: We can't all go to the "ends of the earth," but it takes more than the one who is sent. You are part of the team that God uses to spread his Word—you are the sender! When you work together, the message of salvation in Jesus Christ goes out like an expanding, amplifying sound.
- Key statistics
  - Over 50 international congregations partner directly with a North American congregation.
  - Over 33,000 people participate in discipleship worldwide.

2. Financial narrative

We praise God for the generosity and faithfulness of Christian Reformed Church members and congregations that fund the work of Resonate Global Mission. Funding for the CRC's ministry through Resonate comes from congregations and individuals themselves.

Through offerings, individual giving, and ministry-share giving, local churches are fueling this new vision for God's mission. Resonate's budgeted revenue for this fiscal year is $20.9 million. Of this, 49 percent will come from individual gifts and church offerings, and 30 percent from ministry shares.

We are grateful for the support of this mission-minded denomination in providing generously! In addition, 13 percent of Resonate's budgeted revenue is expected to come from estate gifts, an incredible way that Christian Reformed people use to pass on their legacy of faith and mission. The remainder of budgeted revenue comes from other sources like international field and investment revenue.

In fiscal year 2020-21 the CRC will switch over to the new ministry-share pledging paradigm ("Ministry Shares Reimagined") approved by synod a few years ago. In order to prepare for this change and the possible impact in revenue, Resonate engaged in an intensive evaluation and review of its Mission Advancement Team, the staff members who contribute to God's mission by helping to inspire and engage churches and individuals. The result of that review is that both ministry and

advancement staff will share more designated giving opportunities to churches and individuals. Our North American Regional Mission Teams will be connecting more strategically with established CRC congregations to find concrete ways to support their mission efforts. Finally, Resonate is increasing digital fundraising resources for all its staff as more and more people connect and give to charitable organizations online and through social media.

Roughly speaking, designated gifts for missionaries support their direct personnel costs, while general giving (ministry shares and undesignated gifts) supports their on-the-ground ministry, travel, and educational costs. General giving also supports the work of domestic mission, including church planting, campus ministry, and regional staff costs, along with a few special projects.

	Revenue	Expenses	Support %
2017/18	18,608,000	17,844,000	25%
2018/19	20,640,000	19,206,000	21%
2019/20	20,929,000	18,586,000	23%

IV. Opportunities to grow Global Mission in the CRCNA

As staff members assigned to lead the CRC's Global Mission efforts and serve its congregations in their mission, we give thanks for the prayers, passion, and resources of CRC members who have generously contributed to our agencies over the years. We recognize that the CRC is enduring a period of testing, which can be an opportunity to refocus our churches on mission. We conclude this reflection by highlighting some mission opportunities currently before Reframe and Resonate.

A. Global mission opportunities for Reframe and Resonate together

As sister agencies, Resonate and ReFrame have worked together in several countries over the decades. Countries where collaboration has taken place include Brazil, El Salvador, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia. Today the two agencies cooperate in small ways in four of ReFrame's international ministry fields. In Japan, a Resonate missionary serves on the media ministry's governing council. In Haiti, Resonate serves as an administrative partner for ReFrame's French-language ministry there. In Egypt, Resonate missionaries played an integral role in bringing together ReFrame and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt (EPCE, Synod of the Nile) to form an Arabic-language ministry partnership, and currently a Resonate missionary serves as a communication liaison between the EPCE and ReFrame. In Mexico, a Resonate missionary also serves on the media council of the Synod of Tabasco in the ongoing process of developing the Spanish-language partnership there.

Both Resonate and ReFrame staff continue to look for opportunities to pursue the CRC's mission together globally. Our shared evaluations demonstrate the need for staff members of both agencies to come to a greater appreciation and understanding of each other's roles and ministries. In fact, a recent evaluation of a shared East Asian field highlighted an opportunity to recruit and share national mission staff together as it becomes increasingly

difficult to place North American missionaries in that country. ReFrame staff will also participate in Resonate's process of developing a three- to five-year strategic plan for its international ministry. One goal of this plan will be to identify areas of strategic investment where Resonate and its partners (including ReFrame) can work together.

A growing opportunity for missional collaboration between Resonate and ReFrame is in helping CRC congregations pursue their mission. ReFrame's English media ministry provides a strategic pathway for engaging CRC congregations and members in reflecting on global mission. ReFrame does this by sharing stories about the successes and challenges facing media missionaries around the world while at same time challenging North American Christians to pray, support, and get involved with their own local mission efforts. Resonate has experienced Regional Mission Teams throughout North America who are ready to assist members and congregations to discern their callings in global mission. How can we deepen our collaboration for the sake of mission in the CRC?

The CRC has identified in its *Our Journey 2025* Ministry Plan the importance of "sharing the gospel, living it missionally, and planting new churches in our neighborhoods as we discover how to connect with our local and global ministry contexts." Resonate and ReFrame have the opportunity to develop media that draws attention to the missional calling of every Christian and identifies ways in which they can be Christ's light in their communities. Finally, Resonate and ReFrame can deepen their cooperation in developing missional leaders in North America and around the world through media.

In all of these opportunities, the challenge for the two agencies will be in figuring out how to collaborate within their shared but distinctive mandates and strategies. An important first step will be to develop effective communication channels and systems that foster better mutual understanding of what each agency does and how they do it. Mutual, realistic understanding will allow the shaping of a shared vision for moving ahead with tactics that leverage the strength of both agencies for mission in and beyond the Christian Reformed Church. Both ReFrame and Resonate are committed to figuring out how to work better together in order to leverage missional opportunities.

B. Global mission opportunities for ReFrame

Over the past five years, ReFrame has evolved from being a roster of discrete programs to being a family of interrelated programs that aim to grow long-term relationships with its audiences. Now producers closely work together to share ideas for content able to cross audience boundaries of age and spiritual maturity. Content production is shaped for the whole ministry and for each individual ministry through listening to the needs of the wider North American culture. For example, during the pandemic holidays of 2020, producers worked with the image of a "blue" Christmas to address the challenges of celebrating Christmas in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past three years, through the participation of ReFrame staff in crafting the denomination's *Our Journey 2025* Ministry Plan, program content is also being increasingly shaped by the four denominational "milestones" listed below:

– **Cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline:** Nurturing and cultivating the practices of prayer and spiritual discipline are at the

heart of ReFrame's ministry. Regarding cultivating prayer, over the past three years ReFrame's number of prayer volunteers has grown to 7,000, including prayer volunteers in North America and around the world. As this number continues to grow, ReFrame is producing more resources to deepen the prayer life and ministry of its volunteers as well as its general audiences. Regarding nurturing and cultivating spiritual discipline, several ReFrame programs produce content with resources for more in-depth individual and group study. These materials include eBooks distributed in print or for use digitally. ReFrame is working to expand these resources in more of its programs. Internationally, some of ReFrame's partner ministries have translated the devotional book *Seeking God's Face*. ReFrame is working to expand the access of this spiritual-discipline treasure into other languages as well.

– **Listening to the voices of every generation:** Media ministry is all about listening to the voice of audiences and, in turn, shaping content for spiritual growth. ReFrame's palette of six programs allows producers to listen to and speak to different ages and spiritual needs. ReFrame does this particularly well through its *Think Christian* and *Kid's Corner* programs in listening and speaking to the needs of young adults and children, respectively. The *FamilyFire* program uses "closed space" Facebook groups for collaborative listening to the needs of families. The *Groundwork* Bible study program is using surveys and program testing to grow its audience of younger listeners.
– **Grow in diversity and unity:** Through its international partnerships with media ministries around the world, ReFrame provides an inspiring example of and model for the diversity and unity of God's people working to share the gospel across language, national, and cultural boundaries. In North America, ReFrame's English-language ministry uses audience focus groups for better understanding the needs of diverse audiences. More work needs to be done in this area. ReFrame has also made some progress in expanding the diversity of its North American staff, an area requiring even more progress. Through the work of its Anti-Racism Reconciliation Team (ARRT), all ReFrame staff are learning about the needs and actions required for biblical reconciliation. This too will no doubt shape content promoting diversity and unity.
– **Share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches:** As stated above, ReFrame's mission is to rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance in creating contextual media content and resources that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world. ReFrame does proclamation and discipleship naturally, both in North America and around the world. Neither ReFrame nor its international partners, however, plant churches. That is beyond the scope of a media ministry's mandate. Nonetheless, ReFrame and its partners are committed to "strengthening local churches." This is done through a church-centric orientation in content production, which includes explicit and implicit calls for participation in a local body of believers. *Church Juice* is one example of how ReFrame is providing resources to CRC congregations and other churches with "best practices" for living as a witness in their communities. More needs to be done, however, in concretely figuring out what it means for a media ministry

to "strengthen churches" and then in developing tactics for doing so across programming.

C. Global mission opportunities for Resonate

Resonate went through an extensive process of evaluation in 2019 to discern how it has been living out the CRC's vision for the union of Home Missions and World Missions. Out of this reflective work, Resonate developed and resourced four strategic priorities for its ministry in North America and around the world: (1) develop young adults and lay leaders for mission; (2) plant churches that participate in broader church planting movements; (3) equip and encourage congregations in gospel witness; and (4) minister to diaspora communities. These priorities align very well with those of the *Our Journey 2025* Ministry Plan. Because of this hard work, Resonate is well placed to catalyze the mission of CRC congregations in the milestones of *Our Journey 2025*.

- **Cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline:** Go Local, Resonate's process for engaging CRC congregations in local mission, strategically focuses on prayer and spiritual discernment in the context of their neighborhoods. CRC participants are courageously stepping out to share the gospel as they listen to the still small voice of the Spirit in their neighborhoods. Internationally, many Resonate missionaries are leading spiritual formation groups for national leaders who are being renewed and energized for mission in contexts of opposition to the gospel.
- **Listening to the voices of every generation:** Resonate has identified the formation of young adults and lay leaders for mission as a top priority for its domestic and international ministry. We are establishing new cohorts of young adult lay leaders in strategic cities in North America, Latin America, and the Middle East. We continue to use proven leadership-training processes to globally grow God's church. We are strategically investing in university campuses to share the gospel and form student leaders for mission. Our vision is that God would use our efforts, along with those of other ministries and agencies, to nourish a movement of young adults for mission much like the CRC experienced in the first half of the 20th century.
- **Grow in diversity and unity:** Resonate is a critical partner for CRC congregations who want to embrace their changing neighborhoods and contexts. In North America, Resonate is nurturing relationships with congregations of the CRC's ethnic groups to develop missional opportunities like church planting. Resonate staff members facilitate forums and training for CRC members and leaders who want to learn how to connect to neighbors from other racial and ethnic groups. Internationally, Resonate is taking advantage of the massive wave of global migration. Its missionaries are present among diaspora communities in several of the world's major cities, sharing the gospel with immigrants from many "closed" countries.
- **Share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches:** Resonate, other denominational ministries, CRC classes, and local congregations will all need to work together to see the CRC grow through church planting and evangelism. First, key CRC leaders will need to work with Resonate regional mission teams to nurture and recruit church planters

and mother churches. Second, denominational ministries and agencies will need to collaborate to make changes in the credentialing, formation, and support processes for church planters. Third, classes will have to invest resources in church planters and embrace them. Many church planters will not be from the dominant CRC culture and will need the help and support of their fellow leaders to succeed in establishing new churches in an unfamiliar system.

V. Conclusion

There is much to celebrate about the work of the CRC's global mission calling area in recent years. ReFrame and Resonate are deeply committed to the ministry priority of Global Mission: "Called to be witnesses of Christ's kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world." We encourage delegates to Synod 2021, classes, and church councils to carefully consider the opportunities for Global Mission shared here, and to contact our agency staff for support and assistance in these areas. Resonate and ReFrame are strategic partners with CRC congregations and members as they seek to faithfully live out their calling to be God's witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Appendix C
ReFrame Ministries Foundational Document

I. Vision

Why do we exist?

Vision: Our vision is that the lives and worldviews of all people around the globe will be transformed by God's gospel message.

II. Mission

What do we do?

Mission: Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we create contextual media resources that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world.

III. Core values

How do we behave?

Core Value 1: Redemptive—We believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ is redeeming all of creation, so we speak with a healing and hopeful voice in all of our programming.

Core Value 2: Humble—We are unconcerned with ego and seek to, above all, serve God, the church, our colleagues, and our audiences.

Core Value 3: Diligent—We are willing to roll up our sleeves and do the hard, and often unglamorous, work needed to achieve excellence.

IV. Strategy

How will we succeed?

Strategic Anchors

Church rooted: We believe the Holy Spirit works through the church, so we partner with churches to build and strengthen the body of Christ.

Major languages: We strive to reach the widest possible audience, so we create content in the world's most-spoken languages.

Context driven: We work with local partners who faithfully contextualize the gospel message and use the most effective media for connecting with diverse audiences.

Relationship focused: Following the example of Christ, we seek to build long-term, discipling relationships with individual members of our mass audiences.

V. Thematic goal

What is most important right now?

If we could accomplish only one thing in the next three to twelve months, what would it be?

Optimize our ministry in response to the challenges of COVID-19.

- **Content and production:** Create responsive content strategy and processes.
- **Advancement:** Adapt fundraising and communication practices for this time when in-person visits are not possible.
- **Administration:**
  - Establish effective long-term work systems and shared best practices across language ministries.
  - Create a contingency plan/budget.

VI. Standard operating objectives

What are the metrics and areas of responsibility that the leadership team must maintain to keep the organization afloat?

ReFrame Ministries Executive Dashboard

Finance

- Total revenue vs. expenses
- Revenue categories compared to budget
- Expense areas compared to budget
  - Language ministries
  - Administrative
  - Advancement

Advancement

- Donors (vs. previous period)
- Donor contacts (visits + phone calls vs. previous period)

Digital marketing

- Donors in online channel (vs. previous period)
- New donors in online channel (vs. previous period)
- Online gifts (vs. previous period)

English ministry

- Email subscriptions
- Website users
- Website sessions
- Website pageviews
- Prayer requests

ReFrame Ministries
God's Story. Today's Media.

Executive Dashboard

Updated through:
Jan 31, 2021

	Revenue to Date	Expense to Date	Change in Assets
	$5.4M	$4.2M	$1.1M
Over/Under Budget?	-1.5%	-15.7%	
Last Year to Date	$5.5M	$4.6M	
% Change from Last Year	-2.0%	-8.8%	

Revenue by Category

	Revenue to Date	% Over/Under Budget
Revenue	$5.4M	-1.7%
Ministry Share	$1.8M	3.4%
Church Giving	$257.4K	-53.1%
Other Gifts	$2.1M	-2.2%
Estate Gifts	$620.1K	-21.1%
Other Revenue	$571.4K	164.8%

Is our **revenue** getting closer to **budget** over time?

Category

Expenses by Area

	Expense to Date	% Over/Under Budget
Total Expense	$4.2M	-15.7%
Program	$2.9M	-14.2%
Adminstrative	$524.8K	-14.9%
Advancement	$759.8K	-21.2%

Which **programs** are **spending** over/under budget?

Advancement

Country

As of Feb 28, 2021

Are we doing more **donor visits?**

Donor Visits this FY
201
-70.1%

Donors this FY
7,630
12.2%

Digital Marketing

As of Dec 31, 2020

Online Donors
1,204
74.2%

New Online Donors*
510
122.7%

Online Gifts
1,743
71.1%

English

Program

As of Dec 31, 2020

Are we getting more **web traffic?**
(FY to date; % change vs. last year)

Users	Sessions	Page Views
1.5M	4.2M	8.9M
37.1%	51.0%	25.0%

* New Online Donors as of Dec 31, 2020

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Calvin Theological Seminary
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	3,320
Investments	$	54,556
Other	$	18,883
Total Assets	$	76,759
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	87
Other Payables	$	9,138
Total Payables	$	9,225
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	55,221
Unrestricted	$	12,313
Total Net Assets	$	67,534
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	76,759

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Calvin Theological Seminary
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual	Fiscal 18-19 Actual	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 2,405	$ 2,277	$ 2,143
% of Total Income	32.3%	30.6%	27.5%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 1,505	$ 1,365	$ 1,330
Disaster Gifts			$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ 171	$ 198
Total Gift Income	1,505	1,536	1,528
% of Total Income	20.2%	20.7%	19.6%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ 2,397	$ 2,526	$ 2,413
Agency Services	$ -		
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 1,141	$ 1,092	$ 1,699
Total Other Income	3,538	3,618	4,112
% of Total Income	47.5%	48.7%	52.8%
TOTAL INCOME	7,448	7,430	7,783
EXPENSES			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 4,995	$ 5,139	$ 5,274
International	$ -	$ -	$ -
Domestic Ministries	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster	$ -	$ -	$ -
Other	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Program Service	$ 4,995	$ 5,139	$ 5,274
% of Total $	68.8%	76.8%	79.2%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 1,566	$ 995	$ 902
Plant Operations	$ 694	$ 555	$ 482
Fund-raising	$ -	$ 573	$ 494
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	2,260	1,550	1,384
% of Total Expenditures	31.2%	23.2%	20.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 7,255	$ 6,689	$ 6,658
	-		
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 193	$ 741	$ 1,125
Total Program Service FTE's	32	32	32
Total Support Service FTE's	16	16	16
TOTAL FTE's	48	48	48

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Calvin University
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	22,267
Investments	$	37,625
Other	$	3,487
Total Assets	$	63,379
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	10,006
Other Payables	$	52,769
Total Payables	$	62,775
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	-
Unrestricted	$	604
Total Net Assets	$	604
Total Liabilites and Net Assets		63,379

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Calvin University
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual	Fiscal 18-19 Actual	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 2,349	$ 2,221	$ 2,075
% of Total Income	2.3%	2.1%	2.1%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 3,258	$ 3,451	$ 3,678
Disaster Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	3,258	3,451	3,678
% of Total Income	3.2%	3.3%	3.8%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	$ 92,332	$ 92,175	$ 82,887
Grants	$ -	$ -	$ -
Miscellaneous	$ 5,402	$ 5,803	$ 8,411
Total Other Income	97,734	97,978	91,298
% of Total Income	94.6%	94.5%	94.1%
TOTAL INCOME	103,341	103,650	97,051
EXPENSES			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 86,489	$ 85,342	$ 80,841
Interenational	$ -	$ -	$ -
Domestic Ministries	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster	$ -	$ -	$ -
Other	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Program Service	$ 86,489	$ 85,342	$ 80,841
% of Total Expenditures	82.7%	82.8%	82.8%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 2,247	$ 2,105	$ 2,302
Plant Operations	$ 7,597	$ 7,491	$ 6,862
Fund-raising	$ 2,860	$ 2,817	$ 2,298
Debt Service	$ 5,357	$ 5,355	$ 5,326
Total Support Service	18,061	17,768	16,788
% of Total Expenditures	17.3%	17.2%	17.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 104,550	$ 103,110	$ 97,629
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ (1,209)	$ 540	$ (578)
Total Program Service FTE's	548	528	528
Total Support Service FTE's	132	143	143
TOTAL FTE's	680	671	671

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Central Services
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Budget @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ -	$ -	$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales			
Agency Services	6,644	6,989	7,143
Grants/Miscellaneous			
Total Other Income	6,644	6,989	7,143
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	6,644	6,989	7,143
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education	$ -	$ -	$ -
International	$ -	$ -	$ -
Domestic Ministries	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster	$ -	$ -	$ -
Other	$ 5,399	$ 5,569	$ 5,647
Total Program Service	$ 5,399	$ 5,569	$ 5,647
% of Total Expenditures	81.3%	79.7%	79.1%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ -	$ -	$ -
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	$ 1,245	$ 1,420	$ 1,496
Fund-raising (Foundation)	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt Service	-	-	-
Total Support Service	1,245	1,420	1,496
% of Total Expenditures	18.7%	20.3%	20.9%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 6,644	$ 6,989	$ 7,143
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Program Service FTE's	42	45	45
Total Support Service FTE's	2	2	3
TOTAL FTE's	44	47	48

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Congregational Ministries
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Budget @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 5,088	$ 4,960	$ 4,812
% of Total Income	43.8%	43.9%	46.1%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 970	$ 1,442	$ 2,105
Disaster Gifts			
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ 2	
Total Gift Income	970	1,444	2,105
% of Total Income	8.4%	12.8%	20.2%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ 5,278	$ 4,730	$ 3,525
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 268	$ 164	
Total Other Income	5,546	4,894	3,525
% of Total Income	47.8%	43.3%	33.8%
TOTAL INCOME	11,604	11,298	10,442
EXPENSES			
Program Services:			
Education	-	-	-
International	-	-	-
Domestic Ministries	11,498	11,429	11,771
Disaster	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-
Total Program Service	11,498	11,429	11,771
% of Total Expenditures	97%	94%	98%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 332	$ 523	$ -
Plant Operations	$ -	$ -	$ -
Fund-raising	$ 21	$ 224	$ 293
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	353	747	293
% of Total Exenditures	3.0%	6.1%	2.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 11,851	$ 12,176	$ 12,064
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ (247)	$ (878)	$ (1,622)
Total Program Service FTE's	77	63	81
Total Support Service FTE's	2	3	3
TOTAL FTE's	79	66	84

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Employee's Retirement Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Year 2020 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	337
Investments	$	6,287
Other		
Total Assets	$	6,624.00
Liabilities		
Trade Payables		
Other Payables		
Total Payables	$	-
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	6,824
Total Net Assets	$	6,824.00
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	6,824.00

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Employee's Retirement Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)
Operating Budget (000s)

	2019 Actual	2020 Actual
ADDITIONS:		
Employer Contributions	$ 501	$ 501
Participant Contributions	$ 83	$ 83
Investment Earnings	$ 788	$ 788
TOTAL ADDITIONS	1,372	1,372
DEDUCTIONS:		
Distributions	$ 714	$ 714
Management & General	$ 24	$ 24
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	738	738
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	$ 634	$ 634

TOTAL FTE's

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Employee's Savings Plan - (US)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Year 2020 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	-
Investments	$	41,297
Other	$	-
Total Assets	$	41,297
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	-
Other Payables	$	16
Total Payables	$	16
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	41,281
Total Net Assets	$	41,281
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	41,297

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Employee's Savings Plan - (US)
Operating Budget (000s)

	2019 Actual	2020 Actual
ADDITIONS:		
Employer Contributions	$ 2,536	$ 2,242
Participant Contributions	$ -	$ -
Investment Earnings	$ 7,166	$ 5,356
TOTAL ADDITIONS	9,702	7,598
DEDUCTIONS		
Distributions	$ 4,529	$ 4,701
Management & General	$ 131	$ 136
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	$ 4,660	$ 4,837
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION	$ 5,042	$ 2,761

TOTAL FTE's -

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Grants
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	3,480
Investments	$	-
Other	$	640
Total Assets	$	4,120
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	-
Other Payables	$	-
Total Payables	$	-
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	4,120
Unrestricted	$	-
Total Net Assets	$	4,120
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	4,120

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Grants
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Budget @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ -	$ -	$ -
% of Total Income	#DIV/0!	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster Gifts			
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-
% of Total Income	#DIV/0!	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ -	$ -	$ 3
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ -	$ 856	$ 1,674
Total Other Income	-	856	1,677
% of Total Income	#DIV/0!	5.2%	5.8%
TOTAL INCOME	-	856	1,677
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 532	$ 1,141	$ 1,798
International	$ -	-	-
Domestic Ministries	$ -	-	-
Disaster	$ -	-	-
Other	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Program Service	$ 532	$ 1,141	$ 1,798
% of Total Expenditures	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ -	$ -	$ -
Plant Operations	$ -	$ -	$ -
Fund-raising	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	-	-	-
% of Total $	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 532	$ 1,141	$ 1,798
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ (532)	$ (285)	$ (121)

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Loan Fund
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	6,345
Investments	$	-
Other	$	15,900
Total Assets	$	22,245
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	49
Other Payables	$	16,520
Total Payables	$	16,569
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	-
Unrestricted	$	5,676
Total Net Assets	$	5,676
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	22,245

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Loan Fund
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual	Fiscal 18-19 Budget	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ -	$ -	$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants	$ -	$ -	$ -
Miscellaneous	$ 863	$ 852	$ 831
Total Other Income	863	852	831
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	$ 863	$ 852	$ 831
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education	$ -	$ -	$ -
International	$ -	$ -	$ -
Domestic Ministries	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster	$ -	$ -	$ -
Other	$ 313	$ 400	$ 1,017
Total Program Service	$ 313	$ 400	$ 1,017
% of Total Expenditures	45.4%	51.5%	81.6%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 377	$ 376	$ 230
Plant Operations	$ -	$ -	$ -
Fund-raising	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	377	376	230
% of Total Expenditures	54.6%	48.5%	18.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 690	$ 776	$ 1,247
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 173	$ 76	$ (416)

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Year 2020 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	7,157
Investments	$	68,945
Other	$	70
Total Assets	$	76,172
Liabilities		
Trade Payables		
Other Payables	$	238
Total Payables	$	238
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	75,934
Total Net Assets	$	75,934
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	76,172

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		MPF 2019 Actual		MPF 2020 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Employer Contributions	$	2,582	$	2,592
Participant Contributions	$	-	$	-
Investment Earnings	$	11,125	$	8,664
TOTAL ADDITIONS		13,707		11,256
DEDUCTIONS:				
Distributions	$	2,943	$	3,018
Management & General	$	891	$	952
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	$	3,834	$	3,970
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION	$	9,873	$	7,286
TOTAL FTE's		1		1

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - (US)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Year 2020 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	5,278
Investments	$	120,188
Other	$	328
Total Assets	$	125,794
Liabilities		
Trade Payables		
Other Payables	$	100
Total Payables	$	100
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	125,694
Total Net Assets	$	125,694
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	125,794

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Year: 2020
Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - (US)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		MPF 2019 Actual		MPF 2020 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Employer Contributions	$	5,117	$	5,037
Participant Contributions	$	-	$	-
Investment Earnings	$	21,122	$	15,010
TOTAL ADDITIONS		26,239		20,047
DEDUCTIONS:				
Distributions	$	10,271	$	10,570
Management & General	$	1,176	$	1,223
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	$	11,447	$	11,793
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION	$	14,792	$	8,254
TOTAL FTE's		2		1

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Raise Up Global Ministries
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	94
Investments		
Other	$	164
Total Assets	$	258
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	776
Other Payables	$	50
Total Payables	$	826
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	98
Unrestricted	$	(666)
Total Net Assets	$	(568)
Total Liabilites and Net Assets		258

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Raise Up Global Ministries
Operating Budget (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%
Other Gift Income:		
Gifts & Offerings	$	223
Disaster Gifts	$	-
Estate Gifts	$	-
Total Gift Income		223
% of Total Income		28.1%
Other Income:		
Tuition/Sales	$	211
Agency Services	$	-
Grants/Miscellaneous	$	359
Total Other Income		570
% of Total Income		71.9%
TOTAL INCOME	$	793
EXPENSES		
Program Services:		
Education	$	-
International		-
Domestic Ministries	$	915
Disaster		-
Other	$	-
Total Program Service	$	915
% of Total Expenditures		71.8%
Support Services:		
Management & General	$	274
Plant Operations	$	-
Fund-raising	$	85
Debt Service	$	-
Total Support Service		359
% of Total Expenditures		28.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$	1,274
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$	(481)
Total Program Service FTE's		8
Total Support Service FTE's		2
TOTAL FTE's		10

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: ReFrame Ministries
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	2,372
Investments	$	7,716
Other	$	588
Total Assets	$	10,676
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	627
Other Payables	$	1,736
Total Payables	$	2,363
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	1,464
Unrestricted	$	6,849
Total Net Assets	$	8,313
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	10,676

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: ReFrame Ministries
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7856	Fiscal 18-19 Actual @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 2,918	$ 2,795	$ 2,611
% of Total Income	29.8%	28.8%	29.8%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 3,522	$ 3,259	$ 3,365
Disaster Gifts			
Estate Gifts	$ 2,207	$ 3,280	$ 2,035
Total Gift Income	5,729	6,539	5,400
% of Total Income	58.6%	67.5%	61.6%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ -	$ -	$ -
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 1,133	$ 357	$ 750
Total Other Income	1,133	357	750
% of Total Income	11.6%	3.7%	8.6%
TOTAL INCOME	9,780	9,691	8,761
EXPENSES			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 168	$ 165	$ 161
International	$ 3,367	$ 3,093	$ 3,460
Domestic Ministries	$ 2,282	$ 2,257	$ 2,630
Disaster			
Other			
Total Program Service	$ 5,817	$ 5,515	$ 6,251
% of Total Expenditures	71.4%	69.5%	70.2%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 940	$ 880	$ 1,050
Plant Operations			
Fund-raising	$ 1,395	$ 1,538	$ 1,599
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	2,335	2,418	2,649
% of Total Expenditures	28.6%	30.5%	29.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 8,152	$ 7,933	$ 8,900
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 1,628	$ 1,758	$ 267
Total Program Service FTE's	20.65	20.55	20.00
Total Support Service FTE's	10.50	9.50	10.35
TOTAL FTE's	31.15	30.05	30.35

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Resonate Global Mission
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	7,691
Investments	$	10,859
Other	$	773
Total Assets	$	19,323
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	2,401
Other Payables	$	893
Total Payables	$	3,294
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	4,096
Unrestricted	$	11,933
Total Net Assets	$	16,029
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	19,323

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Resonate Global Mission
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Actual @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 7,116	$ 6,855	$ 4,861
% of Total Income	38.3%	32.8%	31.6%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 9,807	$ 12,464	$ 9,104
Disaster Gifts			
Estate Gifts	$ 766	$ 963	$ 830
Total Gift Income	10,573	13,427	9,934
% of Total Income	56.9%	64.3%	64.6%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ -	$ 10	$ 10
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 909	$ 594	$ 573
Total Other Income	909	604	583
% of Total Income	4.9%	2.9%	3.8%
TOTAL INCOME	18,598	20,886	15,378
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 964	$ 1,075	$ 872
International	8,525	10,763	8,889
Domestic Ministries	$ 2,399	$ 3,214	$ 2,225
Disaster	-	-	-
Other	$ 1,866	$ 2,200	$ 1,436
Total Program Service	$ 13,754	$ 17,252	$ 13,422
% of Total Expenditures	90%	91%	100%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 1,585	$ 1,787	$ 1,186
Plant Operations	$ -	$ -	$ -
Fund-raising	$ 2,592	$ 2,512	$ 1,749
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service $	1,585	1,787	5
% of Total $	10.3%	9.4%	0.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	15,339	19,039	13,427
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 3,259	$ 1,847	$ 1,951
Total Program Service FTEs	116	77	69
Total Support Service FTEs	19	25	17
	135	102	86

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Special Assistance Fund (SAF) - Canada (Canadian Dollar)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	449
Investments	$	-
Other	$	13
Total Assets	$	462
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	13
Other Payables		
Total Payables	$	13
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	449
Total Net Assets	$	449
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	462

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year:21-22
Agency: Special Assistance Fund (SAF) - Canada (Canadian Dollar)
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual	Fiscal 18-19 Actual	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 245	$ 250	$ 218
% of Total Income	98.8%	97.3%	97.3%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	$ -	$ -	$ -
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 3	$ 7	$ 6
Total Other Income	3	7	6
% of Total Income	1.2%	2.7%	2.7%
TOTAL INCOME	248	257	224
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Education			
International			
Domestic			
Disaster			
Other	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
Total Program Service	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
% of Total Expenditures	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ -	$ -	$ -
Plant Operations			
Fund-raising			
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	-	-	-
% of Total Expenditures	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 111	$ (30)	$ 117
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	-
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	-

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Special Assistance Fund (SAF)
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	259
Investments	$	-
Other	$	17
Total Assets	$	276
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	38
Other Payables		
Total Payables	$	38
Net Assets		
Donor Designated		
Unrestricted	$	238
Total Net Assets	$	238
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	276

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year:21-22
Agency: Special Assistance Fund (SAF) - US
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual	Fiscal 18-19 Actual	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 245	$ 250	$ 218
% of Total Income	98.8%	97.3%	97.3%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ -	$ -	$ -
Disaster Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	$ -	$ -	$ -
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 3	$ 7	$ 6
Total Other Income	3	7	6
% of Total Income	1.2%	2.7%	2.7%
TOTAL INCOME	248	257	224
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education			
International			
Domestic			
Disaster			
Other	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
Total Program Service	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
% of Total Expenditures	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ -	$ -	$ -
Plant Operations			
Fund-raising			
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	-	-	-
% of Total Expenditures	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 137	$ 287	$ 107
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 111	$ (30)	$ 117
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	-
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	-

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Synodical Administrative Services
Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets	
Cash	6,450
Investments	20,908
Other	19,685
Total Assets	47,043
Liabilities	
Trade Payables	715
Other Payables	33,714
Total Payables	34,429
Net Assets	
Donor Designated	379
Unrestricted	12,235
Total Net Assets	12,614
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	47,043

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: Synodical Administrative Services
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Budget @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ 2,561	$ 2,750	$ 2,283
% of Total Income	69.3%	83.1%	64.7%
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 322	$ 388	$ -
Disaster Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Estate Gifts	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Gift Income	322	388	-
% of Total Income	8.7%	11.7%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ -	$ 10	$ -
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 812	$ 163	$ 1,246
Total Other Income	812	173	1,246
% of Total Income	22.0%	5.2%	5.8%
TOTAL INCOME	3,695	3,311	3,529
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Education	$ -	$ -	$ -
International	$ -	-	-
Domestic Ministries	$ -	-	-
Disaster	$ -	-	-
Other	$ 2,123	$ 1,749	$ 1,822
Total Program Service	$ 2,123	$ 1,749	$ 1,822
% of Total Expenditures	66.3%	63.4%	61.2%
Support Services:			
Management & General	$ 1,078	$ 1,010	$ 1,154
Plant Operations	$ -	$ -	$ -
Fund-raising	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt Service	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Support Service	1,078	1,010	1,154
% of Total $	33.7%	36.6%	38.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	$ 3,201	$ 2,759	$ 2,976
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	$ 494	$ 552	$ 553

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: World Renew
Balance Sheet (000s)

		Fiscal 19-20 Actual
Assets		
Cash	$	19,357
Investments	$	10,964
Other	$	2,980
Total Assets	$	33,301
Liabilities		
Trade Payables	$	1,307
Other Payables	$	128
Total Payables	$	1,435
Net Assets		
Donor Designated	$	12,881
Unrestricted	$	18,985
Total Net Assets	$	31,866
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	$	33,301

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Fiscal Year: 21-22
Agency: World Renew
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 17-18 Actual @.7829	Fiscal 18-19 Actual @.7511	Fiscal 19-20 Actual @.7426
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	$ -	$ -	$ -
% of Total Income	-	- -	
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	$ 12,448	$ 12,093	$ 12,226
Disaster Gifts	$ 15,960	$ 12,318	$ 13,897
Estate Gifts	$ 2,062	$ 5,397	$ 2,877
Total Gift Income	30,470	29,808	29,000
% of Total Income	89.5%	90.8%	88.9%
Other Income:			
Tuition/Sales	$ -	$ -	$ -
Agency Services	$ -	$ -	$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	$ 3,566	$ 3,035	$ 3,625
Total Other Income	3,566	3,035	3,625
% of Total Income	10.5%	9.2%	11.1%
TOTAL INCOME	34,036	32,843	32,625
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Education	$ 2,162	$ 1,443	$ 1,993
International	$ 11,498	$ 11,273	$ 11,765
Domestic Ministries	$ 291	$ 312	$ 372
Disaster	$ 12,506	$ 13,974	$ 15,614
Other	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Program Service	26,457	27,002	29,744
% of Total Expenditures	83.9%	84.7%	83.9%
Support Services:			
Management & General	1,723	1,892	$ 1,982
Plant Operations	-	-	-
Fund-raising	3,341	2,974	3,710
Debt Service	-	-	$ -
Total Support Service $	5,064	4,866	5,692
% of Total Expenditures	16.1%	15.3%	16.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	31,521	31,868	35,436
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	2,515	975	(2,811)

REPORTS OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

It is the responsibility of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA to submit a *unified* report to synod composed of ministry updates provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and congregational service ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The reports of the ministries are organized and presented in alignment with Our Calling—five ministry priorities endorsed by synod (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 610; *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 563): Faith Formation, Servant Leadership, Global Mission, Mercy and Justice, and Gospel Proclamation and Worship. Supplementary reports will be provided by denominational boards and standing committees of synod, if necessary. The contents of these reports will be considered by the Program Committee of synod (officers of Synod 2019), and if judged to be urgent, will be addressed by a special meeting of the Council of Delegates in lieu of synod in June.

These reports provide helpful information for local churches. Much of the material also supplies significant background for decisions that synod will be asked to make. The content also provides the transparency necessary to enhance our life together as a denomination.

Together these reports present the story of how God is blessing and guiding our work through the agencies, institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. As you read the material that follows, I encourage you to respond with gratitude for what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, transforming lives and communities worldwide, by means of the Christian Reformed Church.

Colin P. Watson, Sr.
Executive Director of the CRCNA

Calvin University

I. Introduction

Calvin University equips students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.

Calvin graduates are ready to step into the public square and renew all things for the glory of Christ. We believe that every student has something to offer the world; every student has something that God is calling him or her to do. Calvin's job is to partner with each student to discover what that is and to help them develop the skills they will need to gain that success. In order to achieve this objective, we have charted out a strategic plan with four goals: embody, grow, collaborate, and build.

A. Embody a faithful and engaged Reformed Christianity – Confident that conviction and curiosity are mutually enriching, Calvin University will continue to be shaped by Reformed Christian confessions as faculty, students, and staff engage with Christians across the nation and around the globe to live out their faith in fresh ways.

B. Grow student enrollment by diversifying academic offerings – To extend the reach of Calvin's mission, Calvin University will attract new students by offering a range of programs and services, degrees, and credentials.

C. Collaborate to enhance learning – To engage the complex challenges of the modern world, Calvin University will encourage collaboration that bridges academic disciplines and fosters external partnerships.

D. Build spaces that inspire learning and promote community – By investing in its learning environments, Calvin University will support a thriving educational community that promotes the well-being of people and creation.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

At Calvin University, we long for God's shalom—universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. This is why we are here, and it is what we are all about: educating for shalom. To that end, Calvin University is grateful to partner with the CRCNA in living out the denomination's five ministry priorities.

A. Faith formation

– In keeping with Calvin University's vision to embody a Reformed Christian witness, the board of trustees and faculty senate have unanimously affirmed new expectations to deepen and strengthen Reformed Christian faith for faculty, senior administrators, and board members. This work is supported by the de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development. With an $11 million dollar gift received in June 2020 to develop the institute, the academic division is poised to move forward to serve Christian faculty and leaders in institutions around the world as well as to expand and deepen opportunities for Calvin faculty to integrate Reformed Christian faith with their teaching and scholarship.

In August, Matthew Lundberg, professor of religion, was appointed to serve as the first director of the institute.
- Campus Ministries' pastoral care appointments have continued remotely.
- The 2020 campus-wide Bible study offered a six-week study of Philippians.
- Upperclass students serve as discipleship assistants to oversee Christian formation in the residence halls, supervising the student Barnabas leaders who serve on each floor.
- Campus Ministries hosted, with the worship apprentices and members of Urban Doxology, two seminars at the Calvin Symposium on Worship called "Worship 101: Worship and Culture" and "Worship 101: Worship Band Basics."
- Calvin's student Worship Apprentices attended the virtual Multicultural Worship Leaders Network Conference in October, learning about multicultural worship and racial reconciliation.

B. Servant leadership

- The unique Calvin LifeWork program continues to prepare students for servant leadership in work and life after earning their university degree.
- Calvin reenvisioned Streetfest, our annual service-learning program during student orientation, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of sending students into the community, we invited partners to our campus so that students could meet with them and learn about their work, with the goal of having students become inspired to get involved after the pandemic is over.

C. Global mission

- Calvin University is an intentionally global community, from current students, to faculty and staff, to alumni.
- Calvin's global pursuits are exemplified through centers and institutes, research, and special projects.
- Calvin staff and faculty have walked alongside all students, and particularly international students, to make necessary adjustments for travel and coursework, and to ensure their learning opportunities during the pandemic are robust and rewarding.
- Calvin responded to the visa challenges of approximately 70 first-year international students by tailoring a set of online courses just for them. One of the key aims of the International Cohort is that when cohort members eventually join us on campus, they will not only be prepared academically but will also already feel that they are part of the broader Calvin community.
- The Global Campus has partnered with the World Languages Department and the Enrollment Division to develop new initiatives around language education, including contracting with a growing list of high schools for Spanish-immersion dual enrollment and developing online course offerings for partner universities that have had to eliminate upper-level language programming.

D. Mercy and justice

- The Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) continues to provide a Christian liberal arts education to inmates at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. This five-year program results in a bachelor of arts degree from Calvin University in faith and community leadership. During the pandemic, Handlon student leaders have stepped up to lead in new ways to further their education and build community when professors are not allowed on campus.
- Calvin professor Mark Mulder is part of a trio of researchers helping the Alliance of Baptists denomination understand what it means to be anti-racist, and how to move their congregations toward that desired future.
- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching announced its list of colleges and universities receiving the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in 2020. Calvin University is one of 359 campuses across the country to receive this important designation. To receive the classification, each institution voluntarily submits an application that provides compelling evidence of community engagement through meaningful collaboration with local, regional, national, and global communities.
- The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges: 2021 Edition recognized Calvin University as one of 416 colleges and universities committed to the environment and sustainability. The Princeton Review chose the colleges based on its survey of administrators at 695 colleges in 2019-20 concerning their institutions' sustainability-related policies, practices, and programs.
- Plaster Creek Stewards (PCS) is dedicated to returning health and beauty to one of the most contaminated urban waterways in West Michigan. PCS continues to involve students, staff, faculty, community members, and partners in education, research, and many different on-the-ground restoration efforts. In 2020, PCS received two separate Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grants. One of these extends PCS's curb-cut rain garden initiative in the Alger Heights, Garfield Park, and Oakdale neighborhoods. The other grant is funding the planting of 390 trees in the watershed. Both projects began in summer 2020 and are scheduled to be completed in fall 2021.
- Calvin has been a leader in creating inclusive educational communities. Heading into fall 2020, the institution was one of only five universities in the state of Michigan and one of 300 in the U.S. to offer an inclusive higher education program. Now, thanks to a $1.2 million Transition and Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Calvin is on a path to be the first university in Michigan to offer a Comprehensive Transition and Post-Secondary program.
- Calvin continued its tradition of partnering with World Vision to recruit runners for the Grand Rapids half-marathon to raise money for clean water.
- Campus Ministries continued to encourage student giving to the Community Care Fund during the pandemic, raising over $2,750.

– The Center for Counseling and Wellness (CCW) is supporting two student leadership groups this year as part of its work cultivating emotional resilience on campus. The first, Calvin Unmasked, consists of student moderators for an anonymous peer listener app that started in September. Calvin students report that use of the app is supporting their sense of connection and community during the challenges of this pandemic season. The second group, the CCW Student Advisory Board, has existed since 2017 and is now preparing to bring mental health peer education to our campus community. Peer educators will use their training as NASPA-certified peer educators to strengthen wellness, connection, and self-care habits among their peers during the spring semester. Students in both groups bring a passion for mental health awareness and a desire to support their peers in thriving during college.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

– Campus Ministries hosted external guests for chapel/LOFT musical and spiritual leadership, including Myra Maimoh, Quese Allen, Luke Enders, Nii Adoteye Anum, Tanner Smith, Lemarr Jackson, and a Ugandan Children's Choir. These guests contributed to the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that characterizes our campus worship.
– Campus Ministries partnered with the World Language departments to host worship in world languages on Tuesdays in chapel, contributing to the linguistic diversity of our chapel services and expanding our appreciation for the diversity of peoples and languages spoken in worship.
– Campus Ministries developed and coordinated 40 online chapels with worship apprentices, staff, guests, and alumni during the spring COVID-19 pandemic.
– Campus Ministries livestreamed daily chapel services during the fall semester, continuing our diverse chapel program.
– As the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption in churches around the world, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship is guiding churches through this novel season.

III. Academic initiatives

At Calvin, academic pursuits reveal truth and knowledge about the world God created. The following list details select academic initiatives since the university's previous report to synod.

A. Accolades

U.S. News & World Report has again ranked Calvin University as number 3 overall among Midwest regional universities in its *2021 Best Colleges Guidebook*. In addition, Calvin received *U.S. News*'s number-5 ranking among Midwest regional universities on its "Best Undergraduate Teaching" list and the magazine's number-13 ranking on its "Best Value Schools" list.

In 2020, Calvin received a grant that will continue to improve the support it can offer students. The U.S. Department of Education's Student Support Services Program (SSS) is granting Calvin $935,000 ($187,000 per year for five years) for the institution to provide academic and other support services to low-income students, first-generation students, and students with

disabilities. The goal of the grant is to increase students' retention and graduation rates by fostering an institutional climate supportive of their success.

B. Expanded academic offerings

New schools were founded: School of Business (funded by a donor gift, with construction set to begin in March 2021), School of Education.

New interdisciplinary departments were formed: World Languages (Spanish, French, German, Dutch, and Asian languages), Historical Studies (History, Classics, Art History), Visual and Performing Arts (Music, Theater, Dance, Studio Art, Graphic Design).

New programs were developed: master of education (online), master of media and strategic communication, master in geographic information science

New majors and a minor were developed: financial planning major, B.S. psychology major (in addition to the B.A. already in place), graphic design minor.

Calvin began additional online programming after appointing Kevin den Dulk to lead the effort as associate provost. The Higher Learning Commission has authorized Calvin to offer online programs.

C. Core curriculum

Responding to challenges in Calvin's current core curriculum, the university has created a new, smaller core curriculum. It is a single core for all undergraduate students and builds on the university's educational framework; includes a three-hour seminar for all students in their first year at Calvin, focusing on community and Calvin's commitment to a Reformed Christian liberal arts approach to education; has assessment built into the program from the outset; and recommends a proactive approach to core program governance such that changes, when needed, can be made adeptly.

D. Academic calendar

The new academic calendar will feature an alignment of three 16-week semesters (fall, spring, summer), six 8-week sessions, and twelve 4-week sessions. This arrangement increases flexibility in course offerings and in meeting the needs of new student populations.

The fall and spring semesters will be similar to what Calvin currently offers for undergraduate students, using a traditional tuition model.

The summer semester, beginning in May, will include summer study abroad programs, 8-week courses for online learners, and traditional face-to-face summer offerings for undergraduate and graduate students.

These calendar changes, among other things, will make it possible for students to begin summer internships and employment a month earlier than in the past (if they do not take a May 4-week session) and to continue their studies during the summer with a reduced tuition model.

E. Pandemic adjustments

Some efforts of the academic division of the university were shifted by COVID-19 restrictions. What follows is a brief summary of the academic division's efforts since March 2020.

Calvin sought and received permission from the Higher Learning Commission to shift all operations, as needed, to online teaching and learning through December 2020.

Faculty summer plans were altered significantly so as to offer opportunities for learning more about online instruction. In June and July, two experts in online instructional design led faculty in a video and discussion series focused on key challenges. In partnership with CIT, the academic division also formed an instructional design team to help faculty prepare content and work through technical questions.

All teaching and learning spaces were evaluated with respect to square footage (to allow for six feet of physical distancing) and necessary technology (to enable remote learners to join class sessions and to enable a smoother transition to 100-percent online learning if needed).

About 150 students in fall 2020, via remote access, joined their peers who were learning face-to-face. These were students who identified as particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 or who cared for people who are particularly vulnerable. These students joined their peers in synchronous learning, in which faculty simultaneously taught students in the classroom and online. This practice will continue in spring 2021.

The Center for Student Success continued to implement needed "coordinated care" measures, providing online tutoring and one-to-one peer support, monitoring online course activity to identify disengaged students, modifying the early-alert program for faculty to identify struggling students, deploying virtual drop-in sessions for students with an academic counselor, and screening students who wish to learn remotely.

Student-faculty research collaborations were modified to engage as many students as possible through various technologies and strategies.

F. New learning spaces

The remodeling of a simulation lab for nursing students was completed in time for September 2020. The nursing faculty and staff created simulation modules and videos to use in the finished lab and also to use in online learning. These additional spaces are enabling students to have enhanced learning experiences in their career preparation.

A significant remodel of the first floor of the Spoelhof University Center began in February 2020 to create a Design Hub, a new collaborative learning space designated for students in art, business, and engineering programs. It was completed in fall 2020.

G. Spotlighting faculty and students

Adejoke Ayoola, professor of nursing, was inducted into the 2020 Class of Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing.

Richard Mouw, a widely respected theologian and philosopher, joined the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin University as a senior research fellow.

Student Laura Dykstra has been named a Goldwater Scholar. She is one of only 396 college students across the United States to receive this honor in 2020-2021. The scholarship, a partnership between the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation and the Department of Defense National Defense Education Programs, comes with a $7,500 scholarship to support students in their research journeys.

Students Kai Arbogast, Zach Clark, and Kris Miedema placed in the top 10 percent of a worldwide programming competition: IEEEXtreme's global challenge. The trio of electrical engineering majors at Calvin University

tackled 24 hours' worth of programming problems and finished near the top of a 3,700-team field.

Calvin senior Jason Entingh plans to head to Eastern Europe for six months as an English teaching assistant through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

A team of five engineering majors, seniors Zac Ericson, Brett Ermer, Marcus Gelder, John Macy, and Peter Oh, reworked a senior project halted by the COVID-19 pandemic and instead used their time and skills to help a local company print PPE.

For a graphic design class project, Gabrielle Eisma, a junior at Calvin University, took poems written by local artists and curated an unconventional and quite hidden gallery space. The poetry now rests in sixteen different places throughout West Michigan, from parks to parking lots, near gardens and playgrounds, and in churches and community centers.

IV. Finances

The pace of change at Calvin, as at many other institutions in the country, has been quite rapid over the past few months. It is easy to focus on the numerous adjustments that have been made as we have learned to work during the current COVID-19 era, but the truth is that we have several great team members and leaders who are not merely standing still or recovering losses but are instead taking steps to improve the university, financially and otherwise.

Calvin had its record-best year for fundraising, and endowment surpassed $200 million, thanks to strong giving and good investment returns.

The fast pace for designing our new business school continued throughout the summer with our partners from GMB Architecture and Engineering and GDK Construction Company. It truly required a team effort to design the project so quickly, with numerous meetings that included faculty, the facilities team, and donors. Todd Hubers and Russell Bray contributed mightily to the organization of the entire process. We are pleased to have been able to open bids quickly and to start construction in March.

The local leadership for Creative Dining Services has kept up with constantly changing health department and State of Michigan mandates throughout the summer and fall. They have adjusted as needed to providing a reduced dining capacity, alternate serving models, and a delivery service while catering to a wide array of student preferences.

The dining services team has reduced their 2020–2021 spending targets to match lower revenues in catering, dining, and all facets of service in the Prince Conference Center.

The campus store has been open since late June, following all necessary social-distancing protocols. They instituted a delivery service for textbooks ordered online, dropping textbooks off in dorm rooms before students were even on campus. While they did this in response to the coronavirus pandemic, it was also a good opportunity to pilot a different service model as they seek to compete with Amazon and other online providers.

The university met the challenges of the global pandemic crisis, including financial and operational challenges associated with COVID-19, and reduced costs to maintain a balanced budget.

V. Board matters

A. Board officers

Board officers for the 2020-2021 year are Bruce Los, chair; Mary Tuuk Kuras, vice-chair; Janice Buikema, secretary; Jim English, treasurer (vice president for finance); and Sharolyn Christians, assistant secretary (executive assistant to the president).

B. Board membership

The following nominations for new delegates from the regions are presented for election to the Calvin University Board of Trustees.

1. Region 5

   Thomas Wybenga will be completing his second term. The board presents the following slate of nominees to the classes in Region 5 to be voted on at their spring classis meetings. The results of the voting will be presented to synod for ratification in June.

   Gary Bos is a 1969 Greek-major graduate of Calvin University. He received his doctoral degree in medicine from the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine in 1978. He attended Calvin Theological Seminary in 1968 prior to serving as a captain in the U.S. Air Force. He received the Air Medal for service in Vietnam and was offered a regular commission. He is recently retired from serving as a staff orthopedist since 2012 at Kittitas Valley Healthcare in Ellensburg, Washington. He also served as an adjunct professor at Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences from 2009 until his recent retirement. Dr. Bos currently serves as the treasurer on the CRCNA Council of Delegates; his term concludes in June 2021. He has also served as an elder and council president in three Christian Reformed churches. Classis Columbia stated clerk Roger Kramer describes him as "very capable and an effective communicator. He has . . . great spiritual depth and leadership ability."

   Jack Byeman is a 1967 economics-major graduate of Calvin University. He received his master's degree in business from Washington State University in 1969. He worked for the Boeing Company and served as their director of finance and director of business resources until his retirement in 1999. He currently serves as a consultant and leadership coach. His past board experience includes service on the finance committee and Ministers' Pension Fund of the CRCNA; as a director on the Barnabas Foundation board; as a member of the Boeing Employees Credit Union; as a member of the advisory board of Central Washington University College of Business; and as a member of the advisory board of Vykor, Inc. He currently serves on the advisory boards of two small businesses. He has served as a deacon, elder, council president, member of a pastoral search committee, and manager of a major building project at various Christian Reformed churches.

2. Region 6

   Fernando del Rosario will be completing his second term on the board. The board presents the following slate of nominees to the classes in Region 6 to be voted on at their spring classes meetings. The results of the voting will be presented to synod for ratification in June.

Kevin Adams is a 1982 sociology graduate of Calvin University, a 1987 master of divinity graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, and a 2003 doctoral degree in ministry graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has also studied at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is currently the founding and senior pastor at Granite Springs Church in Lincoln, California. Prior work includes serving as an intern or youth pastor at Fairfield CRC in Fairfield, California; Caesarea Community Church in Port Perry, Ontario; Rogers Heights CRC in Wyoming, Michigan; and as a pastor at Bethel CRC in Princeton, Minnesota. His board experience includes service on the Calvin Theological Seminary board of trustees, including a term as secretary and as chair of the Presidential Search Committee. He has also served on the Rocklin (Calif.) Unified School District board and the board of Family Life/AIDS Curriculum. He has served as an adjunct professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and William Jessup University. He has been involved in various roles at Sierra Leadership Network as a codirector, at Christian Reformed Home Missions as director of formation, at Newbigin House of Studies in San Francisco as a program affiliate, and as part of a pastor's group for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

J. Todd Hoeksema is a 1978 physics and mathematics graduate of Calvin University and a 1984 doctoral degree graduate in applied physics from Stanford University. He is currently a senior research scientist in solar physics at the Hansen Experimental Physics Laboratory at Stanford University. He spent four years working at NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C. His current research is related to understanding what causes the variability of the sun that affects the earth. Dr. Hoeksema also currently serves on the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy board of directors. Previously he cochaired the Committee on Solar and Space Physics for the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. He also served as chair of the Solar Physics Division of the American Astronomical Society. He has been a council member at the Palo Alto (Calif.) CRC regularly since first serving as a deacon in the 1980s. Most recently he served as council president until his term concluded in 2019.

Note: Additional board membership updates will be included in the Calvin University supplemental report to synod.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the chair of the board, Bruce Los, and to the president of Calvin University, Michael K. Le Roy, when matters pertaining to education are discussed.

B. That synod ratify the following faculty reappointments with tenure, effective September 1, 2021:

Rachael A. Baker, Ph.D., associate professor of biochemistry
Frederick L. Haan, Jr., Ph.D., professor of engineering
David B. Klanderman, Ph.D., professor of mathematics
Nathan Sunukjian, Ph.D., associate professor of mathematics
Renard G. Tubergen, Ph.D., associate professor of engineering
John R. Walcott, Ph.D., associate professor of education

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect new members, reappoint for subsequent terms, and ratify the results of elections held in classes for membership on the Calvin University Board of Trustees.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin University
Michael K. Le Roy, president

Faith Formation Ministries
"Helping churches grow faith for life"

I. Introduction

Synod 2015 launched Faith Formation Ministries as a new denominational ministry with the following mandate:

> Faith Formation Ministries joins and continues God's mission of transforming lives and communities worldwide by encouraging and equipping local CRC congregations and their leaders in their calling to practice intentional, lifelong, intergenerational, holistic, missional discipleship and faith formation with an emphasis upon children, teens, and young adults.
>
> (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 467, 589)

Throughout the past year, Faith Formation Ministries has sought to carry out this mandate within the complexities (both challenges and opportunities) that surfaced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In pursuing our calling, we seek to collaborate wherever possible. That has been true to an even greater degree this past year. We also enter into our conversations with a listening ear, trying to discern what the unique cadences of the church or ministry leader's context are. That listening posture has been even more important in a year when many leaders have been stretched beyond their training, experience, and capacity. In the midst of this season, Faith Formation Ministries team members have also engaged in our own ongoing learning related to facilitating virtual gatherings, creating and curating digital resources for faith formation, and assisting churches in equipping people for home-based faith formation practices.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

In previous years, the Faith Formation Ministries team has leaned into the lifelong and intergenerational descriptions in our mandate. This year we have begun exploring more of the holistic and missional aspects of our calling. This emphasis has led our team to recognize the need to diversify our resources, grow in our cultural intelligence, and collaborate more intentionally with other ministries.

Throughout the six years of our ministry, we have operated with a conviction that Christian discipleship and faith formation are more than a simple transfer of knowledge about God from one generation to the next. Following Jesus Christ involves an ongoing transformation of our character through the Spirit and in community with other disciples so that our desires, perspectives, and interactions with others conform more and more to the love of God made known in and through Jesus. This transformation is both personal and communal, and it leads us to participate more fully and more faithfully in God's mission of making all things new.

This robust vision of discipleship beckons us to see faith formative aspects in each and every context and moment of our lives. Not only is faith formation lifelong; it is also holistic, shaping our home life, our vocations, our recreation, our economics, and our politics. Not only is faith formation intergenerational in that our faith together grows best through relationships across generations, but faith formation is also missional, forming us both for

and through the opportunities we have to work toward the well-being of our neighbors.

With these things in mind, our team is engaging in a wide range of conversations. We consult with church leaders about topics such as curriculum choices, encouraging and equipping parents for faith-attentive conversations with their children, inviting emerging adults more fully into the life of the church, and discipling people who are new to the faith or who are in the third third of their life. We are also participating in collaborative conversations around church planting, lay leadership formation, and best practices in responding to COVID-19.

We also continue curating and creating resources, including basic introductions to faith practices (spiritual disciplines), how to engage children and youth during the pandemic, and *Dwell at Home* activities for Advent and Holy Week.

III. How we have engaged our mandate this year

In the first six months of the 2020-21 ministry year, we have specifically engaged this vision by doing the following:

- Facilitating more than thirty workshops, retreats, and roundtables for councils, pastors, and other ministry leaders.
- Launching the Faith Practices Project as a five-year initiative for introducing congregations to various spiritual disciplines and encouraging their engagement with *Our Journey 2025*'s milestone on spiritual disciplines and prayer.
- Offering insights, providing resources, and facilitating conversations through more than forty posts on The Network (network.crcna.org).
- Facilitating a cohort in southern Ontario to encourage mentoring with youth and emerging adults; preparing to launch three new cohorts (another on mentoring, one on children's ministry and family faith formation, and one on the third third of life in early 2021).
- Developing and launching *Dwell Flex* to support churches in adapting to new virtual, multiage, and at-home approaches to Sunday school, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions on in-person gatherings.
- Shepherding a classis-based network of Youth Ministry Champions who support and encourage youth ministry in the congregations of their respective classes. We also started to work collaboratively with the RCA on this network and hosted a creative, dispersed retreat for youth champions for both denominations.
- Joining the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's newest research project on family-based faith formation.
- Facilitating five virtual gatherings of leaders from various CRCNA-related children's ministries (GEMS, Cadets, Kids Corner, and Faith Formation Ministries).
- Participating in collaborative teams around church planting and COVID-19 response.
- Preparing to lead Generation Spark, an emerging adult-mentoring initiative, with the Reformed Church in America (RCA).
- Contributing to broader ecumenical networks focused on faith formation, including relationships with the RCA, Fuller Youth Institute,

Therefore Go Ministries, Intergenerate, the Children's Spirituality Summit, Vibrant Faith, and the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators.

Our first priority in our work is to listen well to the people with whom we interact. So far this year, much of what has emerged through this listening has been related to the pandemic. We've heard comments and questions like these:

- "How do we lead a children's ministry online?"
- "What are the best practices for including children and youth in online worship?"
- "How can we encourage people to engage in faith formation at home?"
- "I've got nothing left. My church expects me to suddenly be the expert for all things online just because I'm the youngest member on staff."
- "This season has been the hardest in ministry. I'm not sure I'll be in ministry once COVID-19 is done."

We are also hearing the following:

- "Emerging adults, particularly those who have participated in campus ministries during university, often find that the leadership skills and experiences they have to offer are overlooked when they become part of a church post-college/university."
- "Faith formation resources need to be digitally accessible."
- "Pastors and ministry leaders are scrambling just to get Sunday services online and haven't had much time to think about other approaches to faith formation beyond the Sunday worship gathering."

IV. Connecting with churches: Concluding *Our Journey 2020* and preparing for *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Reflecting on 1 John 2:6, we desire that our faith formation efforts will lead to more and more people living as Jesus did—in grateful response to the mercy and love God has lavished on us in Jesus Christ.

During *Our Journey 2020*, we focused on the following:

- Encouraging a faith storytelling culture within churches. We wove a storytelling component into most of our workshops and many of our resources. We also developed a toolkit of resources related to faith storytelling.
- Creating intergenerational, lifelong opportunities for discipleship. We curated and created resources, like our *Ten Ways* handouts and our *Third of Life* toolkit, that provide tangible suggestions for how to engage faith formation throughout the whole lifespan.
- Contextualizing discipleship for the particularities of each congregation. We facilitated cohorts, workshops, and retreats for ministry teams, provided coaching to ministry leaders, and developed free, adaptable resources that congregations can access to meet the specific faith formation needs in their contexts.
- Giving attention to the faith formation of children, youth, and young adults. We brought on several team members with background experience, education, and other training focused on children and youth

ministry to serve as catalyzers and resource developers. We expanded the *Dwell* curriculum offerings and created resources to equip parents and families. We also developed partnerships with the Fuller Youth Institute, Therefore Go Ministries, and the RCA to strengthen our capacity to engage with youth and emerging adults.

As we begin *Our Journey 2025*, Faith Formation Ministries is giving attention to the following aspects of the ministry plan:

- **Cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline:** Along with launching the Faith Practices Project in preparation for this milestone, Faith Formation Ministries team members will serve as guides, encouraging engagement by denominational ministries and congregations with this first milestone.
- **Listen to the voices of every generation:** Two Faith Formation Ministries team members will serve as guides for this milestone. This milestone leans into our strength and our mandate of intergenerational ministry and being attentive to the faith formation needs and opportunities for people of all ages.
- **Grow in diversity and unity:** We are excited about the opportunity this milestone provides to amplify diverse voices through the resources we develop, to become more attentive to the ways disciples have been and are formed in a wide range of diverse communities and contexts, and to broaden our own cultural competencies and antiracism practices.
- **Share the gospel and live it missionally:** Our mandate calls us to lean into missional practices of discipleship and faith formation. We look forward to participating collaboratively with other ministries to grow disciples who will make disciples, who can then make more disciples.

V. Looking ahead: three trends to note

Through our engagement with churches, our ongoing learning and dialogue with other ministries and denominations, and our discernment as denominational leaders responsible for encouraging faith formation in the CRCNA, we note three trends that we anticipate will affect faith-formative practices and resources in the coming years:

1. **Belonging:** The social isolation experienced by many people during the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified the need to belong in community with others. While Western theology has often emphasized the personal assurance of our salvation and our relationship with God, people are more attuned to their need to experience a sense of belonging to the community of God's people. This raises our understanding of the importance of small groups, microchurches, and other communal spaces for engagement in the life of the church that can help people both to know others and to be known by others. Developing faith formation resources that emphasize belonging is a growing priority.

2. **Accessibility:** Our North American culture is increasingly mobile and technologically engaged. In recent years this has affected how frequently people attend events in person and their willingness to commit to traditional discipleship classes or Bible studies. We need to ask questions about how these patterns will shape the ways in which churches can disciple

their congregations, and to be attentive to the ways in which a growing digital footprint can change the audience and community that a church is reaching.

3. **Integration:** Many people are asking how the Christian faith relates to issues of justice, economics, politics, sexuality, science, and more. While this trend is not new, our team is hearing an increasing call for resources that pursue faith formation in dialogue with these areas of life. There seems to be a growing desire for a more integrated approach to faith formation among youth and emerging adults and also among older adults who have been in the church for years.

VI. Final remarks

Throughout the unusual circumstances of ministry in the past year, Faith Formation Ministries has continued to grow as a team and in its practice of engaging with ministry leaders. In the early months of the pandemic, we served as a trusted resource for guiding ministry leaders through the sudden needs surrounding online church worship and programming. As the need for longer-term safety measures, including physical distancing, became evident, we gave attention to deeper issues surrounding mental health, fatigue, care for ministry leaders, and equipping ministry leaders for a different type of ministry season. More recently we have focused on helping ministry leaders navigate faith-formative conversations and adaptive opportunities involved with the collective trauma that many have experienced through the pandemic, through increased attention on systemic racism, and through partisan political conversations and events unfolding in the United States.

In the midst of these fluctuations and challenges, Faith Formation Ministries' team members have also spent time on professional development in order to better serve congregations and ministry leaders. Everyone on the team has participated in antiracism or cultural intelligence learning opportunities. Many of our catalyzers have focused on learning new skills and making use of resources for facilitating virtual retreats, workshops, and other gatherings. A few of us have explored spiritual direction, restorative justice, and other areas that are tangibly connected to our faith formation. We recognize that there is still much to learn with regard to faith formation in North America, particularly in light of events that unfolded in 2020. But we are confident that our team will be well positioned to continue serving the congregations of the CRC as well as the missional focus of the denomination throughout this coming year.

Faith Formation Ministries
Christopher J. Schoon, director

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

I. Introduction

Our 149 chaplains embody the gospel of Jesus Christ and minister at the front lines by providing pastoral care to thousands of people each day. For the past 100 years, our chaplains have provided meaningful, creative, and essential ministry throughout our communities, hospitals, prisons, long-term care facilities, and workplaces. Chaplains also serve in the military, hospice care, veterans affairs, pastoral counseling, and more. These communities need chaplains for their ability to handle crises, conduct difficult yet meaningful conversations, and care for people from many different backgrounds. The year 2020 highlighted how important chaplaincy ministry is. Our chaplains are employed and embedded in organizations, creating unique ministry opportunities. Our chaplains have been creatively adapting to ever-changing policies and safety precautions. They have provided spiritual care within anxious institutions that are struggling with budgets, layoffs, and staff burnout. When community clergy were restricted from visiting hospitals, prisons, and nursing homes, our chaplains were continuing to provide pastoral care to people in crisis and in pain who were often isolated and alone, and to sick, dying, lonely, and grieving patients who were separated from their church and family members. Our chaplains' education, special training, and gifts have prepared them to share the gospel during this critical time.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (CCM) endorses, trains, supports, and advocates for chaplains who extend the CRCNA's ministry into their institutions and organizations. CCM has had to adjust over the past year to provide meaningful ministry in the midst of COVID-19 restrictions, seek out new ministry opportunities, and meet the diverse needs of our chaplaincy community. Our ministry is entering 2021 with joy and excitement to implement the CRCNA's commitment to the ongoing ministry of our chaplains. Our ministry has restructured and added staff (from two 1.0 FTE staff to three staff working a combined 2.2 FTE) to better support our chaplains. Rev. Timothy Rietkerk, who began working as the director of this ministry in January 2021, has nearly thirty years of chaplain ministry experience serving within military, Veteran Affairs hospital, and hospice settings. Rev. Sarah Roelofs, who served as director for three and half years, will transition to working part-time as a ministry consultant. Carol Vander Ark Champion was recently hired and serves as a part-time executive administrative assistant. After working understaffed (at 1.6 FTE) for most of the year, we look forward to seeing how God continues to work through our chaplains who provide ministry in moments that matter.

A. Mandate – Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional and specialized settings (Acts of Synod 2003, pp. 685-87).

B. Mission – Chaplaincy and Care Ministry's mission, overseen by the Council of Delegates, is to implement, regulate, and develop the denomination's commitment to chaplaincy. We carry out this mission in the following ways:

1. Overseeing the denominational endorsement process for chaplains
2. Providing pastoral support and advocacy for endorsed chaplains
3. Facilitating shared supervision with chaplains' calling churches
4. Informing and educating the CRCNA on chaplaincy and related ministries
5. Administering training grants
6. Recruiting chaplains
7. Conducting training
8. Promoting the development of chaplaincy
9. Participating in national endorsement-related organizations

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Servant leadership

CCM equips chaplains to serve as servant leaders. This past year, we were not able to make our usual 50 in-person visits and 6-8 campus visits, but we did connect with 68 students (43 U.S.; 25 Cdn.) and 177 ministers and lay leaders (140 U.S.; 37 Cdn.) through email, phone calls, surveys, and video calls. The number of students and prospective chaplains with whom we have connected has tripled over the past five years, including five times as many women and twice as many people of color now seeking to learn more about chaplain ministry. Through these connections, CCM guides these diverse individuals from a variety of backgrounds, ministry experiences, and vocational goals as they apply for endorsement, complete specialized training, and connect with others working in their field of interest.

Chaplains are specially trained as servant leaders for their ministry. CCM shares the stories and resources of our chaplains, through whom the church makes a direct impact in those chaplains' communities and institutions. To work in clinical settings, chaplains complete a minimum of 800 hours of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) or equivalent training. This is in addition to formal master's level theological and biblical training. CCM supports these new and future chaplains through a donor-driven development fund. In 2020, CCM granted a total of $10,261 ($6,200 US and $4,061 CDN) to seven individuals (5 U.S. and 2 Cdn.) for specialized training. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of training grant requests was down from the average 12 grants totaling $22,000, and we expect the number of requests to significantly increase in the coming year.

Chaplains display leadership in a variety of settings. Endorsed chaplains continue to lead in their organizations and communities and have taken on a variety of new tasks to meet the needs of their organizations and the people they serve. Chaplains provide pastoral care to staff and people who are homeless, disabled, and elderly and people who have lost hope. Chaplains provide guidance, advocate for people's spiritual needs within many institutions, and serve on ethics committees within their organizations. Thirty-nine CRC chaplains are board certified through several professional chaplain organizations, demonstrating their advanced skills and enabling them to step into leadership and specialized roles in their workplaces. Three chaplains are clinical educators (2 U.S.; 1 Cdn.), training dozens of new chaplains annually. Ten military chaplains are field-grade officers who have significant responsibility leading others and advising their commanders in matters of spiritual

wellness and moral responsibility. Many more serve in important roles on ethics committees, managing and advocating for peoples' spiritual needs and rights while serving their local community.

On any given day, a hospital chaplain reads Psalm 23 while holding an iPad to include family members as they say goodbye to a parent; a prison chaplain prays with an inmate who makes a profession of faith; a nursing-home chaplain visits with a dementia patient who feels lonely and confused because family members are no longer allowed to visit; a military chaplain provides counseling to a soldier having suicidal thoughts. CRCNA chaplains touch the lives of thousands of individuals each day, meeting them in a variety of crises. Chaplains help people struggling with dying, addiction, depression, stress, grief, and more. They are there when people need to ask hard questions about life and faith. They listen deeply, identify spiritual needs, and connect them with spiritual resources and faith communities. In this way, chaplains embody Christ's grace in the world.

B. Gospel proclamation

Every day, chaplains proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ as they minister to a diverse group of people in crisis, bringing the peace, healing, and grace of Christ to many who are outside the church. Chaplaincy ministry is a specialized ministry that has unique challenges, requires specific skills, can be isolating, and provides rich opportunities to minister. Chaplains are trained to provide care to people in difficult situations. The year 2020 has stretched our chaplains as they have been exposed to repetitive trauma and fatigue during this pandemic, and they have risen to these challenges and have continued to provide meaningful pastoral ministry.

This year CCM has adapted how we provide support to our chaplains. The pandemic limited our ability to provide in-person visits, but it created an opportunity to develop and deepen our ministry through our 2,989 (2,189 U.S.; 800 Cdn.) interactions with our chaplains. Normally we minister face-to-face with our chaplains by making six to eight regional visits each year and by hosting an in-person chaplain conference. Throughout this past year CCM has focused on supporting our chaplains through individual interactions (by phone, video call, and email), weekly prayer video meetings, weekly devotions, encouragement letters and gifts, our annual conference, and social media. At the beginning of 2020 we had been meeting once a month with 20-30 chaplains to discuss a topic (pluralism, trauma care, women in leadership, etc.) relevant to chaplaincy. On March 18, those meetings changed focus to gathering weekly for prayer and support, to ask questions, and to share resources. The meetings now are coupled with a weekly devotional time together, which has become an important source of support and care for our chaplains. Of our 149 chaplains, 82 (64 U.S. and 18 CAN) have joined us at least once this year, and an average of 10-15 chaplains attend per week.

Our annual conference is foundational to our ministry. In September, we hosted our first virtual conference: "Come to Me: Sufficient Grace, Perfect Power, and Humanity." The 113 attendees (80 U.S. and 23 CAN) spent three days together to learn, worship, reflect, and be refreshed. While the overall training format changed, our time together was incredibly meaningful, integrating worship times, fellowship, plenary sessions, small group breakouts, and space to practice spiritual disciplines. While many chaplains expressed

that they missed seeing each other in person, they identified that they were able to engage in deep conversations with a wider variety of chaplains due to being placed in multiple small group breakout sessions. We had a number of chaplains in attendance who had been unable to attend in the past due to the amount of time they would be away from work. Throughout the conference, our chaplains shared about the joys and challenges in their lives and ministry in the midst of the pandemic, racial tensions, and political divides.

Through our increased social media engagement, we were able to effectively connect chaplains to one another and share resources. This was evident through the 30 percent increase in members in our closed Facebook group and 300 percent increase in participation, engagement, and sharing posts. CCM provided regular updates through a bimonthly newsletter, sent out encouraging postcards and letters, worked closely with CRC News to highlight many chaplains' stories. Through these ministry activities, CCM supports chaplains as they proclaim the gospel in culturally appropriate ways to those God has entrusted to their care.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (the Ministry Plan)

CCM aids churches and communities that cultivate practices, grow in diversity, listen to the voices, and share the gospel through the work of our chaplains. CCM facilitates the relationship between the chaplain and his/her calling church, enabling chaplains to get much needed support in their ministry and connecting churches with important spiritual resources. Our 149 chaplains represent 97 individual CRC churches. Through this covenantal relationship, the church can effectively extend their mission into unique areas of their surrounding community.

Through the milestone of cultivating spiritual disciples of prayer, worship, and fellowship, our ministry transforms the lives of our chaplains and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit. This milestone is developed in our weekly prayer meetings, weekly devotionals, and worship and prayer opportunities throughout our programming. Our chaplains foster cultivating spiritual disciplines in the church through active engagement with their local churches and providing spiritual care resources on social media and in CRC publications.

CCM is focused on growing diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome by supporting our chaplains who provide this essential ministry to persons of diverse ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds. CCM seeks to increase diversity within our chaplain community by providing on average $22,000 in training grants to ensure everyone is able to get the necessary chaplain training and connect all newly endorsed chaplains (regardless of their age or ministerial experience) with a chaplain mentor. Our chaplain community is becoming a more diverse ministry with a 47 percent (from 9 to 17) increase of chaplains of color and a 21 percent (from 31 to 39) increase of female chaplains in the last five years. CCM seeks to identify gifted leaders from diverse backgrounds and ministry experiences to serve in leadership roles on our advisory council, at our annual chaplain's training, and by sharing their story through social media and CRC publications. CCM collaborates with professional chaplaincy organizations in the U.S. and Canada to advocate for religious liberty and expression of religion, and to train our chaplains to meet the spiritual needs of diverse populations.

Listening to the voices of every generation and sharing the gospel are at the heart of chaplain ministry. CCM supports chaplains who connect the church to the local and global ministry contexts through the pastoral care they provide. They are a rich resource for the church. CRC chaplains provide pastoral care to over 2 million people per year, mostly to people who are not associated with the CRC and a growing number of people who are not affiliated with any religion. Our ministry is working on building relational networks and resources within our community to provide meaningful and appropriate pastoral care. Chaplains are equipped by our churches to serve as frontline workers and minister to those who are isolated, feel abandoned, are in crisis and pain, and have experienced overwhelming loss and grief. Their education, specialized vocational training, and unique gifts have prepared them to respond to the call to "be there in moments that matter" in their local communities and institutions.

IV. Chaplaincy statistics

The Chaplaincy and Care Ministry Advisory Council and the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry present the following statistics:

1. Total CRCNA endorsed chaplains: 149 chaplains (in the United States: 120; in Canada: 22).
2. Twelve chaplains were newly endorsed in 2020: David Bouma, Michelle DePooter-Francis, Lisa DeYoung, Marcia Fairrow, John Kyu Hahn, Mark Janowski, Daniel M. Kim, James Kim, Anthony Matias, Sharon Segaar-King, Thomas VanWyk, and Hernan Zapata-Thomack.
3. The CRCNA supports 22 military chaplains: 16 active duty in the United States; 2 active duty in Canada; 4 in the US National Guard and Reserves; and an additional 6 military chaplain candidates.
4. In the past year, the following 7 military chaplains have served, or are currently serving, overseas: Israel Alvarado, Jon Averill, Richard Hill, Raidel Leon Martinez, Cornelius Muasa, Cory Van Sloten, Lloyd Wicker.
5. Three chaplains retired in 2020: Douglas Einfeld, Barbara Schultze, Alfred Vanden Boogaard.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry
Timothy L. Rietkerk, director

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.

I. Introduction

The CRC Loan Fund, Inc., U.S. was established by Synod 1983 with a directive to assist organized Christian Reformed churches in the financing of capital improvements. The Loan Fund operates exclusively in the United States. The board of directors of the Loan Fund oversees the loan approval process, the determination of loan interest rates, and the setting of Loan Fund policies. The board also establishes interest rates for Investment Certificates sold—primarily to members, churches, classes, and agencies of the CRCNA.

II. Board of Directors

Loan Fund board members are eligible to serve for two three-year terms. Members of the board of directors are James Brewer (2021), Barbara De Boer (2022), Jeffrey Feikens (2022), Jack Meyer (2023), Howard Van Den Heuvel (2021), and Nancy Wiesman (2023).

The board requests that synod reappoint Mr. Van Den Heuvel to a second term and appoint one board member from the following slate of nominees to a term of three years, eligible for reappointment to a second term:

Mr. Dale Burghgraef is a member of Westview CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served as an elder and as council president. He has also served as president of the West Side Christian School board and was a member of the West Side Christian School Foundation. He also served as president of the Grand Rapids Kiwanis Club and as a member of the local chapter of American Business Clubs. He is a graduate of Calvin University and is employed as a development director of West Side Christian School, following a thirty-year career with JP Morgan Chase Bank.

Ms. Layla Kuhl is a member of Madison Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she has served as a real-estate development project manager and a church school teacher, as well as a member of the mission, vision, and movement team. She is president of the East Grand Rapids Middle School parent-teachers organization. Ms. Kuhl is a graduate of the University of Michigan and of Michigan State University. She is also the owner of Clean Work, a residential cleaning company.

III. Financial operations

The Loan Fund is eligible to sell Investment Certificates to investors in twenty-three states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Additional states could be added as needed to benefit the fund.

At the close of the 2020 fiscal year (June 30, 2020), a total of $16,569,556 in interest-bearing Investment Certificates and accrued interest held by investors was outstanding. Interest rates vary from 0.50 percent to 2 percent. Variances in interest rates reflect the terms of the certificates and market conditions at the times the certificates were issued.

Since its inception in 1983, the Loan Fund has originated more than two hundred loans totaling nearly $75 million to churches across the United States. As of June 30, 2020, the Loan Fund had $16,293,351 in gross loans and accrued interest outstanding. Loan delinquencies do occur from time to time, but they are closely monitored and are very low. The fund maintains a loan loss reserve to help cover potential losses. The fund is blessed to have experienced only minimal loan losses throughout its history.

Financial operations are also reflected in the following data:

	2020	2019	2018
Cash and equivalents	$6,346,923	$5,407,381	$3,618,933
Net loans and interest receivable	15,893,278	15,943,762	17,297,235
Other assets	6,635	11,611	42,587
Total assets	$22,246,836	$21,362,754	$20,958,755
Certificates and interest payable	$16,569,556	$15,270,398	$15,094,334
Net assets	5,677,280	6,092,356	5,864,421
Total liabilities and net assets	$22,246,836	$21,362,754	$20,958,755

A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2020, appears in the *Agenda for Synod 2021—Financial and Business Supplement*.

IV. Sources of funding

Funds for the Loan Fund operations are derived from the following sources:

A. The sale of Investment Certificates in states where legal approval to offer them has been obtained.

B. Gifts and bequests made to the Loan Fund.

V. Staff

The Loan Fund is staffed by Alice M. Damsteegt, program coordinator, and David E. Veen, director.

VII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the Loan Fund's director or any members of the board of directors of the CRC Loan Fund when matters pertaining to the fund are discussed.

B. That synod reappoint Howard Van Den Heuvel to a second three-year term and appoint one board member from the slate of nominees to a first term of three years on the board of directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
David E. Veen, director

Pastor Church Resources

I. Introduction

Pastor Church Resources (PCR) serves pastors, churches, and classes as they seek to promote healthy relationships, encourage one another in ministry, and discern next steps in seasons of growth, transition, or challenge. Our efforts aim toward the well-being of pastors and churches and provide the context for individual programs, personal interactions, resources, and consultations that PCR staff offer. Recently, along with emphasizing vocational assessment, we have focused attention on the systemic health of classes and the resourcing of classis functionaries. Our desire to resource pastors, churches, and classes is an attempt to reflect the Spirit of God's work to resource the church with all the gifts necessary for flourishing.

Staffing notes—In 2020 we were blessed to welcome four new staff members to the PCR team: Rev. Elaine May, women's leadership developer; Kristin Hoekstra, Healthy Church administrative specialist; Nate Rauh-Bieri, Financial Shalom program manager; and Rev. Zach Olson, ministry vocational consultant. Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron left her position as ministry vocational consultant to do similar work at Calvin Theological Seminary. After serving PCR for eleven years, Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis retired in June 2020. Cecil's steady and wise pastoral leadership has been a rich blessing to the CRC.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

In the desire of the CRCNA to see congregations flourish, the ministry of Pastor Church Resources plays a role in supporting, training, encouraging, and challenging congregational pastors and ministry leaders. That ministry sometimes takes the form of responding to an emerging season of growth, transition, or challenge. Sometimes it takes the form of resourcing leaders or systems (such as a classis or council) to be more resilient before such seasons of growth, transition, or challenge arise.

Whether that ministry is responsive or proactive, the premise is the same: when people (such as pastors and ministry leaders) or systems (such as a classis or council) know their calling and are sufficiently encouraged and equipped to pursue it, we will see more creative and faithful ministry. In other words, equipped and encouraged leaders and systems will be better able to pursue the kind of wide and deep ministry the CRCNA so strongly values: forming deep faith, developing servant leaders, witnessing widely to Christ's kingdom, and loving mercy and doing justice while proclaiming the saving message of Jesus Christ and worshiping him in all we do.

In PCR, we believe that when leaders and systems are clear on calling and sufficiently equipped and encouraged, the sometimes disruptive dynamics of growth, transition, and challenge need not derail faithful ministry. In fact, PCR seeks to help such leaders and systems recognize and cooperate with the ways God often uses such disruptions as ministry and discipleship opportunities—for example, recognizing that the way pastors engage in continuing education can help them form faith more deeply; that the way a council conducts a retreat can develop a new generation of servant leaders; that the way you handle a conflict can witness to God's kingdom; that the

people you include in critical decision-making can express your commitment to mercy and justice; and that the joyful lives of faithful leaders can point others to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Pastor Church Resources is committed to serving CRC congregations through the lens of *Our Journey 2025*, the newly adopted ministry plan. We have initiated a time of strategic planning to reflect on both how the variety of ministry we do is already living into these priorities and how we can continue to grow in alignment. We are starting with articulating more clearly how each aspect of our work (as listed below) aligns with supporting each of the four milestones of *Our Journey 2025*, and we are seeking ways to refine and/or increase how each ministry reflects those milestones. Further, we are assessing what new opportunities we might pursue or existing ministry programming we might bring to a close to best serve the CRC churches with respect to *Our Journey 2025*.

While future reports will reflect our growing alignment, we would like to highlight one new project we are currently developing. Seeing that listening well is an embedded value throughout all four milestones of *Our Journey 2025*, PCR is working on a way to highlight some of the various tools we often use that support better congregational listening (to one another, to God, to our neighbors, etc.). Our aim is that each year, we will highlight one specific tool and invite (and equip) every CRC congregation to engage with that tool in an accessible way sometime during the month of February. We are planning to launch this effort in 2021 for congregational participation in February 2022.

A. Ongoing ministry initiatives

1. Serving pastors

   a. Consultation and intervention—In 2020, PCR continued its consultation work with pastors and churches, often in the context of tension and challenge. Our consulting staff engaged in 16 intensive engagements with churches (10+ interactions), 13 medium engagements (3-9 interactions), and 8 small engagements (1-2 interactions). These numbers do not reflect the many brief or one-time phone or email conversations regarding Church Order, staff arrangements, church renewal instruments, and so on. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the nature of our work in that all engagements after mid-March took place via virtual meeting platforms. That adjustment brought challenges and opportunities. The work had to be done in a way that felt less personal, but we could be at work in more places than ever because travel was no longer necessary. The experience of the pandemic and the restrictions it brought also formed a new element of every church's story, challenging leadership in myriad ways, exposing underlying dysfunction, and yet also revealing health in many places. It led many people in church leadership to new levels of weariness. That experience was exacerbated in U.S. contexts by political and social tensions within the country, tensions that came to expression in many congregations. We wonder what the long-term impact on churches and pastors will be.

b. Continuing education grants of up to $750 per opportunity are awarded to pastors and staff to engage in learning opportunities that enhance their work in the local congregation. Over the past year, PCR awarded 20 grants on topics such as preaching, restorative practices, Clinical Pastoral Education, Specialized Transitional Ministry training, and spiritual formation/direction. In fall 2020 a new Continuing Education Advisory Team formed. The team assists in grant decisions and provides input for PCR's ministry supporting the ongoing formation of pastors for ministry.

c. Promoting flourishing in ministry—PCR provides grants for pastor peer groups and biennial conferences for pastors and pastors' wives. During this difficult year, the support and encouragement pastors received in peer groups was needed more than ever. Over 100 pastors joined a PCR peer group in 2020—almost 10 percent of CRC pastors.

   We hosted a virtual pastors' wives' conference in October with the same number of attendees as in past in-person conferences. (Male spouses have not shown interest in such events.) We are planning for our second pastors' conference in November. It is our desire to be able to meet in person in Albuquerque, New Mexico. May it be so!

d. Financial Shalom—In 2020, Financial Shalom distributed grants to 22 pastors to support them with critical financial needs and student loan relief. The program also covered 33 pastors' professional financial counseling sessions. Beyond its regular grants to pastors, Financial Shalom oversaw the distribution of the COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund, which provided over $813,000 in grants from denominational agencies to sustain 155 congregations financially affected by the pandemic; of this, around $550,000 was Financial Shalom funding (from a Lilly Endowment Inc. grant). Most of this COVID-19 relief funding went to sustaining pastors' salaries and benevolence for church members. In 2020, Financial Shalom made its work—to alleviate some of the key financial challenges facing CRCNA pastors—more accessible through updated and translated brochures, educational webinars, and the development of a new program for bivocational pastors.

e. Bivocational ministry resources—In tandem with Financial Shalom, PCR took up the goal to normalize and support healthy bivocational ministry. PCR staff have worked with other ministries and the Study of Bivocationality Task Force to learn about bivocational ministry in the CRC. In addition to the Bivocational Growth Fellowship—a yearlong program for pastors seeking a sustainable bivocational arrangement, funded by Financial Shalom—PCR has begun developing resources to assist pastors and churches who are pursuing bivocational arrangements.

f. Vocational discernment—PCR equips pastors to clarify their most effective and unique ministry strengths. A primary tool for this work is the Birkman Assessment through which pastors discover how God has wired them to flourish in ministry. Since this program began, nearly one quarter of active CRC pastors have taken the assessment, increasing their self-awareness and strengthening their ability to communicate

with leadership, identify blindspots, and discern ministry fit. PCR's goal is to provide the Birkman Assessment and assessment debriefing to every pastor in the CRC.

2. Serving churches

   a. Pastor transitions and search—PCR helps churches navigate the logistics of pastor searches. During 2020, personal connections with search-team leaders increased from those of previous years. We recently completed a major revision of our primary resource for these transitions, *More Than a Search Committee*. The revision includes the same practical advice that search committees have appreciated, and it provides more encouragement and support for churches wishing to take advantage of the unique discernment opportunities afforded by pastoral transitions. PastorSearch, a database of searchable minister profiles, remains a vital resource, providing direct access for up to 100 search teams at any given time. A list of supply pastors available to serve congregations during periods of vacancy is also maintained.

      Shortly after a minister leaves a church, PCR contacts the church in order to make the council aware of the ways their classis and denomination can help them navigate the changes ahead. We also survey participants who have recently served as search-committee chairpersons to help us understand how the search process is working for local churches and where it may need improving. We soon expect to release a new virtual training so that search committees are aware of the impact of unconscious bias in a search process. We are also putting the finishing touches on revisions to both the Letter of Call template and the Church Profile template.

   b. Tools and toolkits for churches—PCR provides training tools for churches including *More Than a Search Committee*, *Evaluation Essentials*, and *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Congregations can access all of these resources by downloading them at the PCR website (crcna.org/pcr) or by ordering printed copies through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org). We also offer collections of tools that we call toolkits.

      The *Crossroads Discernment Toolkit* is a collection of over twenty group activities that can help any church proceed through a Spirit-led, group-engaged, mission-oriented discernment of where they have been, where they are, and where God is leading them. As the centerpiece of our Crossroads Discernment Process, it is especially helpful to guide churches through the spiritual discernment of considering, and the logistical details of pursuing, a significant institutional change including a major ministry reset, a church restart, or a church closure. Crossroads is a joint PCR/Resonate resource.

      The *Challenging Conversations Toolkit* is a resource for small groups to engage with the synodical report on human sexuality and to listen deeply to one another as the church considers what to do next. The toolkit is based on some of the best practices recommended by PCR for helping to turn conflicts into opportunities for discipleship and witness.

c. Healthy Church discernment process—The ministry of Healthy Church helps congregations understand their health challenges and discern best ways to grow healthier. This year, Healthy Church began a "reset" of its own, recognizing that it needs to make itself known to our churches more effectively and to provide better support to the coaches and churches involved in renewal. While attempting to address these needs, PCR will retain the core of Healthy Church—the healthy church indicators, a robust survey format, a strong coaching component, and an orientation around discernment. A grant from Vibrant Congregations is providing financial support for this work.

d. Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs)—PCR endorses and supports a number of seasoned pastors who are trained to help congregations experiencing challenges during transitions between pastors, challenges related to conflict, or challenges related to the impact of the lengthy tenure of an outgoing pastor. When the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread in North America in early 2020, there was a brief reduction in the number of churches asking for help with such transitional ministry. However, the need for transitional ministry has again reached former levels and may even grow beyond them because of tensions and conflicts related to COVID-19—and, in the United States, because of relationship challenges related to political and social differences. At this time, there are twenty STMs endorsed by PCR.

e. The Women's Leadership Ministry assists congregations in developing a theology and practice for identifying, cultivating, and releasing women to use their gifts in the church. This ministry was integrated into PCR in July 2020. We developed the *Ten Ways for Men and Women Thriving Together in Ministry* tool.

   This year the CRCNA is recognizing the 25th anniversary of ordaining women in the ecclesiastical office of minister of the Word, commissioned pastor, and elder. The 2020 *Yearbook* survey indicates that 72 percent of CRCNA congregations that completed the survey are open to having a woman serve as a deacon, 52 percent have opened the office of elder to women, and 51 percent have opened the office of minister of the Word or commissioned pastor to women. The survey also found that percentages vary between Canada and the United States. In Canada, 87 percent of congregations have opened the office of deacon to women; 77 percent, the office of elder; and 73 percent, the offices of pastors. In the U.S., 68 percent are open to women serving as deacons; 44 percent, as elders; and 41 percent, as pastors. The ongoing task of the Women's Leadership Ministry is to work with all of our churches to increase the leadership capacity and contributions of women at all levels—local, regional, and denominational—for the health and mission of the church.

3. Serving classes

a. Classis Renewal—The work of classis renewal continues to encompass two broad categories: direct engagement and supportive infrastructure. PCR has worked indirectly with multiple classis leadership teams in the past year to help them better understand their organizational

structure and how their activities best fit with the purpose of classis. We also continue our support for a variety of functionaries, such as being involved in coleading a conference for stated clerks and maintaining continued engagement with church visitors. In 2021 we have started developing more robust support for church visitors and for classis counselors for churches seeking to call a pastor.

b. Regional pastors and mentoring—PCR extends its work through regional pastors at the classis level, providing support, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and spouses. Regional pastors also assist in setting up mentoring relationships for new pastors and encourage the development of support mechanisms when there are multiple staff persons within a congregation. Among other supports, PCR facilitated a spiritual direction cohort for regional pastors in 2020 and will be hosting a similar cohort for 2021. The key mentoring resource, *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*, will be updated and revised in 2021.

B. Special ministry initiative projects

1. Thriving Together Program

Thriving Together is in its third year of a five-year program. It is funded through a nearly one-million dollar grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. The overall purpose of this program is to create a stronger, more vital culture of mentoring in connection with three undersupported, almost "invisible" pastoral-transition moments: early in a second call, in late career, and while privately wrestling with the question "Should I stay or go?" Through gatherings, resourcing, assessments, and developing mentoring relationships, the Thriving Together initiative crystallizes a trajectory already taking shape in the CRC, sharpening the focus on pastoral relationships. In 2020 we hosted multiple gatherings for pastors in transition and have approved the funding for multiple peer-mentoring groups. (These are different from the peer groups mentioned earlier.)

2. Council/elder/deacon training

Our work to develop focused support for church councils continues. We are creating orientation resources for persons entering church office as well as resources that provide ongoing training and support for elders and deacons once they are in office. In partnership with the Thriving Congregations project (funded by a Lilly Endowment Inc. grant), we are developing a specific curriculum that can be used by church councils in a variety of settings and timeframes.

IV. Conclusion

2020 was a year of tremendous disruption in almost every area of all of our lives. Indeed, every aspect of Pastor Church Resources' ministry experienced some turbulence and disappointment along the way. Yet, as pastors, councils, and classes felt the strain of 2020, PCR also felt strong confirmation that synod's mandate for our ministry remains as important as ever. Though we may hope we never have another year quite like 2020, pastors and churches know that "in this world [we] will have trouble" (John 16:33). Changes will come. Plans will be derailed. Leaders will be stretched. Yet it is precisely because of these challenges that synod created PCR. So we remain

focused on equipping and encouraging pastors, churches, and classes with tools, resources, and networks of support so that we might face such seasons of challenge in the confidence that we are not alone. In fact, the Lord we serve assures us, "Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Pastor Church Resources
Lis Van Harten

Pensions and Insurance

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church in North America maintains employee benefit programs that provide retirement, health, life, and disability benefits for employees of the denomination in its ministries, agencies, local churches, and other CRC organizations.

II. Board matters

The ministers' pension plans, special-assistance funds, and the employees' retirement plans are governed by the boards of the U.S. Pension Trustees and the Canadian Pension Trustees. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint session. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed.

Darrel Raih is completing his first term on the U.S. Pension Trustees board in 2021 and is eligible and recommended for a second three-year term. Thomas Dykhouse will be concluding service on the U.S. Pension Trustees board. The board recommends the following single nominee for election to a three-year term, beginning July 1, 2022. (*Note:* Subsequent to his nomination by the U.S. Pension Trustees board, John Bolt agreed to delay his retirement as director of finance and operations for the CRCNA until July 2022. Therefore; it is recommended that his first term on the U.S. Pension Trustees board begin on July 1, 2022.)

John H. Bolt of Caledonia, Michigan, has been serving as director of finance and operations for the CRCNA since 2003. Prior to joining the CRCNA, he spent nearly thirty years working in various corporations, including the Kellogg Company, where he served as vice president and treasurer; and Twin Laboratories, Inc., where he served as chief financial officer. He has managed significant pension programs in various capacities since 1976. He has served two terms as an elder and has served on the finance committee of Alger Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he is a member.

Mike VanderKwaak is completing his first term on the Canadian Pension Trustees board in 2021 and is eligible and recommended for a second three-year term. Concluding service on the board of the Canadian Pension Trustees are Henry Eygenraam and MaryAnn Kokan-Nyhof. The board recommends the following two single nominees for election to these two positions for a first term of three-years, respectively:

Position 1

Jacob (Jack) Vanden Pol of Edmonton, Alberta, is the retired principal of Central Alberta Christian High School in Lacombe, where he worked for twenty-two years. He currently serves as a board member, as treasurer, and as a member of the investment committee of Christian Stewardship Services. Along with service on other boards and committees within the community, he served for twelve years as a trustee for the Christian Schools International Canadian Christian School Pension and Benefits board. He is a member of mosaicHouse Community CRC in Edmonton, Alberta.

Position 2

Hessel Kielstra is a member of Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alberta. He is president of various family businesses involving agriculture and food processing. He has served five terms as an elder at Emmanuel CRC, two terms as a school trustee of Calgary Christian School, and two terms as a trustee with Dordt University. Denominationally he has been delegated to synod four times, and he has served two terms on the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary, two terms on the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA , and three terms on the Back to God Hour advancement board. He is currently serving on the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary and on the board of Partners Worldwide.

III. Benefit-program activities

A. Ministers' pension plans

The ministers' pension plans are defined-benefit plans. Benefits paid by the plans are defined by formula, and the required funding of the plans is determined by actuarial calculations. The primary purpose of the plans is to provide retirement benefits to plan participants. The plans also provide benefits to the surviving spouses of participants as well as to any dependent children who are orphaned. In addition, long-term disability benefits are provided through an insurance product to all full-time, active participants in the plans who have furnished the information concerning compensation and housing as required by the insurance carrier.

The following is a summary of participant counts as of December 31, 2020, for each plan and in total. Participants having an interest in both plans (generally the result of having served churches in both the United States and Canada) appear in the column where they have residence.

	United States	Canada	Total
Active ministers	672	268	940
Ministers receiving benefit payments	606	155	761
Spouses and dependents	192	44	236
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	107	23	130
Total	1,577	490	2,067

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. Both plans are required to have a valuation every three years. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

   Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their performance is measured against established benchmarks and regularly reviewed by the trustees.

   The plans' actuaries have informed us that as of the date of the plans' last valuation, the actuarial liability totaled approximately $134.7 million for the U.S. plan (as of December 31, 2019) and approximately $48.2 million for the Canadian plan (as of December 31, 2019). These amounts

reflect the present value of the plans' future obligations to all participants including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	December 31, 2020	December 31, 2019
United States (U.S. $)	$124,890,000	$116,563,000
Canada (Can. $)	74,657,000	67,179,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings along with contributions to the plans provide a significant portion of the resources needed to meet the plans' obligations to the active participants and to fund payments to retirees and beneficiaries.

2. Plan review

The pension plan has undergone several changes since separate plans for the United States and Canada were established in 1983. While the basic defined benefit form of the plan was not altered, changes were made to benefits provided by the plan, to clarify how the plan is administered, and to improve the protocols used to obtain funds needed to pay costs.

The more significant changes to the plans (or changes that affect them) made in recent years including those approved by synod are as follows:

2010 Decreased the multiplier used to determine the annual benefit accrual from 1.46 percent to 1.3 percent for credited service beginning January 1, 2011.

Approved a change in the early retirement reduction factor to 0.5 percent from 0.3 percent per month, effective January 1, 2014.

2011 Increased the normal retirement from age 65 to age 66.

Advanced the implementation of the change to the early retirement factor (from 0.3% to 0.5% per month) from January 1, 2014, to July 1, 2011.

Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2010 level.

Changed the normal form of retirement benefit from joint and survivor to single life with five years certain. (Participants can still elect to receive a joint and survivor benefit at a slightly reduced level of payment.)

2019 Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2016 level and adjusted current benefit payments previously frozen at the 2010 levels to reflect the new amounts as appropriate.

3. Funding

All organized churches are expected to pay church assessments determined by an amount per active professing member age 18 and older or, if greater, the direct costs of their first or only pastor's participation in the plan. The amount of the assessment for 2021 is $42.96 per member in Canada and $37.20 in the United States, and direct costs have been set at

$9,840 and $7,704, respectively. These amounts are collected by means of monthly billings to each organized church, based on reported membership statistics.

All emerging churches and other denominational ministries that employ a minister as a missionary, professor, teacher, or in any other capacity, including organizations that employ endorsed chaplains (with the exception of chaplains serving in the military who are not yet entitled to receive any military pension benefits) are required to pay the annual cost of participation in the plan. All pension assessments, however determined, are billed monthly, and the grant of credited service for pastors is contingent on timely payment of amounts billed.

B. Employees' retirement plans

The employees' retirement plans are defined-contribution plans covering most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries who are not ordained as ministers of the Word. Beginning January 1, 2020, the denomination introduced an additional defined-contribution plan for commissioned pastors and staff at U.S. churches. The plan is a 403(b)(9) plan that offers a housing allowance tax benefit for pastors upon retirement. Commissioned pastors in the denominational agencies and ministries have become participants in this new plan. In the United States, contributions are paid to the plans by participating denominational agencies and ministries in an amount up to 6 percent of compensation. An additional employer contribution of up to 4 percent of compensation is made to match employee contributions of a similar amount. U.S. churches with staff participating in the 403(b)(9) plan set the contribution rates independently. In Canada, contributions of up to 9 percent are paid to the plan by participating employers. In Canada, there are no contributions made to the plan relative to matching employee contributions. In both plans, participants may make additional contributions up to the limits determined by federal or provincial regulation. Participants receive periodic statements indicating the dollar amount credited to their accounts, the value of their accounts, and the vested percentage.

Individual participants direct the investment of their account balances among several investment alternatives, including fixed-income and equity funds. The investment alternatives are currently managed for U.S. participants by Empower Retirement and Envoy Financial, while Great-West Trust serves as custodian of the plan's assets. For Canadian participants, Sun Life Financial Group manages and serves as custodian of the plan's assets.

As of December 31, 2020, the balances in these plans totaled approximately $41,738,000 in the United States and $6,624,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 364 participants in the U.S. plans and 91 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	Canada
Active	237	89
Inactive	127	2

C. Nonretirement employee benefit programs

Oversight of the denomination's nonretirement employee benefit programs is provided by the Council of Delegates.

Consolidated Group Insurance is a denominational plan that offers health, dental, and life coverage in Canada to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 343 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 235 pastors and employees of local churches, 107 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and one retiree. The plan in Canada is a fully insured plan with coverage purchased through a major health-insurance provider and is supplemental to health benefits available through government health programs.

In the United States, the denomination offers health, dental, and life coverage to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 521 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 182 pastors and employees of local churches, 205 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 134 retirees. The plans are provided by the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) through a trust established to fund benefits and expenses of the plan. RBA was established in July 2013 by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the Board of Benefit Services of the Reformed Church in America to provide nonretirement benefit programs for both denominations.

Premiums charged by the plan in Canada are set by the insurance carrier. The premiums for the U.S. plan are set by RBA based on overall expectations of claims and administrative expenses for the coming year.

D. Financial disclosures

Audited or reviewed financial statements of the retirement plans and of all of the agencies and institutions are made available each year to the treasurer of each classis with the request that they be made available to any interested party. In addition, summary financial statements are included in the *Acts of Synod.* Individualized statements are furnished to active members of the ministers' pension plans and the employees' retirement plans.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Canadian Pension Trustees and the U.S. Pension Trustees and to John H. Bolt when insurance matters and matters pertaining to insurance and retirement plans for ministers and employees are discussed.

B. That synod designate up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2021 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1) but only to the extent that the pension is used to rent or provide a home.

C. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint one member to a second three-year term on the U.S. Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2021, and elect one nominee to a first term beginning July 1, 2022.

D. That synod by way of the ballot elect two nominees to a first term and reappoint one member to a second three-year term on the Canadian Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2021.

Pensions and Insurance
John H. Bolt, director of finance and operations

Raise Up Global Ministries

I. Introduction

Raise Up Global Ministries equips global church leaders by (1) developing biblically based interactive materials and (2) training facilitators to lead change in their communities. Raise Up is a partnership of three programs of the CRC: Global Coffee Break, Timothy Leadership Training, and Educational Care.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

In the past ministry year, God used a pandemic to push the programs of Raise Up out of the box. Each program experienced loss, change, and new opportunities. The mission remained steady, but methods changed. In the spirit of interactive learning, as you read through the following reports, consider where you see the five ministry priorities of Our Calling at work. Where do you see faith being formed, servant leaders being equipped, global mission taking place, mercy and justice being practiced, and the gospel being proclaimed?

A. Global Coffee Break

Global Coffee Break (GCB) serves churches and small group leaders around the world with vision, training, and resources for relational, small group Bible discovery so that people develop faith in Christ and together grow in him. Put succinctly, GCB helps churches invite neighbors to discover God's story together. Training, coaching, and networking prepare church leaders in North America and around the world. GCB produces and distributes the *Discover Your Bible* study series to support this work.

The COVID-19 pandemic closed the door to in-person events and opened a door to online learning. In spite of the pandemic in 2020, GCB increased its number of conferences, coaching, and training events. Korean Coffee Break leaders took the lead in moving to Zoom training and conferences. In August, more than 100 leaders attended an online Korean Coffee Break conference. In November, 100 people joined an online weekend retreat. Participants came from the four corners of the United States—Alaska, Florida, California, and Maine—as well as from Canada, Mexico, and Korea! In addition, GCB program manager Juan Sierra led Zoom training for leaders from the CRC of Liberia and continued using technology in relationships with global partners.

COVID-19 made an impact on group life. Some groups stopped meeting, and our print book sales suffered. But many other groups took advantage of our new option to order digital studies and continued to meet by Zoom, in parking lots, or parks. Coffee Break groups continued to see people meet Jesus. A leader in Washington shared that a newcomer, who had never opened a Bible, joined their Zoom Coffee Break group. They scrambled to get her a Bible and a *Discover Mark* study guide. Her questions open their eyes and give them joy. They are watching the Holy Spirit open her heart to God's story. Another group in Illinois found a Bible for a newcomer. That church's pastor says, "Coffee Break has been and continues to be their most effective evangelistic strategy."

God has opened doors, and GCB will follow these new opportunities. More online training opportunities will develop as we eagerly await and plan for in-person training and conferences. A diverse team helped revise *Discover Genesis* for fall 2020 and spring 2021. This study reflects the commitment to resource group discovery. A brand new study, *Discover Revelation 1-3*, will be ready for sale in July 2021. More translations of the well-loved studies will be made available in Korean and Spanish, as well as Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Nepalese.

B. Timothy Leadership Training

Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) serves the underresourced global church through the development and stewardship of biblically rooted and contextually relevant training resources, equipping leaders for faithful and flourishing ministry. In other words, TLT provides accessible training resources for church leaders who need it most. TLT delivers training and resources through partnerships with mission agencies and churches.

When the pandemic hit, TLT encouraged leaders to suspend in-person TLT activities. Training events in thirty-plus countries around the world came to a screeching halt. God led. In February, TLT had launched two Trainer's Care Networks. The networks resourced and connected leaders for shared learning and support on WhatsApp. Early in the pandemic, TLT revised a manual written for the 2014 Ebola crisis. This was rapidly translated into over twenty languages and distributed to hundreds of TLT facilitators and partners. Families and small groups continued with TLT, using *Loving Your Neighbor in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. One young girl created an action plan to draw water for handwashing each morning. A pastor in Bangladesh said that the manual helped his church members have a shared awareness of the facts about COVID-19 and encouraged members to continue to reach out to neighbors in safe ways. He told his congregation that taking those steps would help nonbelievers have a positive view of Christians and enthusiasm for learning about Christ.

More innovations took place. TLT partnered with a mobile technology ministry called Relay Trust to modify the COVID-19 manual into a WhatsApp video format. The creative distribution of the study by phone allows people with low internet bandwidth or limited access to print materials to engage with the interactive study. This successful experiment led to the development of a new study, also distributed on WhatsApp videos, called "God's Unfailing Love." This three-part study is a follow-up to the COVID-19 manual, and it pastorally encourages leaders who are serving in a context of hardship and suffering.

TLT also continued to develop new resources and partnerships. A draft of a new TLT manual, *Fear Not: A Christian Attitude to Spirit Powers* was completed and will be piloted. This study and other training resources are being developed with rich and diverse input from global TLT participants. In addition, TLT forged new partnerships to expand TLT in India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Program manager Albert Strydhorst also led a Zoom group of Burmese church leaders in Indianapolis through the TLT manual *Caring for God's People*. By the grace of God, TLT will continue to develop more ministry partnerships characterized by mutual respect and

shared learning. TLT will continue to innovate in making interactive training and materials more accessible to people around the world.

C. Educational Care

Educational Care (EC) equips school communities with a new perspective based on a God-centered, biblically informed program of learning that results in holistically educated people becoming salt and light in the world. In short, EC inspires and provides useful tools to help educators take care of God's children. EC facilitators train and coach school leaders using interactive learning manuals for change in schools, families, and communities.

The work of equipping teachers in schools was also limited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools, teachers, parents, and children around the world were greatly affected by stay-at-home orders. Even so, EC facilitators continued to stay in contact with schools and displaced teachers. Mark Wiersma helped schools in Nigeria develop safe COVID-19 protocols. A handful of training events took place in person and on Zoom. During this time, EC facilitators formed an interim leadership team. Great work took place as the team shared best practices and identified ways to contextualize EC for different settings: Christian schools; government schools; rural; urban—Bible friendly or not—and more. A subteam worked on revising EC manuals, developing facilitator training resources, and updating a facilitators' guide.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Raise Up Global Ministries is directed by core values aligned with the milestones of *Our Journey 2025*. Each program engages the milestones in various ways, as our sample stories illustrate.

Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline: DYB studies and TLT and EC manuals are based on the Bible. Group participants read the text, talk about it together, and decide what they will do as a result of what they have learned. Learning is put into practice and results in life and ministry change. Prayer is essential to the process. For example, the idea of an evangelistic Bible study was imagined through the prayers of a CRC church plant more than fifty years ago. Today leaders continue to lead from a posture of prayer. A Coffee Break group in Cedar Springs, Michigan, always ends with prayer. The prayer is conversational. They talk to God about what they have learned and what they need.

Listening to the voices of every generation: All three Raise Up programs use facilitated group learning practices. Group learning involves active listening and empowers all voices to participate. Diana Boot, a Resonate Christian education specialist, witnessed the impact of intergenerational learning at an EC training in Uganda. The group was attended by young teachers and a wise, deeply respected, community elder. He joined in to color butterflies while they all discussed the multiple ways in which students learned. His humility, presence, and participation modeled openness to learning and willingness to change.

Sharing the gospel and living it missionally/planting new churches as we connect with our local and global ministry contexts: Raise Up equips and strengthens the global church with accessible resources that can be adapted and contextualized. The same pastor from Bangladesh also shares this story: "As I was

praying, a thought came to my mind. The [COVID-19] manual is suitable for believers who have a Bible—they can look up the verses. But we can use the manual for evangelism too, if we add the verses into the manual." They added extra pages to the manual with Bible passages and distributed the manuals with food packages to about twenty families who are out of work because of the lockdown. They believe the food and Word will give their neighbors strength!

In churches, communities, and schools, we journey together in raising up leaders. Our next steps will remain, as ever, centered around the Word, prayer, groups, and listening.

Raise Up Global Ministries
Sam Huizenga, director

ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International)

I. Introduction—Mission and mandate

ReFrame Ministries serves as the worldwide media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Our ministry today looks much different than when it launched as a single English radio program, *The Back to God Hour*, in 1939. Today our vision is that the lives and worldviews of all people around the globe will be transformed by God's gospel message.

Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we create contextual media resources that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world in ten major languages. This work takes place through four core strategic focal points:

- Church rooted: We believe that the Holy Spirit works through the church, so we partner with churches to build and strengthen the body of Christ.
- Major languages: We strive to reach the widest possible audience, so we create content in the world's most-spoken languages.
- Context driven: We work with local partners who faithfully contextualize the gospel message and use the most effective media for connecting with diverse audiences.
- Relationship focused: Following the example of Christ, we seek to build long-term, discipling relationships with individual members of our mass audiences.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The focus of ReFrame Ministries is primarily global mission. All of our work is guided by the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Naturally, much of our work also falls under other parts of the CRCNA's fivefold calling as we seek to work alongside churches and ministries worldwide.

A. Global mission

ReFrame carries out ministry in ten major world languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Using media, ReFrame is uniquely positioned to provide gospel outreach in nearly every country of the world, even in places where Christian missionaries are not allowed. By proclaiming the gospel through radio, television, internet, mobile apps, and social media, we are able to reach people who may not otherwise have access to a community of believers or a safe way to ask life's difficult questions. We regularly receive responses from people around the world who testify that they heard about Jesus for the first time through the media resources produced by ReFrame.

1. ReFrame employs about 150 Indigenous staff members working around the world. ReFrame has a ministry presence in 55 countries through production and discipleship centers, broadcast locations, and resource distribution. ReFrame reaches people in nearly every country through internet and mobile application resources.

2. ReFrame's international ministry teams have developed 28 ministry websites in 10 languages supported by 67 social media sites. ReFrame produces 50 radio/audio programs and 36 TV/video programs.

3. We distribute more than one million printed devotional booklets each year in five languages. In general, the number of print daily devotions has decreased as we are able to reach more people in more places digitally through email, Facebook, and smartphone apps. We send more than 250,000 devotional emails daily—and this number increases every day.

B. Faith formation on the global mission field

ReFrame provides faith formation resources in the English language, primarily for North American audiences. To learn more about these resources, see section III of this report or visit ReFrameMinistries.org/English.

Culturally relevant discipleship resources are also available in the nine other languages in which ReFrame works. Produced and distributed in print, online, on social media channels, and through smartphone apps, devotions and faith formation resources are bringing God's Word to people around the world.

1. Audio programs apply God's Word directly to people's lives through Bible teaching programs, offering Reformed and biblical perspectives on current cultural issues within the context of the nations where we do ministry.

   For example, as COVID-19 came to the forefront of people's minds in 2020, each of our ministries adapted their programs' core messages to discuss what God's Word says about pandemics, death, and hope in Christ.

2. ReFrame offers print resources, including devotional guides in nearly every language ministry. In total, ReFrame mails or hands out about 2.1 million devotional guides and other gospel-centered materials every year. Much of this content is also available online. In all 10 language ministries, ReFrame regularly hears from people who are grateful to have a meaningful reflection on God's Word.

   For example, one reader of our *Today* devotions shared, "On days of excess stress, I can read and reread your devotions and get a refreshing breath of God's grace. Thank you so much."

3. As video-based programs become increasingly popular and accessible, ReFrame now has 36 different video programs across its ministries. These programs range from daily, two-minute devotional reflections to hour-long church services that took the place of in-person visits while people were restricted from gathering during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these video programs offers the hope of God's truth in an easily accessible format. Most of the programs are available on social media sites as well as YouTube.

   After watching a video from our Spanish ministry team, Maria wrote, "You are a blessing. One of the good things about confinement is the exchange of messages and reflections that we hear daily. We see God using pastors for his holy ministry. God bless you!"

C. Servant leadership on the global mission field

1. ReFrame Ministries is blessed to work with Indigenous leaders gifted in both ministry and media. These leaders and their teams provide culturally relevant outreach in each of our 10 language ministries.

2. International ministry leaders include Pastor Martin Nathan (Arabic); Pastor Jerry An (Chinese); Robin Basselin and Justin Sterenberg (English codirectors); Rev. Masao Yamashita (Japanese); Rev. Arliyanus Larosa (Indonesian); Rev. Hernandes Lopes (Portuguese); Rev. Sergei Sosedkin (Russian); Rev. Huascar de la Cruz (Spanish). French ministry coordinators include Rev. Marc Nabie in Burkina Faso, Rev. Jacky Chéry in Haiti, and Rabo Godi in Niger.

   Several of these leaders are new to their positions in the past two years. We praise God for providing these leaders just in time for a global pandemic, as media ministry suddenly became even more important than we had known before.

   a. Rev. Arliyanus Larosa was officially commissioned in January 2020. As COVID-19 hit Indonesia, he started 12 new video programs that people could access on social media.

   b. Robin Basselin and Justin Sterenberg's appointment as codirectors came in fall 2019. Together, they led the English ministry team to create several new publications and resources for North Americans that have experienced a lot of trauma in just the past few years. This includes resources for celebrating holidays at home, audio programs that address racial injustice, and videos featuring ways that Christian kids helped people respond to COVID-19.

   c. Rev. Huascar de la Cruz officially became the Spanish media ministry leader at the end of October 2019. His appointment was providential. Just a few months later, a state-owned television station reached out and asked him to produce a special Sunday program that would allow people to worship from home in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This marked one of the only times this station has allowed religious content in its programming.

2. Pastor Jerry An facilitates symposia for Chinese-speaking church leaders in both Asia and North America to promote the use of media for gospel outreach.

3. The goal of all ReFrame-related training events is to equip leaders for sharing the gospel in the context to which God has called them.

   a. French ministry leader Rev. Marc Nabie expanded Timothy Leadership Training events in several West African nations.

   b. In India and nearby countries, ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader facilitated leadership training events for pastors, church leaders, media producers, and vacation Bible school teachers.

   c. Rev. Sergei Sosedkin and his team provided leadership seminars for Russian-speaking students and future church leaders who are attending universities in Russia and Ukraine.

D. Mercy and justice on the global mission field

While the mission of ReFrame is primarily global media missions, ministry teams and partners have opportunities to provide comfort and assistance to people who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and disadvantaged. Many

ReFrame programs provide messages of hope for people who are living in incredibly difficult circumstances—questioning their beliefs in places where it could be dangerous to do so, living in physical poverty, or suffering from sickness. In these ways we also address issues of social justice through our various programs in several languages.

1. Our ministry partners in India practice a holistic approach, providing for physical as well as spiritual needs. The team makes a special effort to distribute food and sanitary equipment, since many of their listeners are in the lowest castes of Indian society.

2. Our English ministry's *Family Fire* staff have been producing materials for people who are experiencing pain and brokenness in their lives.

3. With the goal of teaching and encouraging Christ-followers to live out their faith, ReFrame also produces the *Think Christian* online blog and the *Groundwork* audio program, regularly offering discussions on issues related to biblical justice.

For example, in September 2020, *Groundwork* host and Calvin Theological Seminary professor Rev. Scott Hoezee shared the following on a *Groundwork* episode titled, "Answer God's Call for Justice": "COVID-19 has reminded us that society just isn't fair. . . . Poorer people don't have health maintenance organizations that they are part of, so when they get sick with COVID-19, they are much more likely to die of it. . . . Followers of Jesus should lament this; and although we might have different ideas on how to reform health care and the like, . . . we should say: Something has to be done."

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

The core mission of ReFrame is gospel proclamation through a variety of media, sharing the gospel with people wherever they are in the world. ReFrame continually seeks out culturally relevant and effective ways to proclaim the gospel and call people into relationship with God.

1. We have increasingly moved to a model of partnership with local denominations and organizations in our international ministries. This provides a greater opportunity for local ownership and sustainability. In Brazil, for example, we partner closely with congregations in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil to distribute biblical content for church members and the communities they serve in missions—including communities as far as Angola in southern Africa.

2. As our world moves toward using less and less paper, ReFrame expands the CRC's use of digital outreach for sharing the gospel: developing new apps, growing email and social media audiences, and sharing almost all content online, even if it is also available offline.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

ReFrame offers a variety of programs and resources to help congregations and individuals work toward the milestones named in our denominational ministry plan, *Our Journey 2025*.

A. Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline

Our English ministry team has grown a network of more than 7,500 prayer partners in North America and throughout the world who pray for people responding to our media outreach programs. This number has been growing exponentially over the past few years, as has the number of prayer requests coming in to the ministry.

Our *Today* devotions, produced since 1950, are available in print, at TodayDevotional.com, by email subscription, on podcast websites, and through mobile applications. We print and distribute about 210,000 *Today* booklets six times each year, and more than 260,000 people have signed up to access the *Today* emails. In addition, about 75,000 people use the *Today* devotional app on their mobile devices.

Groundwork is a 30-minute audio program and podcast that builds biblical foundations for life. *Groundwork* guides listeners in casual but thoughtful conversations about practical applications of God's Word in today's world. You can listen on the air or online at GroundworkOnline.com.

Think Christian is a collaborative online magazine that invites readers to practice seeing God in all things—particularly popular music, movies, television, and other forms of pop culture. Rooted in the Reformed tradition, *Think Christian* recognizes that all of culture falls within God's sovereignty and that by his common grace believers and unbelievers alike are capable of creating beautiful things.

Family Fire is an online community (through Facebook and the website FamilyFire.com) that provides resources to spiritually strengthen families through articles, devotions, email and social media interaction, and live retreat events.

B. Listening to voices of every generation

Kids Corner is a children's program especially geared toward children ages 6-12. This program has transitioned from a single audio program to a growing collection of online resources for children's spiritual growth that can be delivered across North America. *Kids Corner* launched a new website in 2020, making all 20 seasons of our audio series more readily available and—using online episode guides—more interactive.

Kids Corner launched new videos in 2019 along with a graphic novel that tells the story of the Bible. A video series called *Kids in Action* gives kids the opportunities to tell their own stories within the *Kids Corner* audience about how they are living out God's Word.

People of all ages respond to the messages in our *Today* devotions. A class of high school students responded to the December 2020 devotions, written by retired CRC pastor Rev. Arthur Schoonveld, with a photography project. The students read the devotions, looked for daily reminders of the topics in the messages, and snapped photos related to those topics. The students also wrote reflections about their discoveries.

C. Growing in diversity and unity as we build relationships

ReFrame's global outreach is strengthened through crucial networks of North American and international partners. Strong collaborations create effective partnerships for mission and allow resources to be invested wisely. In addition to our connections with the various ministries in the CRCNA, ReFrame works cooperatively with the following Reformed denominations

worldwide: the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church in Japan, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico, the Indonesian Christian Church, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile. In addition, we partner with evangelical congregations in Eastern Europe, in Africa, and in India and surrounding countries—and with house churches and Christian ministries in China.

ReFrame Ministries has also partnered with the CRC's Korean Council since 2008 to publish a bilingual Korean-English version of the *Today* devotions.

D. Sharing the gospel, living it missionally, and planting new churches as we connect with our local and global ministry contexts

1. *Church Juice* helps churches be intentional about how to use the wide variety of media tools available to them in order to effectively communicate with their congregations and communities.

   Church Juice offers virtual and in-person opportunities for church communicators to come together, learn, and encourage one another. If you have questions about how your church can improve its communications, start a conversation with *Church Juice* producer Bryan Haley. Email him anytime at bryan@churchjuice.com.

2. ReFrame's English ministry produces ebooks as downloadable PDF files. Several are also available in print for group discussion or personal growth. Topics from the newest resources include "pop Psalms" (*Think Christian*), bullying (*Kids Corner*), "Blue Christmas" (*Today*), and "How Do I Pray?" (ReFrame's prayer ministry).

3. ReFrame's Japanese ministry team offers videos to churches that are part of the Reformed Church in Japan. These videos help to introduce the church to prospective visitors and seekers and offer a glimpse of what a Sunday is like in a typical church. In this way ReFrame helps to grow the global church in Japan using media resources.

4. ReFrame's Hindi ministry team supports the work of church planters in northern India. The team hosts radio-program listener gatherings and offers resources to communities of believers. These gatherings often take place at house churches that are growing into church plants.

IV. Recommendations

A. That Rev. Kurt Selles, director of ReFrame Ministries, be given the privilege of the floor when ReFrame matters are discussed.

B. That synod encourage congregations to use ReFrame's materials to support their own local ministries and outreach.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

ReFrame Ministries
Kurt Selles, director

Resonate Global Mission

I. Introduction

Gospel mission is essential. In a year that has been especially difficult—as churches have grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, political division, protests, and so much more—we are more confident than ever that gospel mission must remain a priority for the Christian Reformed Church.

We are grateful to you, the members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, for your continued support for ministry through the COVID-19 crisis. This year many ministries and missionaries needed extra support to transition to a new way of doing ministry remotely, and you were there to help. Thanks to you, missionaries, church planters, and other ministry leaders are able to respond and adapt.

Synod has mandated Resonate to lead the denomination in its task of bringing the gospel holistically to the people of North America and the world. Our key strategies of forming leaders, sending congregations, and connecting networks have proven to be resilient and effective in the face of this year's challenges. We are thankful to God and to you, our brothers and sisters who join us on mission, for what we've accomplished together: keeping mission workers safe, and keeping mission work going.

Resonate partners with you, your church, and Christians in more than forty countries who minister to people of different faiths and cultures. Thanks to your support, the good news of Jesus is going out like an expanding, amplifying sound around the world!

Here at home, we help our churches discover God's plan for their community and join in. Each congregation and each one of us has a role to play in God's mission, and Resonate wants to help you respond to God's call.

We do not yet know all that will happen in all the mission fields where your missionaries, church planters, campus ministers, and other mission workers are serving. But, together with you, we are committed to continuing our work as Resonate: to deepen your passion for mission, strengthen your capacity to follow God on mission, and amplify the impact you and your church have in your neighborhood and around the world.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Of the five ministry priorities in Our Calling, Resonate's main focus is *global mission*. In this regard, Resonate's growing impact on the Christian Reformed Church is most apparent in three strategic areas: forming leaders, sending congregations, and connecting networks.

These broad categories are essential to encompass the mission work of this denomination, work that spans the globe and carries forward more than a century of passion for God's mission. Here is how these three strategies help mobilize Christian Reformed churches to participate in God's mission and proclaim the gospel worldwide.

A. Forming leaders

Missional leaders live out, influence, invite, and equip others to join God's mission. Your partnership with Resonate is working to see an increasing number of Christians formed to engage and lead others on God's mission. Mission work using this strategy includes the following:

1. Campus ministry: Resonate engages universities and colleges in ministry on more than forty campuses across North America. Resonate is investing in training and supporting campus ministers to be a faithful presence on campuses and to help students discover God's will for their lives.

2. Leadership development: We are all missionaries, and our mission field is all around us! Resonate is investing in identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers worldwide through initiatives like seminary education and training opportunities in which leaders work alongside others in their communities—whether in North America or overseas.

3. Global mission education: Our staff members walk alongside congregations to encourage them in fulfilling God's mission. Resonate is investing in training mission committees, forging partnerships, and working with young adults whom God is calling to mission work.

Example and Story: A New Direction

Maura was an isolated teenager who didn't take faith seriously. But then she joined an IMPACT club facilitated by the Nehemiah Center, a Resonate Global Mission partner in Nicaragua, and her life took a new direction.

A Resonate initiative, IMPACT clubs equip and empower young people to be servant leaders in their communities. At each meeting, they play games, learn about faith, grow as a leader, and find creative solutions to challenges facing their communities. Any young person in elementary, middle, or high school can get involved.

At each IMPACT club meeting, leaders teach lessons from a biblical perspective. As weeks passed, Maura learned more about God and what it looks like to live like Christ. IMPACT leaders taught Maura how much God loves her; they encouraged her to think about the dreams God has given her for herself, her family, and her community; they inspired her to be a better person.

And one day, Maura realized she didn't want to live without God.

"I decided to accept Jesus as my Savior because I realized that, without God, I am nothing or no one," said Maura. "But in him I am sure. There is no one in the world who loves me more than him. He created me, gave me life, and sustains me . . . with him it is easier to face problems."

Maura is one of the twenty young people in Nicaragua who accepted Christ through an IMPACT club that you help to support through Resonate. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/maura.

B. Sending congregations

Jesus sends all of his followers into the world as his witnesses. Your partnership with Resonate is working to see an increasing number of diverse, locally rooted, and globally connected congregations and ministries sent to faithfully proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus. Mission work using this strategy includes the following:

1. Church planting: Starting new churches is a vital part of Resonate's ministry and is a priority for the CRCNA in the *Our Journey 2025* ministry plan. New churches are the most effective tool we have to reach new groups of

people. Resonate is investing in recruiting, training, coaching, encouragement, and resources for new churches.

2. Strengthening churches: Our local congregations are one of the richest resources for mission. Resonate helps established churches to discover and unleash God's plan for their time and place. Resonate is investing in strengthening churches for mission both locally and globally.

3. Discipleship: The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians worldwide, calling them into a deeper life of faith. Resonate is investing in discipling and training Christians who are discovering God's plan for their lives.

4. Evangelism: The work of church planters and missionaries has grown the global church in amazing ways, but more than 1.5 billion people still have not heard the gospel! Resonate is investing in training people to witness and proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ.

Example and Story: Supporting Church Plants during the COVID-19 pandemic

When the coronavirus pandemic forced many churches throughout the world to take worship gatherings online, many church plants like Bridge Church—a new CRC plant in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta—didn't have the equipment. The unexpected shift to go online was not in the budget.

Trusting that they would be able to pay for equipment someday, somehow, Pastor Ryan Pedde and his team purchased a camera, audio gear, and a license for an online video platform.

Just a few days later, the church plant received an email from Resonate's church-planting team with a list of CRCNA resources available to help support church plants during the coronavirus pandemic—among that list was a "COVID-19 Support Grant" offering up to $1,200 for equipment that would help keep church plants connected during the pandemic.

"Talk about a God thing!" said Pedde. "[Financial giving in our church plant] is uncertain, and to have this cost taken by Resonate is a big deal."

Cornerstone Church, a CRC plant in New York City, also applied for and received the COVID-19 Support Grant from Resonate.

"We moved everything online—prayer, Bible study, discipleship, community groups," said Pastor Brian Na. "We needed to buy a lot of tech equipment to accommodate that."

Cornerstone Church launched in January 2020, and many people who have been plugged into the church plant are new Christians or people who are interested in learning more about Christ. Na said that staying connected online is essential for their growth and understanding.

Na also said that the church plant's online ministry opens up new possibilities to connect with people in their community—especially during a time when many people are anxious, stressed, or lonely as they stay home and physically distance themselves from family, friends, and neighbors.

"This will help our church plant to spread the word in our communities that we are here and everyone can still be connected," said Na.

Bridge Church can already testify that technology has helped them reach more people. "We usually have 150 in attendance [on a Sunday

morning],” said Pedde. “Through live streaming, we had 1,800 people tune in last Sunday!”

Thank you for partnering with Resonate to support church plants during this challenging time! Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/tech-grants.

C. Connecting networks

As more people join God on mission, we want to see people working together for spiritual and social transformation in their neighborhoods and around the world. Your partnership with Resonate works to foster an increasing number of networks of leaders connected in relationships of mutual learning, trust, and influence. Mission work using this strategy includes the following:

1. Coaching leaders of holistic mission networks to help local churches come together and accomplish more than they could if working alone.
2. Sending holistic mission network developers and community chaplains in partnership with local congregations.
3. Developing new experiments and methods of mission work so that networks around the globe can learn from one another.
4. Connecting pastors, church planters, and ministry leaders who need support with people who have vital resources to offer, such as experience, coaching, and encouragement.

Example and Story: It Takes a Network to Feed a Neighborhood

Mission Montréal, a Resonate Global Mission partner, is meeting needs in the city during the coronavirus pandemic by packing and delivering food baskets—and it’s taking a network to make it possible. A collaborative effort of Resonate, Diaconal Ministries Canada, First CRC Montréal, Classis Eastern Canada, and Christian Direction, Mission Montréal is a network that brings together ministries, churches, nonprofits, and other organizations within the city.

When the coronavirus hit, universities in Montréal shut down and university students found themselves facing a lot of challenges—especially international students. Christians in the community were anxious to help with food security. Concordia Food Coalition at Concordia University was trying to help students but couldn’t do it alone. They contacted Mission Montréal.

“We started making food baskets for students,” said Jacynthe Vaillancourt, who leads campus ministry for Mission Montréal.

It would have been a daunting project for just one church or ministry—and that is why Resonate’s work developing holistic mission networks is so important. Because Mission Montréal is a network of people and organizations working together, they are able to meet more needs in the community and to reach more people.

Working with nonprofits, churches, and campus ministries, Mission Montréal has been able to provide about 300 food baskets each week packed with fruits, vegetables, grains, tomato sauce, pasta, and eggs.

Thank you for supporting Resonate partners like Mission Montréal! As individuals, nonprofits, churches, and other ministries work together, we're able to do more for God's kingdom—in this case, by providing food for students, families, and individuals who were in need. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/montreal.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Resonate is an extension of your local church, and we exist to serve you and walk with you as you join God's mission in your own neighborhood and around the world.

Our Christian Reformed congregations are our most important ministry partners. Alongside the updated *Our Journey 2025* ministry plan for the denomination, Resonate has resolved to prioritize four main ministry areas that fit in and help champion mission work among our churches.

One of the most significant areas Resonate can help CRC congregations in mission is in the area of diaspora ministry and ministry with ethnic minorities. Our churches and society are struggling now with critical issues of diversity and justice. However, CRC churches have opportunities to share the life-giving gospel of Christ with people in their communities who may look, speak, and act differently. God's vision for his church is a unified body of people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9). Churches young and old throughout North America are working to be the hands and feet of Christ and to spread the gospel, and Resonate is committed to walking alongside on this journey of mission.

Following are the four areas Resonate will walk alongside your church as they minister with different groups of people.

A. Develop young adults and lay leaders for mission

We will open space for diverse groups of young adults and lay leaders, equipping, mentoring and discipling them so that together we may share the good news and live out the gospel in all areas of life.

Example and Story: Equipping Students to Share Their Faith

"I've learned a lot this year about being a Christian on a university campus where most of my friends don't believe in God," said Tian, a student at the University of Alberta. With your support, Tian stepped up as a strong Christian leader on her campus.

Tian grew up surrounded by a community of strong, supportive believers. For that, she is thankful—but when she got to university, her faith was challenged. Most of her classmates and friends were not religious.

"I suddenly became shy about expressing my faith or even talking about religion at all, even if people asked. I just didn't know what to say, and I didn't want people to judge me for it," said Tian.

But then Tian met Rick Mast, your partner campus minister at the University of Alberta.

Twice a week, Rick set up a table in the residence hall where Tian lived and chatted with students who passed by. Sometimes they would talk for hours.

Noticing Tian's passion for faith and her gift for connecting with people, Rick encouraged Tian to step into campus ministry leadership.

You helped make that possible through a Resonate Emerging Leader grant. Mentored by Rick throughout the year, the leadership experience empowered Tian to use her gifts to help shape the campus ministry and minister with students.

"Tian has been a gift from God," said Rick. "She is devout [and] is continually interested in deepening her faith."

Tian said she learned a lot about living out her faith and sharing it with others.

"University was the first time I've ever been around people where it's not 'normal' or accepted to believe in God—or any god, for that matter! Especially among people my age, religion or spirituality just isn't something people want to talk about or discuss, to the point that it's a little taboo," said Tian. "But I really think that's a sad thing, so it's important for me to have the words and space to talk about faith for anyone who'll listen, as well as hear what they have to say."

Thank you for supporting campus ministry and raising up student leaders like Tian! Your support provides a space where students can ask tough questions, grow in faith, and step into leadership. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/tian.

B. Plant churches that participate in broader church-planting movements

We will catalyze the planting of diverse churches locally and globally that seek spiritual and social transformation in their communities.

Example and Story

Carrie Rodgers didn't think she had the skills to plant Alive in Grandville, a Resonate church plant in Michigan, and Allix Hutchison wasn't sure how to step up and serve—but God equipped both of them to be leaders that the new church plant needs.

When Carrie began working at Alive Ministries in 2012, church planting wasn't on her radar. As her role in leading the student ministry program shifted over time, the church staff encouraged her to consider planting a new church.

Carrie was surprised by their recommendation, but she was also prepared to take the first steps of the church planting journey. She had some people in mind to ask to join her. One of them was Allix, whom Carrie got to know through Alive and through a book club.

After graduating college and moving to Hudsonville in 2017 to begin her teaching career, Allix had a difficult time finding the right church where she could grow in her faith and serve at her fullest potential—something she had struggled with for years.

Carrie invited Allix to join her for coffee. As they sat in their favorite coffee shop and sipped their drinks, Carrie told Allix she was going to plant a church, and she asked Allix to join the planting team.

"It takes everybody, and everybody has something to offer," said Carrie. "You don't have to be the person that writes the big checks . . . you can be the person that says, 'I have time and some skills to give, and my heart is in this.'"

Now, not only does Allix provide great administrative support for the church, but she's also a great example of a young leader. Other young

adults at Alive in Grandville are now following her example and offering to serve.

Please pray for the work that God is doing through Resonate's church plants, and pray that more people like Allix will be empowered by the Spirit to become leaders in their churches. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/alive.

C. Equip and encourage congregations in gospel witness

We will challenge, encourage, and equip communities of disciples locally and globally to discern the Holy Spirit's work in their neighborhoods and boldly follow the Spirit into relationships that concretely demonstrate the love of Christ and grow the church.

Example and Story: Iowa Church Follows God to Laos

Nearly 40 years ago, Faith CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, welcomed a refugee family from Laos. After more than a decade, the newcomers—Khay Baccam and his family—became Christians, and Baccam became a church planter among communities of people from Laos in the United States. But as years passed, Baccam also felt the Holy Spirit tugging on his heart for his home country.

Thankfully, Faith CRC belongs to a denomination of churches who are passionate about mission. Ministry opportunities like their partnership in Laos are the reason the CRC formed and supports Resonate Global Mission—to equip churches in Canada and the United States for mission in both their own neighborhoods and around the world. Faith CRC connected with Resonate (then Christian Reformed World Missions) for guidance.

"The church is to be engaged in the mission of God. Resonate equips the church," said Joyce Suh, Resonate's Regional Mission Leader for South and Southeast Asia. Missionaries like Suh, who have served in Southeast Asia, have knowledge and experience in mission. Resonate missionaries have been able to help Faith CRC's Laos Committee take strategic, practical steps forward from the very beginning.

When Faith CRC first started their ministry in Laos, they traveled with a Resonate missionary to the country and met with church leaders. Faith CRC, Resonate, and church leaders of Laos discerned that the church needed leadership training and launched a ministry partnership.

But Faith CRC's partnership with the church in Laos didn't stop there. God has opened up many opportunities for ministry. Together, Faith CRC and their Lao partners have distributed wheelchairs. They've trained soccer coaches to share their faith with children and teenagers. They dismantled grain bins that once stood in Iowa's fields and rebuilt them in Laos's fields. Through all of these efforts, Laotian believers have been able to connect with more people and share with them the hope found in Christ.

Gord Blom, a member of Faith CRC, said his church has not only seen growth in the church in Laos but has witnessed growth in members of their own congregation who are committed to this partnership.

"[Suh] was a great help in focusing our thoughts on the future," said Blom. "The weekend [Suh] was there, three names popped up that I think are really good candidates for the next generation." Suh said that

Resonate is also committed to working with Faith CRC in their partnership in Laos. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/laos.

D. Minister with diaspora communities

We will mobilize believers inside and outside communities of immigrants, migrants, refugees, and international students in a way that welcomes and embraces them, communicates God's love, and calls them to faith in Christ.

Example and Story: Immigrant Congregations around the World

Iglesia Cristiana El Sembrador

Pastor Harold Caicedo and Iglesia Cristiana El Sembrador in California have a mission to build unity in the body of Christ. Their diverse church is made up of people from fourteen countries across Latin America, working together to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their community.

In addition to spreading the Word of God, this congregation meets the needs of their community in other ways. They serve through helping people navigate the immigration process, assisting people with economic problems, and being a faithful presence in a community healing from drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and violence.

A Ministry among Muslims

More than 11,000 Muslims from all over the world have made their homes in West Michigan, including Bosnians, Arabs, Somalis, and many others who are in need of Jesus Christ. A Resonate partner ministry that you support reaches out to African Muslims—they believe God has brought them here for a purpose.

Many of these people are refugees, people who are running from suffering, persecution, or hardship. Your Resonate partner ministry leader has a vision to bring Muslims into fellowship with Christ—to show them the way to faith in the one true God. Already, more than 60 new believers have left Islam and come to faith in Jesus Christ through this church plant!

Berliner Stadtmission

Resonate missionaries David Kromminga and Mary Buteyn are planting a new church directed toward recent immigrants to Berlin. God has already provided them with team members, a mentor, and potential congregants—and, of course, plenty of challenges.

More than a million refugees have crossed Germany's borders in the past year, with tens of thousands settling in Berlin. They are often fleeing repressive societies and war-torn countries. "As people from different nations come together, by his Spirit and sometimes in the strangest ways, God is drawing all sorts of people to himself, adding to Christ's church and building his kingdom," said David. Read more at resonateglobalmission.org/diaspora.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the director of Resonate Global Mission, Zachary King, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to Resonate Global Mission are addressed.

B. That synod, along with the Council of Delegates, encourage all Christian Reformed congregations to recognize the following Sundays as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Resonate Global Mission: Easter, Pentecost, and the second and third Sundays in September.

Notes:

1. Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.
2. Resonate Global Mission and ReFrame Ministries have worked to prepare and submit a comprehensive evaluation of the Global Mission ministry priority that is part of Our Calling. See the evaluation report in the Council of Delegates report for an overview of ministry results since 2017 and key growth areas identified by both agencies.

Resonate Global Mission
Zachary King, director

Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue

I. Introduction

The Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG), operating as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, is a justice and reconciliation ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada. The Centre for Public Dialogue works to encourage active Christian citizenship, studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective, and interacts with policy makers and shapers in a constructive manner. Our focus issues are currently refugee rights and resettlement, Indigenous justice and reconciliation, and climate justice. We also strive to be nimble and responsive on critical issues that come up—for example, responding to proposed Medical Assistance in Dying legislation in 2020.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We seek to work with local churches in an effort to live into the call to seek God's justice and peace in every area of life. We do this in the following ways:

1. Providing liturgical and devotional resources connected to Indigenous justice, refugee rights, and climate care via our website and social media. We support binational efforts like the CRCNA Day of Justice (August), and provide devotional resources in connection with our Lenten challenge and offering Sunday. This past year more than one hundred churches across Canada marked our offering Sunday (Justice and Hope Sunday in March).

2. Gathering local church members to tell stories and think together about Christ's call to justice through our *Do Justice* blog (dojustice.crcna.org). Through our *Do Justice* columnists initiative, CRC and RCA writers from across North America have regularly shared the ways they are wrestling with the call to do justice in their own local contexts. Our thirteen regular columnists (including six persons of color) focus on specific issues from poverty to climate change to Reformed theological reflections to refugee sponsorship. We also regularly run series to dig deeper into specific issues. Series topics this past year have included international students, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and not growing weary in doing justice.

3. Working closely with the Canadian Ministries justice mobilizer, Cindy Stover, to develop and animate learning opportunities on justice and reconciliation. During the pandemic, these opportunities have pivoted to virtual learning sessions, including online advocacy webinars and recorded video presentations, as well as longer-term engagement projects such as a weeklong Youth Ambassadors of Reconciliation online journey and an eight-month Hearts Exchanged reconciliation-focused community of practice.

4. The intensifying political and cultural turbulence of our day (related to populism, the digitization and consumerization of political decision-making, and digitally driven cultural individualism) requires a faithful liturgical (public good/service) and prophetic salt-and-light response. For this reason, and inspired in part by synodical deliberations, CCG engages in regular discernment and dialogue on biblical and theological principles for public discipleship. Programmatically this became manifest in our responses to COVID-19, including reflections on Romans 13 in video and in written format.

B. Mercy and justice

We assist local churches in loving mercy and doing justice as follows:

1. Communicating with government through direct interaction with policy makers and shapers from our office in Ottawa, Ontario, and through mobilizing Christian citizens to interact with their elected representatives. We continue to work closely with partners to help local churches respond to urgent issues of justice and reconciliation. These partnerships include World Renew, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Canadian Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, KAIROS, and Citizens for Public Justice. This year we encouraged and supported church members on a number of significant advocacy issues including the support and welcome of refugees through the Continuing Welcome campaign. We continue to work with the Climate Witness Project to encourage local responsibility and citizen advocacy for climate justice.

2. Responding to requests for information from churches and members on current issues of concern. This has included requests for information on Israel/Palestine, religious freedom, medical assistance in dying, and more.

3. Working with CRCNA partners to bring justice-themed learning experiences to churches. We have worked with World Renew and refugee service providers to refresh our *World Refugee Day Toolkit*, with particular emphasis on supporting refugees during the pandemic. *Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy* is a practical citizen planning and action tool that is being relaunched with updated materials in Canada and newly launched in the United States in partnership with the Office of Social Justice. In addition, the Hearts Exchanged program launched in two pilot locations in the eastern and western regions of Canada with a focus on supporting congregants in their reconciliation journeys. Planning beyond these pilot cohorts will see Hearts Exchanged expand to all classes/regions in Canada in 2021.

4. In light of the fifth anniversary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, we continue to connect with churches through our Education Together campaign. We build on churches' understanding of the importance of community involvement in education, and we advocate with them to support this essential right for Indigenous youth.

5. We worked closely with the Indigenous Settler Working Group of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada to produce *Stewarding Sacred Seeds*—a reflection on evangelical action for reconciliation since 1995 that includes

exciting new commitments to action and relationships between Indigenous Christians and evangelicals.

C. Gospel proclamation and worship

Doing justice and reconciliation is gospel proclamation—we know and celebrate that Christ is renewing all things and that he calls us to be colaborers in this task. When the church does justice, our witness is stronger and has more integrity. As such, the work and partnerships mentioned above are an element of gospel proclamation and are motivated by a conviction that justice and worship are integrated.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

A. Engaging younger members

Young people make up the largest portion of our *Do Justice* blog audience: just under one-third of our readers are under age 34, and more than 50 percent are under age 44. In addition, a quarter of our social media followers are under age 44. We continue to seek new ways of connecting with younger members, including partnering on the second season of the *Do Justice* podcast and a new Instagram channel.

B. Assisting churches within their local contexts

We regularly connect with churches across the country to help them seek justice. We were able to convert many of our learning events and coaching sessions into virtual opportunities. In 2020 we adapted to offer three Faith in Action Advocacy webinars; two Justice 101 workshops; multiple video conferences on racial reconciliation, refugee justice, and Centre for Public Dialogue priorities; and an online Blanket Exercise workshop. We supported our Climate Witness Project partners in their binational screening of the film *The Story of Plastic* and subsequent regional Zoom discussions. We connected with the Northern Caucus of Classis B.C. North-West to support their discussions on tensions related to the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline running through Wet'suwet'en territories.

Committee for Contact with the Government/
Centre for Public Dialogue
Mike Hogeterp, research and communications manager

Disability Concerns

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

The Office of Disability Concerns (DC) strives to promote and foster relationships, communities, and societies where everybody belongs and everybody serves by assisting churches, agencies, institutions, and leadership within the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America to

- think and act in keeping with the biblical call regarding people with disabilities.
- break barriers of communication, architecture, and attitude.
- establish ministries with, for, and by people with disabilities and their families.

B. Vision

Since 2009, CRC DC has been working in close cooperation with the Disability Concerns office of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Our vision together can be summarized briefly: "In healthy churches, ministries, and communities, everybody belongs, and everybody serves."

C. Mission

DC's mission is to bring about the full participation of all people with disabilities in the life of the church, and the full participation of the church in the lives of people with disabilities. We have four areas of focus:

1. Network – Strengthen the network of disability advocates both in quantity and quality.
2. Awareness/education – Help churches prioritize the full inclusion of people living with disabilities.
3. Resource/consultation – Provide churches with the tools they need to engage in ministry with people who have disabilities in congregation and community.
4. Ministry promotion – Enhance and promote the future growth and development of Disability Concerns for the purpose of serving communities and societies more effectively.

As of January 2021, DC had two employees totaling 0.8 FTE: a part-time director, Mark Stephenson, who works in West Michigan, and a 30-hour-per week volunteer and communications specialist, Becky Jones, who shares her time between Disability Concerns and Safe Church Ministries (20 hours/10 hours) and works from Burlington, Ontario.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Although our work is reflected in all five of the CRC's ministries priorities (Our Calling), we give primary focus to the Mercy and Justice area.

A. Faith formation

We work on faith formation of God's people primarily in partnership with two other ministries: Friendship Ministries, which focuses especially on faith formation with persons who have intellectual disabilities, and Faith Formation Ministries. Even though Friendship is a separate ministry from the CRC, DC's director, Mark Stephenson, served on the Friendship Ministries board and executive committee from 2014 through 2020. DC promotes the sales of Friendship Ministries materials and encourages the formation of Friendship groups. In 2018, Disability Concerns began working closely with Faith Formation Ministry in assisting churches in their ministry with adults in their "third third" of life (age 55 and over). This work has included two conferences, the production of two Ten Ways tools, and the *Third Third of Life Toolkit.* We pray this work will equip churches to grow as communities among whom *all belong and all serve*, no matter people's ages or abilities.

B. Servant leadership

CRC and RCA DC ministries work in a variety of ways to develop people's leadership skills. Identifying and equipping church and regional disability advocates is the primary way that we go about our work. We help recruit and equip hundreds of volunteers across both denominations to serve churches and classes to accomplish the mandate, mission, and vision of Disability Concerns. As of January 2021, 399 church disability advocates and 31 regional disability advocates are serving Christian Reformed churches and classes.

All disability advocates and many churches have received our *Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves*, which helps church leaders and members welcome and engage people with disabilities in the life of the church. In 2020 over 147 church and regional advocates as well as many others from across North America participated in online training events that DC sponsored. To network and encourage the volunteer advocates, DC staff meet quarterly (virtually or in person) with six regional groups of disability advocates across North America.

DC volunteers and staff help to equip church leaders by doing webinars and other training events online and by consulting with church leaders about engaging people with disabilities in church life. The CRC DC Advisory Committee and the RCA DC Guiding Coalition serve as one team that advises both ministries through meetings several times per year. DC staff provide advice and assistance to other CRC staff on issues related to disability and ministry.

The Disability Concerns newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, and the DC Network blog both received second-place awards from the Associated Church Press.

C. Global mission

In addition to the worldwide outreach made possible by our web and Network pages, DC staff regularly consult with other ministries. Agency Disability Advocates, who are CRC agency and educational institution staff, meet several times per year to discuss ways in which all CRC ministries worldwide can engage with people who have disabilities.

D. Mercy and justice

The mercy and justice aspect of our denomination's calling animates and drives the day-to-day work of Disability Concerns. A person with a disability lives not only with an impairment but also with the discrimination that favors able-bodied people (ableism) and which marginalizes and stigmatizes anyone living with an impairment. Therefore, DC strives to promote and foster relationships, communities, and societies where *everybody belongs and everybody serves*.

As one way to measure progress in this work, we look at numbers in the accessibility section of the annual *Yearbook* survey. For example, 311 CRC congregations (30%) worship in barrier-free facilities, and another 634 (62%) have partially accessible facilities; so a total of 92 percent of CRC church buildings are fully or partially accessible. In addition, 578 churches (56%) have barrier-free sound, and 480 (47%) have barrier-free books/materials in print. Further, 554 churches (54%) offer transportation for people who cannot drive themselves, and 38 percent of congregations have adopted a church policy on disability. As well, in *Breaking Barriers,* on our Network pages and social media, and in CRC Communications and *Banner* articles, DC tells stories of people in CRC and RCA churches who are engaging in disability advocacy and embracing positive change.

Of the four offices identified in the CRC Church Order, our work aligns most closely with that of deacons, who are called to "be compassionate to those in need and treat them with dignity and respect" and to "be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society" (Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, 2016). Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) and CRC DC annually review and update our Memorandum of Understanding, and we have met with the new Church with Community Coordinator in the United States, Jodi Koeman. Working together to equip deacons, communities, and churches can be enriched and strengthened by engaging with people who have disabilities and so that churches can provide for the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical well-being of persons and families with disabilities.

Our director serves as president of the board of Pathways to Promise, a parachurch organization founded in 1988 by CRC Disability Concerns and other ministries to help churches minister with people and families with mental illnesses. This connection allows us better to understand the needs within churches and ensure that DC is offering resources to support them. For example, noting the dramatic increase in anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic, Disability Concerns highlighted our resource for small groups, *Let's Talk! Breaking the Silence around Mental Illness in Our Communities of Faith,* developed over 10 years ago, and this resulted in nearly double the unique pageviews this resource received in 2020 as compared to 2019.

RCA and CRC Disability Concerns ministries are members of the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition, which works on public policy priorities in Washington, D.C.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

Many RCA and CRC regional advocates, church advocates, and members of CRC RCA DC Advisory Team wrote brief devotions for a Lenten series

that the RCA organizes each year. These devotions give visibility to RCA and CRC advocates and to the work of DC.

Synod has asked CRC congregations to celebrate Disability Week each year (this year: Oct. 10- through 17), to raise awareness about the gifts and needs of congregation and community members who have disabilities. DC provides worship leaders with a variety of online resources including litanies, prayers, and sermons. DC consults with worship leaders on the best ways to include people who have disabilities in the church's life, including worship life.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (the Ministry Plan)

A. Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline

See section II, A above for more information about how DC cultivates practices of prayer and spiritual discipline.

B. Listening to voices of every generation

DC provides a variety of resources for congregations to engage children and young people with disabilities in all of congregational life.

C. Growing in diversity and unity as we build relationships

In the Reformed understanding of vocation, God calls all of his people to serve in God's kingdom as God has gifted them. For this reason, we cast the vision of *everybody, including people with disabilities, belonging to and serving God in church and community*.

D. Sharing the gospel, living it missionally, and planting new churches as we connect with our local and global ministry contexts

DC places the highest priority on a network of church and regional disability advocates, connecting our work directly to churches and classes by identifying and equipping local people to minister within their local context. These ministry leaders help churches and classes better reflect the body of Christ, especially as described in Luke 14:15-24 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Congregations that do this well are much better equipped to connect with members of their community, 15 to 20 percent of whom live with disabilities.

Through our work with RCA Disability Concerns and other ministries, through the Network, through regular gatherings of disability advocates, and through direct connections with churches, Disability Concerns seeks to foster collaboration that will enhance the ministries of congregations and advance the work of God's kingdom.

Disability Concerns
Mark Stephenson, director

Indigenous Ministries (Canada)

This past year has been an extremely challenging one for our Indigenous Ministry as it relates to the work happening at our Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres in Edmonton, Alberta; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. All the staff were turned into "frontline workers" because of the COVID-19 pandemic. And as was the case in other kinds of work, the pandemic acted as a catalyzer for both the challenges and blessings of the work. Their work highlighted the fact that communities need the heart and hands of Jesus in their midst. Before reading the rest of this report, you will be well served to watch the short video at youtube.com/watch?v=kjDtti3TE1g&feature=youtu.be about the work at the Indigenous Family Centre in Winnipeg. It shows the impact of the work and the collective value of the congregations of the CRCNA through ministry shares. This is your ministry!

In the past few years, the work of our Indigenous Ministry entities in Canada have been walking an increasingly intentional journey of reconciliation due to the sharpened focus across the country in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3). Through ministries of compassionate community, awareness raising, and advocacy, ministry with Indigenous persons in Canada and the connection to local churches continue to grow increasingly faithful and strong. These efforts have included collaboration with both the Centre for Public Dialogue and the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC) (crcna.org/indigenous/canadian). A thoughtful review and evaluation process throughout 2018-2019 contributed to this maturation among our Indigenous ministry efforts. CIMC follows an annual plan that is affirmed through the CRCNA Canada Corporation as a way of validating their work and its integration with partnerships at the local church level and beyond.

The Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Regina, and Edmonton—all funded by the Christian Reformed Church—help to meet the spiritual and social needs of Indigenous Canadians to help them live dignified and harmonious lives. These ministry centres are highly regarded by the communities they serve. In fact, the United Church of Canada used the Winnipeg Centre as a chief example of positive ministry within which they also participate as an ecumenical partnership. Ministry participants value the dignity and respect the experience as they attend and participate in the programs and community activities.

The ministry of Indigenous Christian Fellowship (ICF) continues in Regina, which has the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples within its province (Saskatchewan) and the highest number of residential school survivors. The city is also home to the First Nations University of Canada and the home base (Little Black Bear First Nation) of Perry Bellegarde, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Canada. Within this context the ministry persists in presenting the gospel of Christ using the gifts of Indigenous peoples.

These past years have seen an increasing amount of violence in the ministry's neighborhood. Deaths in Regina have occurred within a city block of ICF's front doors. ICF seems like a bubble of peace and sanctuary within what too often can feel like the valley of the shadow of death. The prayers

and support of the CRCNA help to remind the ICF council, staff and volunteers to count on the presence of Christ's Spirit in the pilgrimage of hope.

The Edmonton Native Healing Centre community is a place for people of all cultures, faiths, and financial straits to meet and grow together. We build common ground among people. Further, most of our community and all of our staff are Indigenous, and we strive to speak truth and live out the principles of reconciliation.

The Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee consists of key volunteers, the directors of the Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres, and other ecumenical partners (RCA and PCC) who continue to urge churches to grow in structuring their ministry toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. CIMC also works on educating churches about colonialism and its negative influences on Indigenous people and how both the church and Indigenous peoples need reconciliation with one another.

Resources, studies, and other tools are increasingly available. The key hope would be for all churches to access the plethora of tools and resources available as reconciliation becomes a stronger theme in our churches—not just reconciliation with God through Christ but also with people in Canada. Given the history of the church in Canada, the process of reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples is an important part of the way the Canadian CRC has made real the work toward shalom.

Together with the Centre for Public Dialogue and KAIROS, the KAIROS Blanket Exercise is a workshop being shared throughout Canada. It has provided many people with an opportunity to understand the injustices faced by First Nations people in the history of Canada, especially with regard to land claims. Advocacy for Indigenous rights is another important component of Indigenous ministry in Canada. The work on Indigenous education reform carried out by the Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue (crcna.org/publicdialogue) involves working with a broad coalition of churches and Indigenous organizations to encourage public awareness and action in Indigenous education. (See also the report by the Committee for Contact with the Government.)

Office of Race Relations

I. Introduction

Two events in 2020 had a dramatic effect on the work of Race Relations. The global pandemic required us to pivot from our usual practice of face-to-face workshops and consultations to virtual events. The death of George Floyd at the knee of a police officer and several other prominent deaths heightened awareness of racism in North America, in our denomination, and around the world. We are grateful for the increased awareness about racism, and we have received many requests from churches for resources for study and action, which we have made available through the years on our website at crcna.org/race. However, a sad truth is that this increased awareness has been among white people, because people of color must live with awareness of race and racism all the time, and the graphic images of seeing black persons die at the hands of white people has caused great pain and anger among all peoples of color.

We continue to serve CRC congregations, classes, agencies, institutions, the Council of Delegates, and synod in embracing and living out our identity as God's diverse and unified family. We seek opportunities to engage church and denominational leadership and to field inquiries for collaborative learning programs and organizing actions that

- imagine true biblical reconciliation as a diverse and unified people of God.
- mobilize congregants and staff members to help lead them into greater awareness of racialized injustice.
- engage them to stand against racism in their personal lives.
- work to dismantle racism in all its forms.

II. Mandate

CRC Race Relations will initiate and provide effective and collaborative training, programs, and organizing actions in ways that mobilize Christian Reformed agencies and educational institutions, as well as classes and congregations, to recognize, expose, and dismantle racism in all its forms and to experience true biblical reconciliation as a diverse and unified people of God.

III. Connecting with churches and aligning with Our Calling

Within our mandate for antiracism and racial reconciliation, we are called to provide education and resources to equip our denomination not only to eliminate the effects of the sin of racism but also to facilitate reconciliation through workshops, materials, and coaching.

A. Faith formation

We have several workshops: Racism: Looking Back, Moving Forward (U.S.), The Act of Re-membering (Canada), and Churches between Borders, Cultural Intelligence, and the Ideology of Whiteness. In partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue and the CRC Office of Social Justice, we have also conducted the Blanket Exercise throughout the year. First developed in Canada and contextualized for use in the United States, the Blanket Exercise

is an interactive telling of the shared history of Indigenous peoples. This perspective is rarely heard and speaks to the profound urgency of reconciliation.

B. Servant leadership

In the past year we helped to support servant leadership in the following ways:

- consulting with classes Arizona, California South, Columbia, Greater Los Angeles, Grand Rapids North, Red Mesa, and Southeast U.S. on leadership development, minority candidate assessments, strategic planning, and antiracism
- coaching Consejo Latino on multiethnic leadership development
- entering into a consultation process on antiracism with the Council of Delegates
- entering into consultations with Pastor Church Resources to help staff assess their awareness of systemic racism, develop cross-cultural competence, and generate an equal connection with pastors and church leaders from all the ethnicities in the CRCNA
- mentoring an intern from Calvin University, Pisudtiporn (Paula) Tangsirisatian, during the summer
- maintaining close contact with Race Relations facilitators during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in New Mexico as they serve on reservations where illness and deaths due to COVID-19 have been severe
- collaborating with the CRC staff group Hungry for Racial Justice and with CRC Human Resources to ensure greater equity in our personnel policies

C. Global mission

In support of global mission, we sponsored eight students from several countries with our Race Relations scholarships toward their education at CRC-endorsed institutions. More information is available at bit.ly/rrscholarships.

D. Mercy and justice

In 2020 we accomplished the following in mercy and justice efforts:

- cowrote the denominational "Statement about the Deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor" in early June, which included many suggested antiracism resources for churches
- consulted with 25 churches and seven classes on resources for education and dismantling racism
- adapted Race Relations workshops to be available online
- led racial reconciliation workshops, training sessions, and book and movie discussions with congregational groups at Covenant Life CRC (Grand Haven, Mich.); Southwest Chicago Christian Schools; and Faith CRC in New Brighton, Minn. Workshops included Cultural Intelligence and Racism: Looking Back-Moving Forward.
- maintained active social media presence online with articles and other educational materials
- in the fall, initiated a series of online conversations on race and racism called Race Relations Roundtables. The first two—Addressing Native

American Issues as a Non-Native and Post-election Outlook for Antiracism Efforts—were attended by 49 people each; and the third—Talk Is Cheap, Antiracism Is Work, co-sponsored with the Office of Social Justice—had 175 participants.
- posted online a new, asynchronous workshop, the Ideology of Whiteness
- began hosting "Living Room Conversations" in October to provide CRC staff with a place for dialogue
- published the Race Relations quarterly newsletter with articles that challenge the present situation in North America and the church, including reading recommendations and events. In 2020 we began offering most articles in English and Spanish. Subscribers to our newsletter increased by 47 percent from May 2020 to January 2021.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

- cosponsored the 2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration, attended by more than 900 people, in January 2020 in Grand Rapids, Mich.
- with Antioch Podcast, Calvin University, ReFrame Ministries, and World Renew, sponsored the Stand against Racism virtual event in April, attended by 112 people
- provided bulletin inserts and covers for All Nations Heritage celebrations, held the first Sunday in October

IV. Conclusion

The racial climate has become toxic, and the power and witness of the gospel are increasingly vital today. The denomination continues to face the challenge of placing a high value on the dignity of all persons and on the inclusiveness of multiple cultures in life together as a church, as well as on the integrity of that identity.

The ministry of Race Relations continues to lead and encourage throughout the whole church. Race Relations is committed to its statement of vision and its mandate to make the CRCNA a truly diverse and unified family of God. We continue to attribute all the progress and success that has been made in this ministry only to the grace and goodness of God. To this end, we covet your prayers.

For more information on Race Relations matters, please visit our website (crcna.org/race), Facebook page (facebook.com/crcracerelations), and social platforms Twitter (@crcnaORR) and Instagram (instagram.com/racerelations).

Office of Race Relations
Mark Stephenson, interim director

Safe Church Ministry

I. Introduction

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness prevention and response, to help build communities where each person, made in the image of God, is respected and honored, where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse, and where the response to abuse is compassion and justice, which foster healing.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Mercy and justice

Safe Church Ministry reflects the calling of the CRCNA in its calling to do justice and to love mercy as a core part of our identity. Each congregation and person is affected by abuse, some to a staggering degree, and what happens to one part of the body of Christ inflicts harm to us all. Preventing and responding to abuse is at the heart of our call to follow Jesus in all we do. Safe Church is focused on meeting each congregation and classis where they are to take practical steps forward not only to develop policies to prevent abuse and respond justly to abuse but also to help them create cultures and systems that can identify abuse of all kinds in order to live out our calling as the church of Christ, who brings the fullness of the kingdom in our midst.

B. Leadership development

Safe Church invests in volunteer and paid leaders at all levels of ministry across the United States and Canada, working with denominational and classical leadership to increase our collective understanding of abuse of power in our systems, and more particularly with the safe church coordinators of classes that in turn equip and empower their safe church teams to empower congregations, pastors, and ministry leaders. We work with our coordinators to build networks of support and encouragement through equipping and coaching and by connecting people with effective resources.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Safe Church Ministry is not just about having a policy. It is a way of being the church. It is our goal to work together to systematically prevent abuse and equip congregations and classes to create cultures—as the church—that use power to reflect the shalom of our triune God. A key measurement of this goal is to keep track of and report on the status of safe church teams in congregations and classes throughout the CRCNA, as directed by Synod 2018. The data below are based on the responses of 718 congregations to the annual *Yearbook* survey in 2020 (850 responded in 2019; 760 responded in 2018).

- 614 churches (85.5%) have a written safe church or abuse prevention policy (84% reported in 2019; 86% in 2018).
- 213 churches (29.7%) require training for pastors, elders, and deacons regarding the use and potential abuse of power associated with their position (24% in 2019; 16% in 2018).
- 111 churches (15.5%) use a prevention program, such as Circle of Grace, with children and youth (12% in 2019; 7% in 2018).

- 420 churches (58.5%) have protocols in place for responding to church leader misconduct (47% in 2019; 36% in 2018).
- 292 churches (40.7%) have a safe church team or committee (35% in 2019; 28% in 2018).

Synod 2018 also requested annual reporting on the number of classes that have safe church teams. According to data received from the *Yearbook* questionnaire and input from our coordinators, we can report the following:

- Twenty classes have a functioning safe church team that is equipping congregations in their classis.
  - Nine of 11 Canadian classes have teams
  - Only 8 of 38 United States classes have teams; by region there are
    - 0 of 4 in USA East.
    - 4 of 12 in Great Lakes.
    - 2 of 10 in USA Central.
    - 2 of 12 in USA West.
- Fifteen of the 29 classes that do not have a safe church team do have a safe church coordinator who is trying to create a safe church team; however, many have faced challenges or may not have the support from classes or congregations to create a thriving team.
- Fourteen classes do not appear to have either a coordinator or a safe church team.

Following are lists of the classes that have or do not have a safe church team:

- Classes that have a safe church team:

Alberta North	Huron
B.C. North-West	Iakota
B.C. South-East	Illiana
Chatham	Kalamazoo
Chicago South	Muskegon
Eastern Canada	Niagara
Georgetown	Northern Michigan
Grand Rapids North	Pacific Northwest
Hamilton	Rocky Mountain
Heartland	Toronto

- Classes that do not have a safe church team but do have a coordinator trying to start a team:

Arizona	Holland
California South	Hudson
Central Plains	Minnkota
Columbia	Northern Illinois
Grand Rapids South	Quinte
Grandville	Yellowstone
Greater Los Angeles	Zeeland
Hackensack	

– Classes that do not have a safe church team or coordinator:

Alberta South/Saskatchewan	Lake Superior
Atlantic Northeast	Northcentral Iowa
Central California	Northern Cascades
Grand Rapids East	Red Mesa
Hanmi	Southeast U.S.
Ko-Am	Thornapple Valley
Lake Erie	Wisconsin

Synod 2019 adopted directives at all levels in the denomination in response to a committee report on the abuse of power. Staff member Eric Kas represented Safe Church Ministry on this committee, which has completed its work in developing a proposed Code of Conduct and a pilot version of an Abuse of Power Training module, mandated as training for all 2021 candidates for minister of the Word. In addition, progress has been made in several committees assigned with addressing other adopted directives from the Addressing Abuse of Power Task Force report to Synod 2019. The committees will report to synod through the Council of Delegates.

In 2020, Safe Church consulted in 38 separate situations involving abuse. In addition, we sponsored various safe-church related initiatives through our mini-grant program. Safe Church continues to add and update resources for churches on its website and on the Network, including our 2020 webinar series titled "Connect, Collaborate, and Coordinate to End Abuse"; the webinars featured conversations with accomplished authors and experts, including Diane Langberg, Chuck DeGroat, Jay Stringer, Ruth Everhart, and Boz Tchividjian along with several safe church leaders and survivors of abuse. Over 600 people receive our Safe Church newsletter every other month, and over 30 people have committed to pray for Safe Church using our monthly prayer guide.

Safe Church staff includes three employees: a full-time director, Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen, who began her work at the end of January 2021 and did not participate in writing this report; a full-time (increased from part-time) ministry consultant, Eric Kas; and a volunteer and communications specialist, Becky Jones, who works ten hours per week for Safe Church and twenty hours per week for Disability Concerns. Safe Church has additional administrative support from staff shared with other justice ministries as well. Staff time has increased to meet demands of the adopted directives related to abuse of power and of renewed efforts in catalyzing restorative practices throughout the CRC. We are thankful for every effort made in leading the church to prevent abuse in all of our congregations.

Safe Church Ministry
Eric Kas, ministry consultant

Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action

I. Introduction

The Office of Social Justice (OSJ) exists to help the CRCNA address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and oppression—both around the world and in our own communities. It does this by raising awareness and educating members, integrating justice into worship as an expression of its core value for Reformed faith, and raising the voice of the CRCNA in advocacy for and with those who suffer injustice.

OSJ assists the CRC in responding to social justice issues identified by synod—primarily hunger and poverty, climate change, immigration and refugees, sanctity of human life, religious persecution, and restorative justice.

The Office of Social Justice equips the CRC to "do justice" and participate in advocacy in three main ways: (1) through individuals or groups in congregations, (2) through organizing collaborative efforts with existing denominational agencies and institutions, and (3) through ecumenical efforts and partnerships.

The Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice continued this year in its work of assisting OSJ in "effectively addressing all relevant levels of U.S. government on significant and pressing issues of the day from an integrally biblical, theological, and confessional perspective, expressed in terms of a Reformed worldview, emphasizing whenever possible the official positions of the CRCNA as adopted by synod" (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, p. 45). Mark Stephenson began serving as interim director of OSJ and of Race Relations in February 2020 and continues to serve as director of Disability Concerns.

II. Reflecting on our Calling

A. Our main focus in terms of the CRCNA's ministry priorities is *mercy and justice*; our instructions from synod have focused on several primary issues to organize this work.

1. Hunger, poverty, and biblical social justice

   – OSJ's primary partner is World Renew; together we seek to ensure that concern for and solidarity with the poor is an integral part of the calling, worship, community, and identity of the Christian Reformed Church. We also partner with Bread for the World, Canadian Food Grains Bank, and other ecumenical organizations that specialize in a Christian response to hunger and poverty.
   – OSJ's unique role is to ensure that advocacy—pressing for political action on the laws, policies, and systems that contribute to injustice, hunger, and poverty—is one of the spectrum of ways that CRC congregations respond to God's call to care for the poor. We offer education and opportunities for engagement through social media feeds, blog posts on *DoJustice* (dojustice.crcna.org), action alerts, and congregational workshops and learning opportunities that focus on the role of policy-making in eliminating hunger's root causes.
   – In response to the variety of vulnerabilities made abundantly evident by the COVID-19 pandemic, we released an action alert called "Hear

Us Out" in partnership with World Renew, Disability Concerns, and Safe Church Ministry. This provided an opportunity to raise up the needs of a variety of groups during the early stages of the pandemic.

2. Climate change

   – Our Climate Witness Project—a joint project with World Renew—has ten regional organizers across the United States and Canada to help equip CRC members in their region to learn about the realities of climate change, take steps to better steward resources, and advocate to their elected representatives.
   – More than 125 churches are Climate Witness Partner churches.
   – CRC members in both the U.S. and Canada contacted their representatives over 228 times to urge strong action on climate change, as a matter of creational stewardship and love for our neighbors.
   – Almost 400 people registered for movie screenings across North America as part of the Climate Witness Project's *The Story of Plastic* series. Participants were invited to watch a free screening of the film *The Story of Plastic* and then sign up for one of six discussion groups facilitated by regional organizers. Organizers are located across North America and, as a result, discussions were hosted in Mountain, Central, and Eastern time zones.
   – During Lent, the Climate Witness Project hosted a conversation with author Gayle Boss about her book *Wild Hope.* People tuned in to the conversation and then participated in a challenge to read the book and reduce single-use plastics in their homes.

3. Immigration and refugees

   – In 2020 more than 80 congregations across the U.S. were represented in partnering with OSJ to educate and equip their communities to engage in immigration and refugee justice. Twelve Christian schools and universities across the United States invited us to facilitate immigration workshops for their students.
   – In January 2020 we partnered with Calvin University's January Series to encourage advocacy for immigrant justice when author Karen Gonzalez spoke (livestream.com/calvin-university/tjsaudio/videos/201263291) on her book, *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong*. We added her book to our website (justice.crcna.org/immigration-resources) as a recommended read, and CRC members in Pella, Iowa, did a book study on it in fall 2020.
   – CRC members responded enthusiastically to action alerts in support of refugees and immigrants, with more than 10,099 online advocacy actions taken by people in both the U.S. and Canada. CRC advocates in California, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan shared their faith voice for refugee and asylum-seeker justice with their members of Congress through virtual legislative meetings in July and September.
   – In the U.S. we partnered with World Renew to equip six immigration mobilizers who supported churches in their regions (California, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan) to love and advocate with their immigrant neighbors. Through their leadership, CRC members

across the country participated in congressional meetings, book studies, lectures and panel discussions, virtual workshops, and relationship building with immigrant neighbors. A highlight was a series of discussions led by mobilizer Jason Lief at Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, about a biblical perspective on immigration and advocacy.

- Based on the OSJ's "Immigration Is Our Story" audio series, which shared the immigration stories of CRC and RCA members through recorded interviews, OSJ and Faith Formation Ministries partnered to create the Immigration Is Our Story workshop. This workshop is intended to create a space for congregants to hear one another's immigration stories and learn about immigration in the U.S. both yesterday and today.
- More than 2,600 subscribers from CRC and RCA congregations across the U.S. received our monthly Immigration newsletter in 2020, which provided updates on worship resources, educational opportunities, advocacy actions, immigration news, and the regional mobilizing of congregations with regard to immigration, refugees, and biblical advocacy.
- In fall 2020 we relaunched our Immigrants Are a Blessing, Not a Burden (BNB) campaign to equip the CRC to learn and speak the truth about immigrants as imagebearers of God. We updated our BNB webpage and Facebook page, created new opportunities for engagement with the campaign, and worked with partner organizations to update and sell BNB swag.
- With the COVID-19 pandemic moving much of our lives online in 2020, we got creative with virtual immigration mobilizing. We launched a *Do Justice* series on international students' navigation of the U.S. immigration system, cohosted a webinar on immigration and gender-based violence, and facilitated a virtual Church Between Borders workshop series for CRC members across multiple time zones.
- In Canada we participated in a Citizens for Public Justice Conference in Ottawa (before the pandemic) to share the *Journey with Me* refugee-welcome workshop with participants from dozens of area churches. Once we began pivoting our resources online due to the pandemic, we offered a six-session video series for World Refugee Day, viewed over 500 times online. We also organized a Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy webinar, helping CRC church members write advocacy letters supporting refugee claimants.

4. Sanctity of human life

- This year's Sanctity of Human Life Sunday materials, which focused on the intersection of racism and abortion, were used by 322 churches.
- We shared regular posts and discussion about ending abortion and supporting people vulnerable to abortion via social media.

5. Religious persecution

   – We made available materials for International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, which focused on the plight of Chinese Christians.
   – We shared regular posts and discussion about persecuted Christians and other religious minorities via social media.
   – We encouraged church members to remain hopeful "when the arc, bending toward justice, feels too long" through a blog series called "Growing Weary of Doing Good." Part of this series addressed peace in the Middle East.

6. Restorative justice

   – We shared regular posts and discussion about mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, and restorative practices via social media.
   – OSJ partnered with Prison Fellowship in collecting faith leader signatures for a letter to the Michigan Legislature urging them to consider guiding biblical principles as they work to reform the criminal justice system in the state.

B. OSJ contributes to the other CRC ministry priorities

1. Faith formation

OSJ naturally engages younger generations. This year we engaged in strong connections with young adults through immigration workshops in Christian elementary and middle schools, consulting with Christian high schools for engagement in social justice issues, growing youth engagement with *Do Justice*, encouraging young-adult leadership in the Climate Witness project, and expanding our social media coverage of timely issues. Young people make up the largest portion of our *Do Justice* audience: just under one-third of our readers are under age 34, and more than 50 percent are under age 44. In addition, 36 percent of our *Do Justice* podcast listeners are under age 27.

We partnered with the CRC Office of Race Relations, World Renew, Faith Formation Ministries, and Calvin Theological Seminary to offer and sponsor a reduced cost of attendance for Ecumenical Advocacy Days. The partnership recruited over fifteen young adults from six CRC churches to prepare and attend the conference. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic this event became a virtual conference, but participants still developed further understanding on what faithful ecumenical advocacy entails.

Our regular e-newsletter, *OSJ News*, has a subscription list of over 7,000 people and continues to grow. In it, we offer ways to integrate justice and advocacy into the faith commitments of Christians—from worship and prayer to advocacy and education.

This year we launched the *Do Justice* podcast! This podcast is intended as a conversation starter for people wishing to pursue justice in and through the Christian church. Together we are finding new ideas and perspectives, sharing better ways to engage in justice work, remembering our motivation, and growing in our faith.

2. Servant leadership

Do Justice, a blog in partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue, is a diverse, Reformed space for thoughtful voices in the denomination about issues of justice and faith today. The blog specifically elevates the voices of marginalized people on justice issues. Of our thirteen regular columnists, six are people of color. Overall, 37.3 percent of *Do Justice* writers are people of color.

The Climate Witness Project connected with several congregations about opportunities to add solar and other energy-saving measures to their buildings. In addition, free energy audits and assessments were made available to churches.

3. Global mission

In partnership with World Renew, the Office of Social Justice offered a Bible study titled *Bangladesh: The Canary in the Coal Mine*. This study is designed to help congregations understand the global perspective on climate change and the connections between the climate crisis and international aid work.

This year Resonate Global Mission joined us as a partnering contributor to our Advent devotional series, in addition to our ongoing partnership with World Renew.

We offered a six-video series for World Refugee Day, viewed over 500 times online. Two of these videos focused on the global impact of COVID-19 on refugees.

4. Gospel proclamation and worship

Our Advent devotional series continues to be our most widely read and shared publication this year, with over 4,000 subscribers.

We offer fresh content for worship every week through *OSJ Prayers*, a weekly post on our *Do Justice* blog that highlights pressing justice issues from around the world, with written prayers appropriate for individuals, small groups, and congregations. These posts have a subscription list of more than 3,300 people and are viewed on the web by scores more.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

All of OSJ's work focuses on churches—connecting with individual members, groups, or church leaders to better provide the resources needed to steward our power in ways that honor the dignity of people who are poor and marginalized. We do this through individual coaching and conversations, providing unique resources for unique requests, and connecting with partners on a myriad of issues.

Our most popular workshops, which were developed at synod's request and are regularly offered throughout the denomination, continue to be helpful to congregations seeking to take steps to engage in justice and advocacy.

– We offered nearly twenty Church between Borders workshops to U.S. congregations this year, educating members about the process for immigrating, the history of immigration policy, Scripture's guidance in considering the issue of immigration, and how to raise a collective voice for justice. Due to the limitations of the pandemic, many of these

workshops were moved to a virtual setting and were thus made accessible to many congregations across the country at once.

- Our Climate Witness Project, conducted in partnership with World Renew, worked with more than 300 congregational members in more than 40 CRC churches across the U.S. and Canada to respond to the biblical call to love our neighbors and be good stewards of creation through film screenings, legislative meetings, and energy efficiency.
- The Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy workshop was adapted to a webinar format and engaged members of over ten CRC churches and campus ministries during the pandemic. Due to the success of this adaptation, the workshop is being updated and relaunched in both Canada and the U.S. in 2021.
- We also provide focused training and leadership development through the Blanket Exercise, Biblical Advocacy 101 workshops, and restorative justice consultations and trainings.

The Office of Social Justice, in collaboration with the agencies and institutions of the CRC, looks back with gratitude on a rewarding and productive year in spite of challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to continuing to assist members of the CRC to become salt and light in the service of God's justice and mercy.

Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action
Mark Stephenson, interim director

World Renew

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

In 1950 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) was formally asked to "consider the advisability of appointing a Synodical Diaconal Committee" (*Acts of Synod 1950*, p. 63). And by 1962 synod approved the formation of the denomination's diaconal agency. Its mandate was "to minister in the name of our Lord to those distressed by reason of the violence of nature, the carnage of war, or other calamities of life, and to relieve the suffering of the needy in the world."

For 58 years World Renew has fulfilled this mandate, reaching out in Christ's name to people in need around the world. In its essence and existence, World Renew works to respond to God's call for justice and mercy, for those who live in extreme poverty, hunger, and disaster. Because we serve a God whose heart is most concerned with those who are oppressed, we seek to bring his renewed hope where it is most needed.

B. Mission and ministry

In 2020, God accomplished more through World Renew than we could possibly have imagined. As the COVID-19 pandemic changed our families, homes, and work lives, God gave us the means to quickly change the way we work. As we adapted to the changes demanded by the pandemic, we witnessed how during the most difficult times our hope in God does not disappoint us (Rom. 5:5). Through God's grace, in most areas where we work, World Renew was able to continue to provide support and counseling to vulnerable communities and help them to recognize and utilize their natural God-given resources to move forward with hope. We give glory to God for providing enlightenment so that communities can see that through him, all things are possible.

With your prayers, involvement, and support World Renew was able to partner globally with 76 Christian churches and outreach partners, for a total of 1,414,026 participants in 35 countries who changed their stories to include newfound strength and hope. We give glory to God for these transformations.

Through community development programs in 1,254 communities, World Renew reached 274,495 participants in the key areas of food security, economic opportunity, community health, and peace and justice. These people were able to build on health, agriculture, livelihood, and leadership skills that will serve to improve their lives for the long term. Additionally, 1,139,531 survivors of violence, drought, flooding, storm, and COVID-19 benefited from World Renew's disaster response programs in 2020.

When COVID-19 lockdowns began in March 2020, World Renew was uniquely positioned, because of our on-ground partners and strong relationships with community leaders, to assist families who were already living in extreme poverty. The pandemic brought more hunger and hopelessness as jobs dried up, income stopped, and food became scarce. But our God is loving and merciful, and his love was reflected in the generosity of our supporters, whose gifts made it possible for World Renew to quickly pivot to provide the most vulnerable families with food and water, virus-prevention

education, masks, soap, sanitizer, and much more. World Renew is grateful to God for putting us in a position where we could share the love and hope of Jesus Christ with his people.

In an immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, donor gifts to World Renew amounting to $454,045 (USD), through the *Moment of Hope* campaign, touched 1.2 million lives. World Renew was able to equip communities, partners, and staff with personal protection equipment (PPE) and emergency food throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, as well as to assist the Navajo Nation in the U.S. and Christian Reformed churches across North America.

World Renew has never received CRC ministry shares but, rather, depends primarily on the generous donations and offerings of God's people to support its mission in communities of poverty. In 2020, despite economically challenging times, World Renew received more than $27 million (USD) in gifts from generous-hearted individuals and churches. This work was supported by 1,447 volunteers from more than 37 church denominations who donated their time and gifts to people in need, totaling 116,962 hours of time, or the equivalent of 58 full-time employees. In Bangladesh, Malawi, Madagascar, and Zambia, 19 International Relief Managers volunteered their time to serve in places of greatest need, and eight continued remote-location work during the pandemic.

World Renew strives for systemic, generational change in five key impact areas: food security, economic opportunity, disaster response, community health, and peace and justice. We partner with local churches and organizations around the world to bring holistic programs that transform communities for the long term.

Compelled by God's deep passion for justice and mercy, World Renew works alongside partners and communities, building programs that focus on every area of need and that allow participants to tap into God-given resources and talents to find renewed hope for the future. This holistic approach to World Renew's mandate, mission, and ministry contributes in various ways to each of the five core principles of the Christian Reformed Church's calling: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship.

Because of the integrated nature of World Renew's work in addressing the whole person, this work not only touches all five of the CRC's ministry priorities but also makes a focused contribution to the church's mercy and justice ministry and servant leadership development. World Renew's work is not only integrated; it is a fully fledged collaboration by the church of Jesus Christ with Christian partners who help people in need, advocate for justice, train local leaders, and develop biblically based community values that strengthen the message of the local church around the world.

In 2020, though at times having quickly to adapt programming to meet COVID-19 safety protocols, World Renew continued to fulfill its mission to "engage God's people in redeeming resources and developing gifts in collaborative activities of love, mercy, justice, and compassion." While the stories of many men, women, and children around the world were touched by poverty, disaster, and injustice, the practical ministry of World Renew presented people with opportunities for renewed hope. And this year was truly a year when the world as a whole needed to hold on to God's certain hope.

Your prayers, involvement, and financial gifts through World Renew have provided the opportunity for men, women, and children living in poverty to change their lives for the better. Through your support you have shared the hope of the Father. That hope knows no bounds, and the people whose lives you change can now share that hope and influence others in their communities to make positive, permanent changes to their lives as well. Thank you for your contribution to making these changes—and so much more—possible.

"Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa. 40:31).

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. North America

a. Church and family education and classical support

In 2020, World Renew continued to build on existing relationships with churches and schools and created new connections with educators and church members. Yet this past year brought huge changes in the ways these connections were made. Rather than via traditional and expected face-to-face conversations, the connections were made virtually through the use of many platforms: Zoom, Facebook, phone, text, and email. Sometimes the messages were recorded; sometimes they were live. Through the onset and the ongoing duration of the pandemic, World Renew continually swiveled to enable God's work of disaster response, development, and mercy and justice to continue. World Renew also continued to build on previously developed relationships with deacons across North America.

In Canada, World Renew and Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) completed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding early in 2020, committing to work more closely together. This providentially timed, structured connection allowed both organizations to be in positions of strength to support congregations in their transitions during the pandemic, and to share both staff and specific best practices so that constituents, churches, and the work both organizations have been called to do could flourish. This includes reviewing our *Helping without Harming* workshops, and strengthening our ties with deacons in each congregation. Four important and helpful webinars were planned and implemented:

- March 28: "How Your Church Can Help during COVID-19"
- April 11: "Mental and Emotional Health in the Church Community during the COVID-19 Crisis"
- May 9: "Learning from Inequality during a Pandemic"
- May 30: "How World Renew Is Still Effective during COVID-19—and How Can You Share that Impact?"

It was recognized that webinars serve as an ideal vehicle and opportunity to reach a great many people both inexpensively and effectively.

Another manifestation of this new relationship was COVID-19 grants. In partnership with DMC, World Renew awarded 18 grants to churches across Canada. Over $70,000 CDN was awarded to local churches responding to urgent needs in their communities to people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the United States a Church with Community Coordinator has been hired in collaboration with the Office of Social Justice and Pastor Church Resources to network and equip deacons and other church leaders to engage their communities in transformational practices. The focus for the past year has been on building a network of leaders, educating churches on working with their communities, and consulting with churches that have shown interest in and readiness for changes to community ministry.

Monthly meetings with leaders across the United States and Canada helped in building a network of diaconal leaders. These leaders supported and learned from one another and other community development leaders with the hope of enlivening their community transformation efforts in their neighborhoods and communities. Consultation was provided to over 10 church leaders as they explored an asset-, or strengths-, based approach to community ministry. Online education was provided primarily through interactive webinars and discussions:

- April 23: "Walking alongside Your Church and Community Members"
- May 21: "Churches on the Front Line of Hunger"
- September 2: "Reimagining Church Budgets: Through a Kingdom Lens"
- December 10: "Stop Playing Santa: Community Ministry"
- December 17: "Food Justice, Creation Care, and the Great Outdoors"
- a series of six online discussions, titled "Welcome to the Neighbo(u)rhood," conducted in January/February 2021, led churches and leaders in innovative approaches to working with their neighborhoods.

To support and encourage the work of churches working with their local communities during the pandemic, 30 churches across 12 states received small $2,000-5,000 (USD) grants totaling $98,500. It was inspirational to see churches multiply these small grants to leverage $607,610 in total for projects that served over 27,000 individuals and 4,000 families/households. World Renew continues to develop these new church relationships, providing education, consultation, and networking so that they can continue to transform their communities.

Though face-to-face conversation was not possible due to the pandemic, the Church and Community Engagement team of World Renew quickly found other ways to connect with churches, deacons, pastors, and constituents:

- recorded presentations by field staff
- a complete prerecorded World Hunger worship service
- phone and Zoom calls with individuals and church groups

– ten "World Hunger Live" devotions
– four "Advent Live" devotions

With respect to church and family education, the World Renew annual gift catalog continues to create new resources that both churches and families can use. These not only increase support for World Renew's work but also provide educational tools for Sunday schools and families. The Church and Community Engagement team also supported churches and schools in developing ways to use the gift catalog for the edification of both the givers and the receivers of the gifts.

In the absence of educational opportunities around tables, World Renew developed a set of podcasts. In six recorded sessions, the following practitioners who were interviewed were able to share of their expertise on a variety of subjects:

– Cheryl Nembhard/Drew Brown – racial justice and the arts
– Dr. Jason Lief – immigration
– Andrew Oppong – climate
– Natalie Wright – local community development/gender justice
– Ken Kim – international disaster response, world hunger
– Julian Muturia/Cindy Stover – gender justice

This method of education will continue in the future, considering that it can reach people inexpensively and effectively.

b. Christian schools, colleges, and universities

Dynamic, vibrant, and growing connections between Christian Schools International (CSI) institutions and World Renew are forming and bearing fruit educationally, spiritually, and financially. Again, in the absence of face-to-face conversations and presentations, World Renew chose in 2020 to present webinars and video conferencing in and with schools: elementary, middle, and high schools as well as universities and colleges. An example of such video conferencing was a four-week Zoom workshop on justice held with some 10 students at Redeemer University in fall 2020.

Students, particularly those in the senior grades of high school, are involved in implementing justice and advocacy initiatives as they work through *Live Justly*, a study guide available in U.S. and Canadian versions. World Renew will continue to deepen these partnerships and facilitate more learning opportunities in the years ahead.

In addition, the codirectors of World Renew use their knowledge and experience toward training up the next generation of Christian practitioners. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director of World Renew-Canada, continues to teach a course on community development at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ontario. She has also started teaching a new course on conflict transformation. And Carol Bremer-Bennett, director of World Renew-U.S., began facilitating a course for NGO Leadership at Wheaton College's Humanitarian Disaster Institute.

c. Refugee Office, Canada

In Canada, World Renew's Refugee Sponsorship and Resettlement Program (RSRP) provided support to churches and sponsoring

groups from coast to coast. Between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2020, 46 sponsoring groups submitted 80 new refugee sponsorship applications to Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for 205 refugees. Also, the RSRP team continues to work on 69 sponsorship applications for 184 refugees to submit in 2021 with 37 sponsoring groups. World Renew is grateful for the continued compassion of many churches across Canada as they continue to reach out to increasingly vulnerable refugee populations in the context of COVID-19 and the uncertainty it brings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed restrictions on global travel and reduced sponsorship processing at visa posts, and this situation has particularly affected the number of refugee arrivals. Between January 1 and December 31 of 2020, through World Renew, 53 refugees arrived in Canada and were welcomed by 15 sponsoring groups. Arrivals for sponsored refugees are well planned. For all arrivals, World Renew must confirm with IRCC that refugees are ready to travel, that their sponsors are ready to welcome the newcomers, and that a quarantine plan is in place. All newcomers to Canada must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. Churches provide financial and nonfinancial support for the quarantine period as well as for the sponsorship year. Churches have demonstrated creativity and adaptability in providing settlement support to newcomers in a way that respects health directives such as social distancing and mask wearing. Despite the difficult times of this past year, we are thankful that refugees are once again arriving in Canada. We are also thankful for the churches that have remained steadfast in their care for refugees seeking safety, protection, and a fresh start.

2. International volunteer opportunities

Despite having to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 400 global volunteers participated in justice and compassion ministries with World Renew in 2020. Their service in and for communities of poverty and disaster was a catalyst for change in their own hearts and in the hearts of the communities in which they lived and worked. Their testimonies are a powerful witness to the formation of their own faith in the context of global ministry.

In 2020, World Renew's service opportunities placed people in relationships where they could build each other up, learning and sharing together. By relating to people who live in poverty as God's fellow image-bearers, people of faith truly serve others. While serving, they grow in Christ, who changes stories by his power and grace.

B. Servant leadership

World Renew's ministry is addressing the pain of a hurting world as the corporate expression of the office of deacon in the church. Servant leadership is considered a key outcome of World Renew's activities. As such, World Renew raises up and equips servant leaders locally and globally to develop and exercise their gifts to minister in their community, nation, and world.

1. Global Volunteer Program

2020 was a year of challenge and hope for participants in World Renew's Global Volunteer Program (GVP). Many partnership churches

worked to connect with each other in creative ways. In addition, as COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, some groups had to cancel their scheduled mission trips while also facing overwhelming challenges to stay connected with their community partners.

Congregations found ways to support their brothers and sisters as their lives were affected by COVID-19 and later in the year by the back-to-back hurricanes Eta and Iota, which swept across Central America. The generosity of our global partnership churches was inspiring, with congregations taking multiple special offerings and holding online fundraising events. Through their generosity, many communities and families experienced God's provision and hope through their North American brothers and sisters.

GVP's Global Partnership Program provides opportunities to participate in the transformative global work God is doing through World Renew. Our global volunteer program gives individuals and groups opportunities to explore God's plan for them. As a volunteer in overseas ministry with World Renew, participant's lives intersect with others—and God changes their stories and gives hope. In 2020, 396 individuals, interns, and groups volunteered with World Renew in person and through online virtual learning experiences.

For the past five years and in partnership with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, World Renew's GVP has organized a learning trip each spring to Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. The participants are young people who want to learn to speak to government officials about justice issues such as global food insecurity.

The trip has been popular, and registration for the 2020 event was full when COVID-19 hit. To adapt to the COVID-19 health and safety guidelines, World Renew set up online learning sessions, hosted video meetings, and adjusted for different time zones. The participants explained to their Members of Parliament that, as Christian young adults, they care that people in developing countries have enough food to eat.

In late 2020, World Renew was able to share with these young adults that, as a direct response to their action, the Canadian government committed an additional $400 million to global relief and development in response to COVID-19.

2. Disaster response volunteer programs

   a. International relief managers

      Each year, individuals choose to serve Christ through volunteering with World Renew's International Relief Manager (IRM) Program. These volunteers are highly specialized and provide crucial management support to World Renew and local partner organizations in the context of international disaster work.

      World Renew has 19 individuals on the IRM roster. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only eight IRMs went out on assignment in 2020, serving in Bangladesh and Zambia. IRMs contributed to World Renew's response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, helping to provide food assistance to over 60,000 refugees. In Zambia, IRMs worked with a local organization to implement two separate projects that provided food to 10,739 households/families (53,695

people) experiencing significant drought and crop failure. After travel restrictions were put in place due to COVID-19, all IRMs continued to support the work of World Renew by calling supporters, reviewing response proposals, making virtual presentations, and engaging in learning through the International Disaster Response's "Caffeinate and Consider" webinars.

Without the support of IRMs in these and other countries around the world, these World Renew responses to international disasters could not have taken place. We are incredibly grateful for the service of our IRMs, who continue to make the ministry of World Renew possible.

b. World Renew Disaster Response Services volunteers in North America

In 2020, World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers gave their time and talents to help clear debris, assess needs, and rebuild homes after disasters in North America. World Renew DRS volunteers are general and skilled laborers, building estimators, construction supervisors, plumbers, electricians, cooks, site managers, and regional, project, and area managers who donate their specific experience and skills to the ministry.

Despite sites closing in March due to COVID-19 lockdowns, DRS was able to shift focus to smaller jobs such as helping in Washington, North Carolina, to build laundry trailers for tornado victims. A small team also helped to repair a home that sustained damage due to Hurricane Florence in Aurora, North Carolina. DRS was able to deploy small teams to Nebraska to aid in rebuilding homes heavily damaged during the spring storms of 2019. Two early-response teams were also deployed to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Pensacola, Florida, to aid in cleanup after strong storms left much damage in the late summer of 2020.

Trying something new, DRS completed remote training with local volunteers from Rio Grande Valley, Texas, on how to complete needs-assessment surveys. They then gathered data for the local long-term recovery group so that they could complete a plan for recovery from Hurricane Hannah.

In addition to completing physical work, DRS allocated several grants. Grants went to aid in Hurricane Laura recovery in Texas and for tornado recovery in Georgia. Rehoboth (N.Mex.) Christian School received a grant to help their community fight COVID-19.

Although 2020 was a very unconventional year for DRS in comparison to the way that we usually serve, we give glory to God for all of the unique ways staff and volunteers were called to serve as Jesus' hands and feet.

3. International development programs

World Renew's international development programs are strengthened through their implementation by servant leaders from Christian partners and churches in local communities. World Renew works alongside these partners in ways that strengthen their capacity to lead transformation in their communities. This includes strengthening organizational and board capacity, coaching in nonprofit management and governance,

facilitating monitoring and evaluation, and promoting accountability and transparency.

Leaders who follow Jesus Christ, reflecting a servant's heart in their work in their churches and communities, mobilize local congregations to become catalysts for change. World Renew works to empower its partners, pastors, and laypeople so that they are equipped to organize and implement their own community development, following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

C. Global mission

World Renew's work around the world falls primarily into the CRC's calling of mercy and justice, and it is work done in the context of global mission. World Renew works alongside other CRC agencies, as well as other churches and denominational partners, to accompany each other into the daily lives of local communities. While World Renew works in concert with CRC agencies in many countries, we also take an ecumenical approach to our partnerships, extending far beyond our traditional CRC relationships. Our work in Kenya showcases the diversity of our partnerships.

In Kenya, 2020 started off with World Renew focused on continuing community development work in the key areas of food security, community health, economic opportunity, peace and justice, and disaster response. This work was supported by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a 15-member organization working to end global hunger; by Growing Hope Globally, a Christian organization that helps to engage subsistence farmers in the world's poorest regions; and by various branches of Anglican Development Services (ADS), the Anglican Church in Kenya (ACK). World Renew has worked alongside ADS to address issues such as the impact of climate change and to improve livelihoods, health, and disaster-risk reduction in Kenya.

The following excerpts from a report by World Renew's field staff in Kenya outlines how World Renew, with partners in Kenya, had to change the way we work in order to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, while continuing the work of empowering families to become self-sustaining:

"Since COVID-19 appeared for all of us at the beginning of 2020, we had to adapt to new ways of thinking and working pretty much overnight. We decided to become proactive and creative in what we could do to move on. We had frequent virtual meetings with our ADS partners and with home office staff to try to figure out how best to move forward with ongoing programs and new ones we were envisioning. We are grateful to say that as difficult as these times were, we were able to move on as a team quite well and look forward to new opportunities as we continue to do scenario planning and mitigating risk of how much COVID-19 has affected communities, development work, and the overall livelihood and well-being of people in Kenya.

"With regard to our ADS partners, ADS Western was able to proceed with several Organizational Development activities, focused mainly on financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and program management. ADS Western, ADS Central Rift, and ADS Mount Kenya continue to implement the five-year Scaling Up Conservation Agriculture program in the face of challenges in the final year of implementation. This program has reached

more than 6,000 farmers with conservation agriculture and other livelihood impacts. Through our partnership with ADS Pwani we have been able to improve the livelihood of six marginalized communities, and we contributed toward improving the health and nutrition status of pregnant and lactating mothers at the coast.

"In Central Kenya (Meru), a four-year integrated program has brought substantial impact to around 1,200 program participants in seven communities in terms of food security, better nutrition, healthier environment through more trees and latrines, and better access to water and savings through many established village savings and loans groups. Lastly, we continue to explore and cultivate church-to-church partnerships that will bring learning and ultimately transformation to us all."

By the end of 2020, COVID-19 cases in Kenya were on the rise. In response, World Renew's team in Kenya has continued to partner with our International Disaster Response team and Growing Hope Globally to build on the current project and prevent human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 by communicating critical risks, countering misinformation, reducing infections among close contacts and health care workers, preventing transmission amplification events, and educating communities about physical distancing. The World Renew model has been adopted by other local partners as a standard for safe and effective community support during COVID-19.

In every place where World Renew works, we partner with Christian denominations and community organizations to reach out to communities in the greatest need. We are grateful to work with these partners to improve ministry capacity and to create opportunities for people to lift themselves out of poverty. During the pandemic, our partnerships have become crucial to reaching the most vulnerable people with accurate information, emergency supplies, and renewed hope.

D. Mercy and justice

The CRCNA formally acknowledges mercy and justice as integral to its mission, vision, and calling. In World Renew's global ministry of community development and disaster response, mercy and justice are inseparable in experiencing the wholeness that God intends for all people, and particularly for those who are burdened by extreme poverty, hunger, and the effects of disaster.

As an agency that firmly believes we are all imagebearers of God (Gen. 1:26), we made gender justice a fundamental piece of our work in 2020. In late 2019 we launched an organization-wide gender audit to enable us to better understand the needs, gaps, and strengths in our gender justice/equality programming. We have been hard at work streamlining our gender policy as well as developing a global gender strategy to guide our home and international offices. Our greatest learning through this process has been that sustainable development and elimination of poverty among the communities we serve will not be possible if we don't deliberately work toward reducing gender inequalities and ensuring that women's contributions and dignity are recognized and respected, just as God intends in Galatians 3:28.

One of our greatest collaborations this year has been our work on gender-based violence. A group of justice-seeking CRCNA agencies led by World Renew collaborated to expose the "hidden crisis" of gender-based violence

(GBV), the horror and pain inflicted on women and girls around the world for being female. The agencies joined together with the United Nations Women's initiative, "16 Days of Activism" (Nov. 25 - Dec. 10), to raise awareness of the causes and impacts of GBV and how Christians can make an impact on families' lives and bring hope for the future. The resources included the following:

- a Bible study from Bonnie Nicholas and Safe Church Ministry on the rape of Tamar, shared through *The Network*
- a *Do Justice* podcast episode, hosted by World Renew and OSJ, released on December 1
- an education and awareness video on gender-based violence, available on World Renew's website
- a "Twitter Takeover" from November 25 through December 10, with input coming from the Office of Social Justice, Diaconal Ministries Canada, World Renew, and others
- two webinars: one addressing domestic GBV on November 19; the other dealing with GBV in countries outside of North America on December 3
- a *Banner* article addressing GBV in an Asian country
- three binational, livestreamed devotional sessions in the CRCNA offices on November 24, December 1, and December 8
- Advent devotional content provided by OSJ, Resonate, and World Renew

1. International community development

In 2020 World Renew was able to touch the lives of more than 270,000 people in impoverished communities around the world. World Renew's community-based programs in food security, community health, economic opportunity training, and peace and justice helped families and individuals to improve their way of life in locations where the basic essentials of life, such as food, healthcare, and education, are scarce or out of reach.

As an essential part of our work, World Renew helps to clear pathways for economic opportunity for families through our Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) program. One of the goals of this program is to strengthen the economic livelihoods and resilience of local communities by forming community savings and loans groups that help poor families get more access to goods, services, resources, and markets for economic activities, and that help people earn an adequate income to support themselves. In 2020, World Renew facilitated 1,085 VSLA groups with 21,696 participants in 17 countries. As the following account illustrates, the groups also allow participants to build bonds that give them a sense of belonging:

On a Tuesday in Loma de Cáfen, Nicaragua, 22 young women sit together chatting. They are participants in a VSLA with World Renew partner Asociación Cristiana de Jovenes (ACJ).

The women are sharing their hopes of bringing to reality some dreams that they once thought were unattainable. Damaris Vasquez Pérez is one of the group members. She is proud that together her group has saved $23,758 córdobas (USD $686) in just 12 months.

"In our community, no one saves even one córdoba [about 3 cents]," she said. "We try to make ends meet by growing crops and working in our small businesses while paying for health care and education. We often have to go to neighbors who are a little better off and ask to borrow money. It's embarrassing to beg for a loan, and most of the time no one has money to spare anyway."

With the promise of training and guidance from ACJ and World Renew, the women decided to start a VSLA group. Damaris admits that the first meetings were difficult, and it took the group four months before they were able to manage the accounting independently.

The women are proud of their perseverance and grateful for the natural support network that their VSLA provides. The meetings give them a chance to connect, opportunities to learn, and the ability to work toward making their hopes and dreams a reality.

Damaris shares, "We overcame all of those challenges, and we overcame the fact that our husbands had to give us the freedom to attend the meetings and give us a few coins to save at first. It was hard, but as time went on, our husbands realized that it was a good thing – in fact, we could help make ends meet at home. Now they all know that on Tuesdays we have our meetings, and no one has a problem attending."

In March 2020, World Renew began to shift its focus in development programs to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions worldwide. In many of our ongoing community-based programs, we worked quickly to restructure and implement pandemic support for people most affected by lockdowns and travel bans. When aspects of programming became less pertinent or possible – with some VSLAs suspending lending, for example – we adapted and at times refocused existing meetings. In Nigeria, VSLAs suspended the issuance of loans between March and June, but groups continued to meet while observing safety protocols to learn about promoting peace, savings group mechanisms, and COVID-19 safe practices. When women were banned from the markets in Tongi, Bangladesh, to curb the spread of the virus, the advocacy of community leaders in the VSLA program led the local political leaders to overturn their decision and instead move the markets to more spacious locations that allowed for physical distancing.

World Renew's economic opportunity programs such as Village Savings and Loan groups help to empower participants to make decisions for themselves and, through the coaching and training they receive from World Renew, to gain the financial know-how and confidence to better provide for their families. Most importantly, participants learn of their own value as children of God as they grow in their skills and faith.

2. Disaster response

   a. International disaster response

      By mid 2020, in the midst of COVID-19 lockdowns around the world, an estimated 80 million people were displaced worldwide by conflict, persecution, or disaster. Humanity is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. World Renew's International Disaster Response team provided assistance to many communities worldwide that were affected by these disasters. Disaster frequently affects people who are already vulnerable and living in poverty. World Renew exists

not only to meet immediate needs but also to implement a long-term approach that helps prepare families for future disasters. Thanks to God's compassion and the generous support of churches, individuals, organizations, and institutions, World Renew has provided assistance to over 1,100,000 people in 27 countries through its international disaster response programs. The following stories give a glimpse of how World Renew brings the justice and mercy of Christ to families in crisis.

Locust plagues are one of the three worst agricultural natural disasters, alongside flooding and drought. Atiang Teddy and her husband Odege Martin had heard stories from their grandparents of a locust plague that devastated Uganda 70 years ago. In February 2020 those stories of the past became a present reality when desert locusts returned, threatening the destruction of the region's crops. In the weeks that followed, the insects spread from one district to another; they were spotted in at least 20 districts, leaving behind eggs that, when hatched, caused additional outbreaks and led to food insecurity.

World Renew Uganda worked with partners in the Teso and Karamoja regions where families like Atiang's live. The goal was to increase the communities' capacity to control and cope with the invasion. Community leaders were trained on the effects of desert locusts and the best methods of prevention, including vigilant surveillance, providing time to target and spray the locusts before they hatch eggs. Through community outreach programs, nearly 3,000 families gained a strong awareness about the issue, and even more surrounding villages were reached through radio programs that gave people a chance to call in and talk about how to handle the invasion.

Atiang is grateful for the support, which has had a great impact on the region so far. "Our crop harvest for the first season has been saved," she said. "We're grateful to PAG KIDO and World Renew for supporting us in the communities and giving us hope in controlling the desert locusts."

In early August, a massive explosion in Beirut's port shocked the world. The blast killed dozens, injured thousands, and left over 300,000 people homeless. The explosion was a crisis on top of many other crises experienced by the people of Lebanon. This is particularly true for the more than two million refugees who live in this country. The nation's devalued currency, rising food prices, and COVID-19 risks had made many vulnerable even before the August explosion. Throughout 2020, World Renew and its partner in Lebanon, MERATH, continued to distribute food to refugee families, and, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, delivered 11,000 hygiene kits to help families protect their health.

In response to the August explosion, World Renew and MERATH provided an additional 18,000 hygiene kits, as well as 7,800 hot meals and 2,200 food vouchers to survivors, including Hagop and Anaheed, an elderly brother and sister. Their apartment is located in the blast zone; and although it sustained heavy damage, they have no option but to stay. Deliveries of hot meals from local churches and gifts of food vouchers have been a vital lifeline for them.

"We don't have any other place than this apartment. We have no choice but to stay here. People are working hard to try to rehabilitate the building, but it will take a lot of time. Now winter is around the corner. . . . The church has given us vouchers that we use to buy food from the supermarket. Some people from the church are also cooking for us every day and bringing hot meals for us to eat. I don't know how long this situation is going to last and how much we can take, especially at our age. The little savings we had are stuck in the bank and not worth much anymore anyway. Still, we are thankful, because God protected us!"

For people whose lives have been disrupted by conflict, natural disaster, or climate change, COVID-19 made precarious living even more uncertain. As the virus spread globally, increased health risks became clear—and the impact goes far beyond immediate consequences. Thankfully, through World Renew's network of trusted local partners, we continued to assist families who were already in crisis, reaching more than 688,000 people with programs designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These included distributing emergency food supplies, providing families with electronic vouchers, and radio campaigns sharing vital health information. To further protect people's health, we also began to distribute soap, face masks, and hand sanitizer in communities around the globe. The following story illustrates our COVID-19 initiatives in Haiti.

As COVID-19 swept across the globe, governments demanded that people stay at home. In Haiti, however, people were forced to go about their lives as if the virus did not exist. From the capital, Port-au-Prince, to the countryside, the recommendations of health experts to social distance and follow handwashing practices went largely unheard.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Most Haitians must go to the public market every day to buy and sell products in order to make a meager income. Missing a day at the market would mean not having money for food.

To raise awareness in communities that lacked information about the pandemic, World Renew, partnering with Perspectives Reformées Haiti, provided 25 megaphones to 15 communities; produced five awareness videos for social media, developed awareness programs for 10 radio stations; distributed 5,000 flyers; and provided sanitizers and soap to 850 families.

In addition, 20 church and community leaders were trained to lead awareness campaigns. These leaders promoted the need for hygiene and sanitation, handwashing, and household and neighborhood cleaning. Today, as they make their way to the markets, more Haitians are aware of the dangers of the spread of COVID-19 and are now practicing ways to avoid infection.

COVID-19 presents new challenges, but World Renew has worked tirelessly with partner organizations to strengthen the ministry of hope we have in Christ. We enter 2021 with that hope in our hearts. Our commitment to walk alongside people in crisis remains strong. As the number of hungry people increases as a direct result of the pandemic, World Renew's work is even more important.

b. Disaster Response Services in North America

In 2020, World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) continued to provide volunteer-based assistance in 34 communities affected by disaster in North America. DRS has decades of experience helping people in North America to recover after disasters, but continuing to provide help during the 2020 pandemic meant finding safer ways for volunteers to serve. Working with our partners and following health guidelines, DRS developed COVID-19 safety protocols to continue to minister safely to people in need. The following is an example that not only shows how DRS had to change the way they work, but also showcases how COVID-19 caused a disaster that affects the well-being of vulnerable men, women and children in North America:

In May 2020, the Navajo Nation reported more cases of COVID-19 per capita than any state in the United States. Covering an area roughly the size of West Virginia, the Navajo reservation is home to thousands of people who lack access to clean running water and other necessities.

For Navajo families, staying home and staying safe during the pandemic was often not possible. So World Renew DRS kicked off a national response to quickly deliver life-sustaining supplies to people living on the reservation. With the Reformed Church in America's Global Mission and Rehoboth Christian School, located on Navajo land in New Mexico, World Renew DRS provided water, food, and face masks to Native American families who needed it most.

"This crisis is different from any other disaster that World Renew DRS has responded to," said Bob Laarman, DRS director. "We have changed some of our response methods during the pandemic, but World Renew DRS remains committed to serving vulnerable people in North America through local people and organizations."

3. Mobilizing churches for justice

As a CRC agency, World Renew shares in the calling to mobilize congregations to faithfully and effectively pursue "God's justice and peace in every area of life." World Renew collaborated closely with the Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) to support churches in addressing justice issues in relation to community outreach, poverty alleviation, equity and reconciliation, climate adaptation, peace building, and refugee and immigration policies. In 2020, 238 churches in both Canada and the U.S. were involved in justice activities with World Renew. In addition, World Renew partnered with 122 churches in the U.S. and Canada on the Climate Witness Project, which focuses on creation care.

a. United States

In the U.S., World Renew partnered with the CRC Office of Social Justice and the Office of Race Relations to support churches in doing justice, especially in the areas of understanding biblical justice, energy stewardship, creation care, and immigrant and refugee rights; deepening one another's understanding of systemic causes of poverty; and advocating on behalf of people who suffer injustice worldwide.

On the topic of creation care, the Climate Witness Project (CWP) supported churches across the U.S. and Canada to learn more about the impacts of plastic on the environment and to meet with policy makers

to encourage policies that would care for creation at both local and national levels. CWP participants gained an increased understanding of how climate change is affecting vulnerable communities and learned how World Renew is supporting those communities to adapt. CWP also hosted online voter/candidate forums during which candidates shared and voters asked questions about the candidates' plans to address climate change along with the role that their faith plays in caring for creation.

World Renew also partnered with the Office of Social Justice to support immigration organizers in five regions throughout the U.S. The organizers team up with churches to host the Church between Borders workshop, to listen and learn from people who immigrated to the U.S., and to stand with immigrants against injustice. The Church between Borders workshop takes participants through a virtual immigration experience. Participants deal with and try to work their way through the same challenges that vulnerable populations face when attempting to immigrate legally to the United States. Participants also journey through an immigration timeline and learn about the roots of racial injustice in our immigration system and discuss a biblical view of welcoming the stranger.

b. Justice mobilization Canada

World Renew in Canada works with the CRC Office of Social Justice, the Centre for Public Dialogue, Diaconal Ministries Canada, and the Canadian ministries director's office to jointly support a justice mobilizer position. In 2020 a memorandum of understanding was established between World Renew and the justice mobilizer to outline the plan to pursue justice through the intersection of World Renew's vision/mission and the shared areas of justice ministry within the CRCNA's Canadian ministry offices.

Justice mobilization had to adapt to the new COVID-19 reality for most of 2020. Some events were canceled or postponed, but thankfully there was a renewed interest in online learning, so many of our justice resources and events continued in a virtual format.

To celebrate World Refugee Day in June, the justice mobilizer partnered with the World Renew Refugee Sponsorship team to create a series of six videos that were viewed over 500 times, helping people know how to pray, advocate, volunteer/welcome, and donate to make a difference in the lives of refugees who were affected by the pandemic both in North America and internationally.

The Youth Ambassadors of Reconciliation Program (YARP) also adapted to an online learning format in August 2020. Partnering with World Renew's Global Volunteer Program, we developed creative ways for YARP to be a meaningful week-long peer-learning experience for seven youths, using a mix of video discussions and self-guided activities focused on privilege, decolonization, and reconciliation action. An added bonus in moving online allowed YARP to include twice the amount of participants at a much-reduced cost in comparison to our regular in-person program. While we maintain the value of in-person intercultural experiences and hope to return to that format after

the pandemic, we've seen the potential of using a mix of both virtual and in-person learning for the future.

The Canadian justice mobilizer also supported the "16 Days of Activism on Gender-Based Violence" (GBV) campaign (Nov. 25-Dec. 10). Bringing together the Justice and Reconciliation team in Canada (including the Centre for Public Dialogue, Indigenous Ministries, and Safe Church) as well as the Office of Social Justice in the U.S., we developed a webinar to highlight GBV in North America, and we produced an advocacy action alert focused on GBV and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada.

The Canadian version of the Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy workshop has now been downloaded over 100 times. In January the workshop was hosted in Edmonton at The River CRC; and then during the pandemic the justice mobilizer adapted the content to a webinar format that could be shared nationally. The webinar was hosted by three churches/campus ministries in the remainder of 2020. Feedback from hosting the live workshop in 2019, as well as new ideas from the virtual adaptation this year, demonstrated a need for updates, so the workshop will be revamped for in-person and online use and relaunched in Canada (along with a new U.S. version in partnership with the U.S. Office of Social Justice) in early 2021.

In addition, 2020 marked the first year of a long-term project, *Hearts Exchanged*; an intercultural and reconciliation formation learning journey for Christian Reformed congregants and churches in Canada. Beginning with a pilot of two learning cohorts in Eastern and Western Canada in fall 2020, *Hearts Exchanged* will expand over the next three years into every classis/region in Canada and will culminate with a commissioning event at the next Canadian National Gathering. The goal of the project is to develop a reconciliation identity in the CRC in Canada through acknowledging and working to undo spiritual harm and building healthy and refounded relationships with Indigenous communities. The justice mobilizer has been involved in all phases of the project, including planning/development of curriculum and facilitating cohorts. The participation of World Renew in supporting the vision, connections, and implementation of future cohorts of *Hearts Exchanged* has been and will continue to be a key part of the project.

c. International justice

World Renew's mandate to alleviate suffering in the world is based on principles of biblical mercy and justice. In justice education, we create opportunities for teaching and learning that are implemented through existing church networks to advance the rights of each person. This includes advocacy action, servant leadership, peacebuilding, and trauma healing. The following account demonstrates World Renew's efforts in Niger to provide trauma healing and support to people who have suffered injustice.

Several years ago rioters attacked and burned down homes, businesses, and a church in a small village in the Sahara Desert. The families who lived there ran, with the few possessions they could carry, to villages nearby.

World Renew and a partner provided the survivors with both emergency assistance and long-term help. A few weeks after the attack, in partnership with the American Bible Society, World Renew offered trauma-healing training to church leaders. The pastor learned to facilitate a Bible study titled *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* with his parishioners. Then the church members gathered in a temporary space to work through the lessons together.

"We stopped – and we spent six weeks going over and over the lesson on forgiveness because we weren't yet ready to forgive," the pastor said. "When we finally reached the point where we were able to forgive the neighbors who attacked us, we realized that we are not only called to forgive them – but also to love them!"

When the church completed its trauma-healing training, they contacted World Renew to learn about community outreach through Christian development work. World Renew's integrated approach to working in communities took the church from forgiving their enemies to loving their neighbors. In the process, they discovered that they could change the story of poverty in their community – and change their own story as well.

Once the victims of violence, the church is now loved and respected by their neighbors and village leaders. From their desire to forgive and find peace in Christ, this community of believers is showing their neighbors the power of God to change lives.

In Niger and many other countries around the world, World Renew seeks to encourage community development based on peace, justice, and equity for every person. Overcoming the trauma, violence, and injustices of the past is essential for individuals and communities to heal, become whole, and move forward with hope.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

In communities where the gospel can be preached freely, World Renew openly integrates its Christian faith into its work. In contexts where Christianity is not recognized or welcomed, World Renew establishes common ground through values training that is rooted in our faith, often bringing the first glimpse of salvation into hearts, homes, and communities where hope seems lost.

By working with churches and partners globally, World Renew strengthens both local churches and their denominational structures through essential training that increases ministry outreach capacity and the proclamation of the gospel. In some communities, World Renew works collaboratively with Resonate Global Mission and other CRC agencies worldwide, opening the door to a greater ministry presence through community outreach in development and disaster-response programming. The following story not only illustrates the teaching of God's Word but also demonstrates the strengthening of faith even in the face of persecution.

Matthew, the accountant for World Renew's Niger partner Showing Everyone Love (SEL), read from 2 Timothy 3 as part of the team's devotions: "'. . . In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived' [3:12-13]."

"We are," he reflected soberly, "living in these times."

A church denomination, SEL is indeed living in a time of persecution. Jihadist threats have resulted in many of its churches and most of the schools in its communities being closed for months now. People are being threatened; some schools are even being burned. Staff members, pastors, and teachers all have personal stories of threat and danger. Many have fled their homes to move to the city in hopes that they will be safer there. Some pastors in exile have carefully set up "house churches" so that believers can continue to meet together outside of their traditional church buildings.

And yet, SEL's president says, the church is stronger than ever. He has seen an inspiring increase in leadership and devotion. He places a lot of credit for this with a household advisor program started by World Renew and SEL.

A household advisor encourages and teaches best practices to community families in the areas of agriculture, income generation, health, family responsibilities, or prayer. "The church had been in a deep sleep," says SEL's president, "but thanks to the prayer household advisors, it is being woken up!"

Kanpoa (not his real name) is the prayer family advisor in his village. He visits families to find out how they are doing, to encourage them in daily Bible reading and prayer, and to invite them to put into practice what God is showing them. At a recent meeting of household advisors, Kanpoa was effusive about the program.

"I am really satisfied with the household advisors program," he said. "Personally this has really helped me strengthen my Christian faith, because through this program I decided to read my Bible every day before sleeping, and also to read it with my family. Through this I have seen my whole family grow in their faith. I am also advising five other households in my village, and they have put into practice my advice. Each night they are praying together as a family and reading the Bible before going to bed. . . . I sincerely thank SEL [and World Renew] for this program."

World Renew's integrated programs represent the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, helping people in need through practical interventions in the key areas of food security, economic opportunity, peace and justice, disaster response, and community health while also pointing participants to the saving grace of the God who loves them.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

A. World Renew Church and Community Engagement Program

1. Offerings

   World Renew does not receive ministry shares from Christian Reformed churches but depends on the generosity of members and congregations who give toward several synodically designated Sunday offerings each year. In 2021 these denominationally approved offerings are slated to include the following:

   – March 7: Canadian Foodgrains Bank (Canada)/Disaster Response Services (U.S.)

- April 11: Refugee Sunday (Canada)/Growing Hope GLOBALLY (U.S.)
- May 9: Mother's Day/Maternal and Child Health/Free a Family®
- June 27: Human Trafficking Awareness (Canada)
- November 7: World Hunger Sunday
- December 25: "World Renew"

2. Reaching and growing into constituency beyond the CRC

In 58 years of ministry, World Renew has engaged with and blessed many people around the world, from participants to constituents to others involved in the work. As World Renew has grown in vision and scope, it is necessary that the work of this CRC agency is shared, structurally and intentionally, with people beyond our denomination.

In 2020 World Renew continued to develop its strategic planning and research initiative to increase denominational diversity among constituents and partners. The Church and Community Engagement teams in both the U.S. and Canada each have a full-time staff person devoted to increasing participation among "Beyond CRC" (bCRC) churches. In addition, World Renew continues to partner officially with the Reformed Church in America and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

The goal for World Renew's bCRC program is to identify, connect, and engage bCRC churches with the mission and vision of World Renew, thereby creating long-term church partners in DRS and international program ministries. Church and Community Engagement is working to achieve this goal by doing the following:

- identifying and qualifying partners in the Reformed Church in America, ECO (in the U.S.), independent churches in both the U.S. and Canada, and churches with a history of World Renew Disaster Response Services involvement
- finding networks and partnerships that would lead us to churches and denominations with similar organizational structures
- looking for "cluster groups" of receptive churches where our efforts will be most efficient
- creating awareness through marketing, personal contacts, meetings, and conferences of partner denominations and groups
- sharing resources, curriculum, presentations, and access to speakers that provide avenues for education and advocacy for churches that share this affinity.

As World Renew believes that our ministries help people who live in the deepest levels of poverty to flourish through local Asset-Based Community Development partners, and that we provide a necessary response to victims of disaster, we want to expand these resources to like-minded churches outside the CRC base.

World Renew is also a member of several international collaborative networks, including the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Growing Hope Globally, ACT Alliance, and Integral Alliance. These networks provide access to funding and grants from donors beyond the CRC who also support other member organizations in these networks.

3. Church engagement highlights

The Global Engagement Opportunities (GEO) program seeks to bring the work of World Renew to life for congregations in a meaningful way. There are currently more than 200 active GEO partnerships in North America. With regard to countries and projects in which World Renew works, the GEO program offers churches in-depth information in the following ways:

- GEO offers opportunities for groups to learn more about geographical, political, and other relevant issues in a country they support.
- GEO explains how donated funds are put to work.
- GEO updates groups regularly on their chosen region, allowing a more personal relationship with staff in the field and ongoing prayer for the team.
- In 2020, GEO arranged ways and means for churches to receive first-hand information and "visits" from field staff regularly and virtually.
- GEO is a great first step toward considering participation in the Global Partnership Program, in which congregations in North America structurally interact with, learn from, and serve congregations and communities in global locations.

IV. Board matters

The World Renew Board of Delegates is a key support of World Renew's ministry. The board's primary function is to set the vision and mission of World Renew and to encourage and track the accomplishment of that vision.

World Renew's governance structure is made up of delegates from each CRC classis, in addition to as many as 27 members-at-large, who together constitute the Board of Delegates of World Renew.

The delegates serve as a vital communication link with CRC classes and churches. They select member national boards, with up to seven members on the U.S. board and up to nine members on the Canadian board. The two boards together form the Joint Ministry Council, which provides governance for World Renew as a whole.

Board of Directors of World Renew-Canada
Andrew Geisterfer, president; Edmonton, Alberta
Dennis DeGroot, vice president; Langley, British Columbia
Jason De Boer, treasurer; Jerseyville, Ontario
Margaret Van Oord, secretary; Jewetts Mills, New Brunswick
Sheku Koroma, member-at-large; Brampton, Ontario
Gerda Kits, member-at-large; Edmonton, Alberta
Ray Anema, member-at-large; Simcoe, Ontario
Joseph Hamilton, pastoral advisor; Sarnia, Ontario

Board of Directors of World Renew-U.S.
Charles Adams, president; Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Rebekah Vanderzee, vice president; Bellflower, California
Jeff Banaszak, treasurer; Holland, Michigan
Shirley VanHeukelem, secretary; Denver, Colorado
Monika Grasley, member-at-large; Merced, California
Shanti Jost, member-at-large; North Haledon, New Jersey
Bonny Mulder-Behnia, pastoral advisor; Bellflower, California

A. World Renew board nominations, reappointments, and term completions

1. Canada member-at-large delegates

   The board of World Renew requests that synod appoint each of the following nominees to a first term of three years as Canada members-at-large:

   Darryl Beck is an active member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario, where he has served as a Sunday school teacher, deacon, treasurer, chair of the outreach committee, and leader of several mission trips to El Salvador. He has also served for several terms on area Christian school boards. As a CPA and controller at Cla-Val Canada Corporation, he brings essential skills for serving in a treasurer role on the board. He is a nominee for member-at-large for the region of Classis Niagara.

   Louise Boutin is an active member of Calvin CRC in Ottawa, Ontario, where she currently serves as chair of the safe church committee. She has also served in leadership roles as a member and chair of council, as part of the ministry board, and as an administrative elder. She has served as a delegate to synod and has attended classis meetings. She is a nominee for member-at-large for the region of Classis Eastern Canada, Ottawa area.

2. Reappointment of Canada classical members and members-at-large

   The following Canadian delegates are completing their first term on the board and are recommended for a second three-year term: Ray Anema (Hamilton), Daniel Mack (Lake Superior), Andrew Geisterfer (member-at-large), Julie VandenHeuvel (member-at-large), and Margaret VanOord (member-at-large).

3. Canada classical delegate appointment

   The board requests that synod appoint the following as a Canada classical delegate to a first term of three years: Echo Macloed (Eastern Canada).

4. Canada members completing terms

   World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members on completing a second term of service: George Lubberts (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Richard Smit (Eastern Canada), Jason DeBoer (member-at-large), and Thomas Gnanayduam (member-at-large).

5. U.S. classical delegate appointment

   The board requests that synod appoint the following as a U.S. classical delegate to a first term of three years: Arlan Koppendrayer (Lake Superior, U.S.).

6. Reappointment of U.S. classical member

   The following U.S. delegate is completing a first term on the board and is recommended for reappointment to a second three-year term: Carol Van Klompenburg (Central Plains).

7. U.S. members completing terms

   World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members completing their service on the board: Linda Marcus (Lake Superior, U.S.), Rich Vander Ziel (Minnkota), Shirley Van Heukelem (Rocky Mountain), and Gregg Robbert (member-at-large).

B. Financial matters

1. Salary disclosure

In accord with synod's mandate to report executive salary levels, World Renew reports the following:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
E2	2	1	1
E3	1	1	0
H	13	13	0

2. Detailed financial information

Detailed financial information and budgets will be submitted to synod by way of the *Agenda for Synod 2021—Financial and Business Supplement*.

C. Human Resources management

World Renew continually evaluates the excellence of its programs and relies on its human resource (HR) systems to provide support to its teams. World Renew's diverse, professional, skilled staff is expected to meet the goals set around its vision and mission.

World Renew has a rigorous recruiting process and successfully hired approximately twenty highly skilled staff last year. We continually expand our recruitment activities to ensure that we meet our diversity and professional learning goals. To that end, we promote professional development and learning, and we continue to develop competencies across the organization.

World Renew is also committed to gender mainstreaming, with the goal of gender equality across our structure and in our staffing processes. As part of its gender plan, World Renew regularly tracks goals for the number of both men and women in leadership positions, staff perception about their team's commitment to gender equality, and the participation of men and women in decision making. In terms of World Renew's leadership positions (those with a job level of H or higher) 56.25 percent are held by women.

Annual performance reviews are routine for all World Renew staff. This practice gives staff an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and critically review their growth areas. World Renew is thankful for all of its human resources, who are essential to providing program excellence in communities in need around the globe.

D. Resource Development report

For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, World Renew was blessed to receive over $37 million (USD) from all sources in the United States and Canada. These funds were then leveraged into greater ministry dollars through grants, partnerships, and collaborations. In 2020, 83 percent of each gift World Renew received benefited people in need. The other 17 percent supported World Renew's core mission through administration and fundraising. Six percent helped to administer our programs effectively, and 11 cents of each dollar provided donors with communication and accountability about how their gifts were used.

World Renew directed approximately $11.7 million (USD) of its 2020 financial resources toward our core international development programs, and $14 million (USD) went to disaster response. Over $1.3 million (USD)

was used for community development in North America, and just over $1 million (USD) was directed to constituent education.

World Renew's connections to international organizations such as Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB), ACT and Integral alliances, and Growing Hope Globally (formerly Foods Resource Bank) provided technical and financial resources that expanded our reach to more people and communities. For example, in 2020, as a member of CFGB, World Renew committed over $10 million in resources to food-related programming in 12 countries, while Growing Hope Globally supported World Renew with over $475,000 (USD) for food security programs in nine countries.

World Renew's fundraising efforts in 2020 resulted in just over $3 million (USD) from grants, and more than $7 million (USD) from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for disaster response and food security programs internationally.

Although at the end of fiscal year 2019-2020 World Renew had an income deficit over expenses of $4.2 million, these funds were spent out of reserves that had built up from the previous year. During this period World Renew launched an intentional long-term effort to better serve churches and to increase revenue and therefore ministry impact around the world. Its investments today will yield more lives changed in the years to come. Of the deficit, approximately $2.2 million (USD) was operating expenses over revenues, $1.0 million (USD) was due to a net decrease in unrestricted estate gifts, and the remaining $1.0 million (USD) was the net spend-down of prior-year donor-restricted contributions for disaster and community development programs.

World Renew has made great strides in building up its Comprehensive Impact Campaign (CIC). The CIC is intended to grow World Renew's fundraising capacities, strengthen its relationships with CRC congregations, and acquire new churches and donors beyond the denomination. The overall goal is to raise $200 million to reach 6 million participants in five years in order to increase ministry impact and change even more lives. The CIC focuses attention on the "five keys" of World Renew's programs: disaster response, food security, community health, economic opportunity, and peace and justice. In order to prepare for the launch of this year's CIC, World Renew is expanding and improving its marketing reach to acquire new donors. One example of this effort is World Renew's development of an automated proposal system. It provides proposals that link country program funding opportunities with church and donor engagement teams to ensure a coordinated fundraising effort for the highest areas of need. It helps churches and donors connect more to specific World Renew programs so that they can better understand the impact of their gifts.

In an effort to continue improving the quality of our programs and processes, especially to ensure that our work ultimately blesses communities and provides good accountability to our donors, we have pursued a verification and certification process from an internationally recognized body that sets standards for this. They are called the Core Humanitarian Standards. Over the course of the 2020-2021 year, there will be an audit to achieve our verification. The auditors conduct interviews with over 20 staff and then do country desk audits in select countries. Depending on pandemic restrictions, country visits will also be made.

In 2020, World Renew continued to receive accolades from nonprofit monitoring organizations for its financial and management practices, including being ranked among Canada's Top 100 Charities in the International Aid category in the Canadian national publication, *MacLean's*. Each year the publication assesses Canadian charities based on data provided by Charity Intelligence. They look at how each charity spends the money they receive and how transparent they are in providing this information. In 2020, World Renew was also rated as one of Canada's Top 100 Charities by *MoneySense* magazine. This rating includes financial efficiency and transparency.

In the U.S., World Renew has achieved a Gold Star of Transparency from GuideStar. We continue to maintain excellent standing with Christian monitoring organizations—CCCC in Canada and ECFA in the U.S. World Renew is committed to our mission and to carefully stewarding with absolute integrity the financial gifts we receive, and we thank God for these recognitions of its values: faith, people flourishing, effectiveness, and stewardship.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Charles Adams, president of World Renew-U.S.; Andrew Geisterfer, president of World Renew-Canada; Carol Bremer-Bennett, director of World Renew-U.S.; and Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director of World Renew-Canada, when World Renew matters are discussed and need to be addressed.

B. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support.

C. That synod, by way of the ballot, appoint and reappoint members to the World Renew Board of Delegates.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

World Renew
Carol Bremer-Bennett, director, World Renew-U.S.
Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director, World Renew-Canada

Calvin Theological Seminary

I. Introduction – Mission Statement

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees presents this report to Synod 2021 with gratitude to God for his provision in the past year. The seminary has experienced God's faithfulness and looks toward the future with hope and anticipation.

Calvin Theological Seminary has been involved in the training and teaching of students for ministry for 145 years since 1876 and was the first agency or institution developed by the Christian Reformed Church.

Mission statement: As a learning community in the Reformed Christian tradition that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ, Calvin Theological Seminary exists to serve the Christian Reformed Church in North America and wider constituencies by preparing individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word and by offering Reformed theological scholarship and counsel.

II. COVID-19 update

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected and is continuing to affect us all. In March 2020 we moved our course instruction online with hopes of being able to return to some level of in-person instruction at some point in the spring semester, but that was not possible. At the end of the semester, we held a virtual commemoration for our sixty-one graduates who came from Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States.

The fall 2020 semester brought us to a "flex" delivery system of education in which we had asynchronous online courses as well as synchronous residential courses in which students had the option of being present via Zoom or in person. Then in November, near the time of the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, we again moved instruction entirely online. From using an outdoor tent in warm weather to turning our chapel into a classroom space later in the fall, we aimed to do what we could to adapt to the circumstances that kept changing throughout the semester.

The spring 2021 semester will start in "flex" mode again, but we will probably have most students begin online and then hopefully move into more face-to-face residential instruction as the vaccine for COVID-19 becomes more widely available.

We would like to commend everyone who worked to provide and support IT functions and program support during this time, with special thanks to Daryl Boersema, technology support manager, and Chris De Man, organizational systems and strategic initiatives manager. We also give thanks for the team leadership of Margaret Mwenda, chief operations officer, and Jeff Sajdak, dean of students, who lead our COVID-19 response team.

While we have seen a pause in prospective enrollment as students decide whether to attend school during a pandemic, we have also been blessed by a summer 2020 session during which we partnered with Calvin University and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to offer "COVID courses" online. In these courses over 300 individuals from across the globe took part

to focus on some aspect of responding to and ministering in the midst of this pandemic. We are experimenting with an online format for continuing such courses—located at calvinseminary.edu/academics/covid-19-courses.

We were also able to provide a complete online event, titled "Loving Your Neighbor Conference: Forming Citizens of God's Kingdom in Prison and Upon Reentry." The entire conference is available at vimeo.com/showcase/7340817.

We want to acknowledge and give thanks for the ongoing and faithful support from the Christian Reformed Church as a denomination and from individuals, churches, and classes. We are blessed by this community that continues to care for and encourage us—board members, faculty, staff, and students.

III. Reflecting on Our Calling (CRCNA ministry priorities)

Over the past number of years, Calvin Theological Seminary faculty, with input and final approval from the seminary's Board of Trustees, produced a "Vision Frame" document that includes our mission statement (*What* are we doing?) and continues as follows:

Values—*Why* are we doing it?

Reformed theology—All our teaching and formation grow from a shared understanding of God's Word as articulated in the Reformed confessions.

The church—We are formed by and serve the church, God's agent of hope for the world.

Cultural context—We give our students tools to sow the gospel in a multicultural world. We challenge one another to have hearts that engage the broader world God so loves.

The whole person—We cultivate meaningful relationships with our students to foster personal and spiritual growth throughout our learning community.

Strategy—*How* are we doing it?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit,

- we are known for academic excellence and scholarship.
- we provide innovative learning environments.
- we pursue synergy with our graduates and other ministry leaders.
- we nurture a community of hospitality.
- we enrich the student experience through vital partnership.

Measures—*When* are we successful?

When graduates of Calvin Theological Seminary

- preach and teach the Bible (message).
- grow in their pastoral identity (person).
- discern and engage ministry contexts (context).
- cultivate and lead communities of disciples (goal).
- equip the church to renew communities for the glory of God (purpose).

A scan of this material shows significant convergence with the ministry priorities of the Christian Reformed Church in North America:

Faith Formation—Calvin Theological Seminary seeks to train disciples who become the trainers of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Servant Leadership—Calvin Theological Seminary is seeking to identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God. From Dig (formerly Facing Your Future)—a program for high school students—to its resident and online education programs followed by continuing education programs and resources, Calvin Theological Seminary is training leaders.

Global Mission—The world is at our doorstep. Every year over 25 different nations (this past year nearly 35 percent of our degree-seeking students came from outside the U.S. and Canada) are represented in the student body of Calvin Theological Seminary. The training for global mission takes place not just in classrooms but also over lunch in the Student Center.

Mercy and Justice—Calvin Theological Seminary trains students through cross-cultural internships and exposure to environments that help form the hearts of Christian disciples. For example, experience with prison ministry through Calvin Theological Seminary has led students to witness the need for ministry to prisoners and to understand the structures of society that need to be addressed.

Gospel Proclamation and Worship—Along with the priority of Servant Leadership this is probably our leading edge within the CRC ministry priorities. Our core degree is the Master of Divinity, which helps to form preachers and teachers of the gospel. This past year, we were able to secure long-term funding for our Center for Excellence in Preaching and gained authorization to launch a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree that continues this formation process for practitioners in ministry.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan)

Making and maintaining connections with churches is a foundational component of education for Calvin Theological Seminary. Whether this involves church-based internships or assignments related to the local church environment, the local church is the key partner for nurturing, developing, and training students.

In fall 2017, Calvin Theological Seminary set up a new way for M.A. and M.Div. students to fulfill a significant part of their contextual learning requirements. From early on in their programs, students are placed in a church or ministry organization where they serve for two years, concurrent with their course work, through internship hours coordinated with churches during the ministry year. The office of Vocational Formation, led by Geoff Vandermolen and administrative coordinator Chris Wright, continues to develop partnerships to help bridge the classroom and the church. The following organizations and churches are part of this concurrent, contextual learning approach:

Ada CRC, Ada, MI
Blythefield Hills CRC, Rockford, MI
Brookside CRC, Grand Rapids, MI
Caledonia CRC, Caledonia, MI
Calvin CRC, Grand Rapids, MI

Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI
Campus Ministry at Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI
Cascade Fellowship CRC, Grand Rapids, MI
Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Christ Church, Davis, CA
Christ Presbyterian Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Church of the Servant, Grand Rapids, MI
City Life Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Community CRC, Wyoming, MI
Creston CRC, Grand Rapids, MI
Disciple Making Church, Bayside, NY
Encounter, Kentwood, MI
Faith Christian Fellowship, Walnut Creek, CA
Fuller Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, MI
The Gathering at Caledonia CRC, Caledonia, MI
Grace for the Nations Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Granum CRC, Granum, AB
Hebron CRC, Ajax, ON
Heritage CRC, Byron Center, MI
Joyful Church of Seattle, Lynwood, WA
Monroe Community Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids, MI
River Rock Church, Rockford, MI
Rockford Reformed Church, Rockford, MI
Second CRC, Byron Center, MI
Stanwood Community Church, Navarre, OH

Because internship hours may now occur during concurrent internships throughout the academic year, we have opened a new way of connecting students to churches for summer service. We appreciate the number of churches that have served as "additional" places of formation, including these cross-cultural and international sites:

A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (Yellowstone)
Mel Trotter Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI
New City Farm/Neighbors, Grand Rapids, MI
New Hope Baptist Church, Toronto, ON
Southwest Community Church, Wyoming, MI
Sunshine Community Church, Grand Rapids, MI

We also continue to welcome the opportunity to connect our students with churches in need of summer ministry leadership—as a result of pastoral vacancy, sabbaticals, or new ministry initiatives. Please contact the Vocational Formation office for more information about this process at vocationalformation@calvinseminary.edu and/or visit calvinseminary.edu/church-resources.

Calvin Theological Seminary also offers continuing education opportunities throughout the year that are open to pastors and lay leaders alike. Many of these opportunities are presented through the Center for Excellence in Preaching (CEP), led by director Rev. Scott Hoezee. You will find a refreshed website for CEP as it continues to serve as one of the premier

Reformed preaching sites in North America (visit cep.calvinseminary.edu/ for information).

In January 2020, Calvin Theological Seminary called Rev. Shawn Brix as our first Canadian church relations liaison (CCRL). The CCRL is a "pastor-ambassador" who builds and strengthens bridges between Calvin Theological Seminary and Canadian churches and ministries. This newly created position is a part of Calvin Theological Seminary's strong commitment to serving churches in Canada, and it reflects our desire to imagine and build new partnerships and initiatives. This connecting, listening, and serving role will help Calvin Theological Seminary be more present and available to serve leaders and churches in Canada. Since his ordination in 1995, Rev. Brix has served congregations in Acton and in Burlington, Ontario, and he most recently served at Living Hope CRC in Peterborough, Ontario.

IV. Additional program and ministry highlights

This past fall, Calvin Theological Seminary proceeded into the following new key initiatives:

The seminary launched two fully online master of arts programs: M.A. in Ministry Leadership and M.A. in Bible and Theology. These streamlined degrees are designed for emerging Christian leaders who want to focus their training in a key area of ministry. Students can choose from a variety of delivery formats, including online access so that students can enjoy the life-changing benefits of a Calvin Theological Seminary education while never needing to leave their home community, work, and ministry. This new delivery system will also be helpful in developing certification programs that will expand the scope of theological training to church workers and church leaders. To learn more about this, visit calvinseminary.edu/ma.

The seminary expanded its Ph.D. program into New Testament Studies as a result of gaining key funding for the Deppe Family Doctoral Chair in New Testament as well as scholarships for Ph.D. students. The Ph.D. program began in 1992 and has served in the formation of leaders for the global church.

In addition, the seminary launched a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree with twelve new students that focuses on applied, contextual learning for a diverse community of practitioners to develop advanced ministry leadership skills and spiritual formation. The webpage for this program can be found at calvinseminary.edu/academics/doctor-of-ministry.

In fall 2019 the Latino/a Ministry program, under the continued direction of Calvin Seminary professor Mariano Avila, launched two new cohorts in its certificate program. One certificate is in Latino/a ministry, and the other is in family care. There is even a pathway to a master of arts degree in family care for students who complete both certificates along with Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) through a partnership with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services.

We continue to be blessed by strong support for our hybrid education master of divinity degree program. The launch of the distance education M.Div. degree has created significant interest in Calvin Theological Seminary, and we can now add this to our distance delivery format, which includes our M.A. and M.T.S. degree programs. Over 25 percent of our degree seeking students receive their education through a hybrid (distance and online) or completely online format.

The seminary is grateful for 225 degree-seeking students and 42 non-degree-seeking students enrolled in the fall semester of 2020-2021, which includes 59 new students. Ninety-eight are M.Div. students (59 residential and 39 in the distance education program). At the same time, we urge congregations to encourage and support women and men who seek additional training for ministry to consider Calvin Theological Seminary.

On September 8, 2015, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary were blessed to open prison doors by beginning classes at Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan, as part of the Calvin Prison Initiative. Twenty new students from within the prison system came together to begin a five-year bachelor's degree program accredited through Calvin University. A total of 94 students are now enrolled in the program. This program began in response to a request from the State of Michigan and is a coordinated effort of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. It is our hope that this "seminary behind bars program" will be used by God to transform not only the students in the classroom but also the prison system as these students are deployed within it. In addition, we testify that professors and students at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary are changed and affected by their involvement in the lives of students at Handlon. While the first bachelor of arts graduates did complete their program in May 2020, we are still waiting for an in-person graduation to celebrate this accomplishment.

We are grateful for partnerships with congregations and pastors in the training of our students. Eleven of our nineteen formation group leaders are pastors, and the other eight are seminary faculty/administration members. They include Mike Abma, Amanda Benckhuysen, Gary Burge, Sarah Chun, Chris De Man, Aaron Einfeld, Marc Holland, Layne Kilbreath, Samantha DeJong McCarron, David Poolman, Denise Posie, David Rylaarsdam, Jeff Sajdak, Chris Schoon, Heather Stroobosscher, Albert Strydhorst, Corey Van Huizen, and Cory Willson.

We appreciate all the support of the church and alumni for their encouragement to expand our offerings for academic and ministry leadership for local churches and the global church.

V. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Julius Medenblik, president; Dr. Margaret Mwenda, chief operating officer; Dr. Gary Burge, dean of the faculty; Ms. Joan Beelen, associate dean of academic services and registrar; Rev. Geoff Vandermolen, director of vocational formation; Mr. Robert Knoor, director of development; Rev. Jeff Sajdak, dean of students; and Ms. Sarah Chun, dean of international students and scholar services.

VI. Faculty

The seminary faculty continues to serve the church in numerous ways. Although teaching and preparing students for various forms of ministry continues to be central to their work, members of the faculty also provide education and counsel to many local congregations and broader assemblies, preach regularly, publish scholarly books and articles, participate in significant conferences, and in various ways seek to stay attuned to developments

in ministries in the Christian Reformed Church and the church of Christ worldwide.

One such resourcing that we would highlight from the fall of 2020 would be the presentation that included professor Cory Willson—co-author of a new book titled *Work and Worship: Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy*. A link to an overview presentation on this topic is at vimeo.com/478925236.

We also want to acknowledge the transition of professor Amanda Benckhuysen (O.T. professor), who has accepted the call to be the next director of Safe Church Ministry for the CRCNA. Professor Benckhuysen is an excellent teacher and scholar. Her new role will only extend her gifts to others. We wish her well, and we are very glad that she will still be doing some teaching for us in the spring. (See crcna.org/news-and-events/news/benckhuysen-be-new-safe-church-director.)

The transition of Professor Benckhuysen as well as the upcoming retirements of some professors will be leading into a search process in which we will be inviting applicants in the areas of church history, Old Testament, New Testament, and Latino/a Ministry Program leadership, among other needs. We invite your prayers for God's provision, and in the near future we anticipate asking the church to provide nominations for faculty openings.

VII. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary session online in October 2020 and via conference call in February 2020. It hopes to hold an in-person/flex plenary session in May 2020.

The board officers are Mr. Keith Oosthoek, chair; Mr. Dave Morren, vice-chair; and Ms. Heather Garretson, secretary.

Trustees Ms. Theresa Rottschafer (Region 7), Rev. Robert Drenten (Region 8), and Mr. Paul Boersma (Region 9) have completed one term of service and are eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod reappoint these three board members to a second three-year term.

Completing a second term on the board is the current board chair Mr. Keith Oosthoek (Region 4 at-large). Also completing a second term on the board are pastor Sergio Castillo (Region 5) and Rev. Scott Elgersma (Region 6). In addition, completing service after a first term is Rev. Marc Nelesen (Region 10). We are very grateful for their service and wise counsel to the seminary and to the church.

A. Regional nominees

The following nominees have been submitted to the classes in their respective regions for a vote. The results of those elections will be presented to Synod 2021 for ratification.

It is always our intention to work toward submitting a slate of two names for consideration by the classes for regional board membership. But due to the lack of nominees from some regions (in large part, we believe, because of the pandemic), the seminary in some cases is forwarding a single, qualified nominee for appointment to the board.

1. Region 5

   Eric Lintner is a member of Christ Community Church in Tualatin, Oregon, where he currently serves as council president. He is a pharmacist who received training at Oregon State University, Portland State University, and the University of Oregon. He currently serves as director of clinical projects at Consonus Healthcare, where he has also held the position of general manager. He has previously served on a number of pharmacy- and health-related vocational boards and committees, as well as with community organizations. He has also served his church as an elder, as church renewal lab committee chair, and as pastoral search committee chair.

2. Region 6

   Pastor Melvin O. Jackson is the senior pastor of Grace Unlimited CRC in Los Angeles, California, where he has served since 2002. He received training from the University of Memphis and from Life Bible College in Los Angeles. He has served the CRCNA on the Classis Greater Los Angeles leadership team, on the Black and Reformed team, on the Council of Delegates (Global Mission committee), and on the Candidacy Committee.

   Pastor Julius Umawing is the minister of discipleship at Bethel CRC in Sun Valley, California. He received an M.Div. degree in the Philippines and a Th.M. degree from Calvin Theological Seminary. He also obtained a doctor of dental medicine degree while in the Philippines. Pastor Umawing served on the board of trustees of the Philippines CRC and has served the CRCNA as a synodical delegate and as a member and chair of the leadership development committee for Classis Greater Los Angeles. He currently serves as regional pastor for the classis.

3. Region 10

   Rev. Arthur J. Van Wolde serves as senior pastor of Haven CRC in Zeeland, Michigan. He has served there since 2012 and has previously served churches in Dearborn, Michigan; Bunde, Minnesota; and Pella, Iowa. He received training from Kuyper College and Calvin Theological Seminary. He has served as a member of the board of trustees of Kuyper College, the launch team for New Life Prison Congregation (Newton, Iowa), and the classis interim committee of Classis Central Plans. He is currently serving on the classis interim team for Classis Zeeland.

B. At-large nominee

Synod has approved that in a few particular regions where there are two trustees per region, one of those positions can be used as a regional additional at-large position to enable the board to pursue additional balance with regard to diversity and skill sets. The board intends to present a nominee for the Region 4 at-large position by way of its supplemental report.

VIII. Students 2020-2021

The composition of the seminary's student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics from fall 2020 indicate the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

A. Denominational affiliation

Christian Reformed: 97 (43%)
Presbyterian: 44
RCA: 14
Other Reformed: 9
Baptist: 5
Other/None listed: 42
(29+ total denominations)

B. Geographical information:

U.S. students: 128 (57%)
Canadian students: 22 (10%)
Korean: 40 (18%)
Chinese: 13 (6%)
Other: 22 (9%)
Total countries represented: 26

C. Student body

Male students: 163 (73%)
Female students: 62 (27%)

D. Programs and students enrolled

M.Div.: 98
Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy: 17
M.A. (English): 33
M.A. (Spanish): 8
M.T.S.: 19
Th.M.: 24
Ph.D.: 32
Hybrid/Distance Learning: 72 (this number does not reflect residential students who also take a hybrid/distance class)
Certificate/diploma: 5
Unclassified: 6

E. Non-degree students

In addition, we have 94 students who are part of the joint Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary program known as the Calvin Prison Initiative. We also have a total of 13 students registered in our two Spanish-language certificate programs.

IX. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Keith Oosthoek, chair, and Rev. Julius Medenblik, president, when seminary matters are presented.

B. That synod, by way of the ballot, ratify the election and reappointment of trustees from the slates of nominees presented.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees
Heather Garretson, secretary

Worship Ministries

I. Introduction

2020 was a challenging year for all, and Worship Ministries (crcna.org/worship) was no exception. Despite the challenges, we continue to see God's providence and blessings, for which we give thanks.

At the time of writing this report, our 2.3 FTE staff includes Joyce Borger (director of Worship Ministries and editor of *Reformed Worship*, 1 FTE), Laura Meyering (administrative specialist for Worship Ministries and subscription manager for *Reformed Worship* (0.8 FTE), Katie Roelofs (worship catalyzer, 0.25 FTE), and Jeremy Simpson (worship catalyzer, 0.25 FTE). We also continue to be grateful for the work of Kai Ton Chau (associate editor, *Reformed Worship*, 0.2 FTE) who does this work as an employee of The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

June 1, 2020, marked the retirement of Diane Dykgraaf (program coordinator, 0.5 FTE). We remain grateful for her 24 years of faithful service to the denomination, starting with Christian Reformed Home Missions and including positions with Faith Alive Christian Resources and then with the Leadership office in addition to Worship Ministries.

Our advisory committee is made up of Gary Brouwers (pastoral advisor, chair), Joyce Jackson (Region 3), Darlene Silversmith (Region 6), April Jackson (African-American representative), Christian Sebastia (Latino Consejo representative), and Benjamin Hoekman (Calvin Theological Seminary student representative). The committee met in person the week before churches began moving to virtual worship, and since then we have developed a rhythm of shorter bimonthly online meetings. In addition, we have fourteen individuals willing to serve congregations in the area of worship as endorsed coaches (crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches).

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We value our ongoing conversations and work with Faith Formation Ministries, especially around faith practices and a project aimed at laying out a Reformed approach to the place of children in the worshiping community.

Reformed Worship (ReformedWorship.org) continues to encourage the inclusion of and attention to the needs of all ages in the worshiping community. Each print issue included "Children's Pages for the Christian Year" that were designed for children to learn about the Christian Year and are reproducible. Also available was a service titled "'Amen' Living: A Service on Acts 2 for Pentecost and Graduates," an intergenerational activity for creating a "Found Art Advent Wreath," and a blog: "Remembering Amidst Forgetting: 5 Tips for Leading Worship in Memory Care Residences."

Children were also in mind in the development of resources to assist congregations as they shifted to household and online worship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Servant leadership

The pandemic has placed incredible demands on our worship planners, leaders, and pastors. Throughout the year they needed to replan some wor-

ship services multiple times in response to COVID-19 realities. They needed to learn a new set of skills in the area of technology. Decision fatigue became apparent as every aspect of worship needed to be thought through repeatedly and traditions needed to be adapted—all with a level of pastoral sensitivity and recognition that there was no way to make everyone happy. Given all of this, we continue to be concerned about the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of our leaders. For this reason during the early weeks of the pandemic, staff made themselves available to meet via Zoom for an hour for one afternoon and one evening every week, creating space for prayer and sharing. Weekly Zoom roundtables resumed again in Advent for worship leaders to share ideas and ask questions of each other. In addition, we provided a webinar on "Self-Care for Worship Leaders" (available on The Network) and worked with CRC artist Regina Jupp to create an online spiritual retreat: "Moments" (reginajupp.com/moments). Both of these resources continue to be available. Additional articles and resources in support of our leaders can be found on the Network (network.crcna.org) and in *Reformed Worship*.

Worship Ministries also provides support to eleven CRC participants in the Certificate in Worship Leadership program through Samford University.

C. Global mission

Our worship both gathers the church and sends the church out to live missionally wherever we find ourselves. The connection between worship and mission continues to be a recurring theme in our work. This year one of our endorsed coaches led a webinar titled "The God Who Sends." *Reformed Worship* also published several articles and resources with missional themes. In addition, one of the books that our peer-learning book groups could choose to read was *The Gospel in a Handshake: Framing Worship for Mission* by CRC pastor Kevin Adams. We were excited that one group was made up entirely of church planters.

D. Mercy and justice

The book of Amos clearly teaches that our worship is not acceptable to God if we do not live lives of mercy and justice. The choices we make regarding the songs we sing, the words we speak, who gets to plan and lead, who is welcome, who is kept away because of inaccessibility, and so many other aspects of worship all reflect our understanding, commitment to, and practice of mercy and justice.

Much of our work this past year centered on listening to diverse voices, especially those of ethnic minority leaders and exploring multicultural worship. Peer-learning book groups were given the opportunity to read and engage issues of multicultural worship with "Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven" by Nikki Learner and Josh Davis.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

1. *Reformed Worship*

The quarterly journal *Reformed Worship* (*RW*), available in print and online, along with its website, *ReformedWorship*.org, remain key channels for supporting worship leaders in the CRC and beyond with an ecumenical and global subscription base. We ended the year with 1,785 subscribers, including 638 CRC subscribers, of which 294 are in Canada. This past year *Reformed Worship* had 423,703 web visitors and 740,494 page views.

Throughout the year we saw the number of individuals receiving *RW*'s monthly e-newsletter grow to 10,041. *RW*'s Facebook page has 5,469 followers.

This past year's theme issue focused on the theology of worship and included "Worship 101: A Five-part Series on Worship Basics" by Joy Engelsman and Joan DeVries, an article by Cornelius Plantinga on "Trinitarian Worship," and an article by CRC worship leader Chantel Varnado, "Come to the Altar: A Place of Spiritual Growth and Reflection," along with many other meaningful articles and resources from a diverse group of voices.

2. Peer-learning groups

   While last year we saw the formation of our first online groups, this year all of our peer-learning groups met virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten peer-learning book groups formed, with a total of 69 participants.

3. Webinars and roundtables

   In 2020, Worship Ministries offered 15 online learning opportunities. Some of the recordings of these webinars and roundtables are available via The Network and via YouTube channel (tinyurl.com/TrainCRCworship) where you will also find a library of past recordings. These recordings were viewed 1,158 times. Topics addressed in these events included a roundtable on "Virtual Church Tech Q&A" and a webinar on "Worshiping with the Psalms in This Time of Pandemic and Isolation."

4. Endorsed coaches

   We currently have 14 endorsed coaches and were able to meet together for a first time just a week before many churches began closing because of the pandemic. We are grateful for our coaches' flexibility in deciding to table our agenda and instead develop resources for churches to use for Lent and Easter. Endorsed coaches are individuals with particular gifts and knowledge in the area of worship, and they are available to work with individuals and congregations. For more information on this program, check out crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2025* (the Ministry Plan)

A. The local church

This past year was all about finding ways to support the local church as it grappled with COVID-19. Much of that work concentrated on the development of resources posted on The Network. A landing page, "Worship and COVID-19" (network.crcna.org/worship/worship-and-covid-19), points viewers to articles dealing with issues such as how to practice the Lord's Supper during the pandemic, "Next Steps for Worship: Planning Wisely, Thinking Deeply," and lament. We created and curated specific resources for Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Advent, and Christmas worship amid COVID-19 closings. In total we created 37 posts, many pointing to multiple resources, and together these received 30,831 pageviews. We are grateful for the many contributors who helped us provide these resources.

Worship Ministries had direct touchpoints with 187 different CRC congregations (not including *RW* visits or visitors to The Network or to our

YouTube channel). Our monthly Worship Ministries' e-newsletter goes out to 2,150 subscribers, and our Facebook page has 532 members. In December, we also began an Instagram account.

This was not the year we expected; for the majority of it we faced staffing challenges in Worship Ministries, but our worship leaders are a generous group—sharing graciously—enabling the faithful worship of God during a difficult time.

Worship Ministries
Joyce Borger, director

STANDING COMMITTEES

I. Introduction

Synod 2004 established the concept of the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee, which is now known as the Candidacy Committee. The committee mandate is available in a document titled Journey Toward Ordination, accessible on the Candidacy Committee website (crcna.org/candidacy).

Because Synod 2020 did not meet, several matters in the Candidacy Committee report and in its supplemental report to Synod 2020 were addressed in June 2020 by the Council of Delegates (COD) on behalf of synod. Other matters in the 2020 Candidacy Committee reports have been deferred to Synod 2021. The Candidacy Committee presents this report reflecting its work in 2020 to Synod 2021.

II. Committee membership

The members of the committee meet three times per year. As with other denominational committees, Candidacy Committee members serve a potential of two three-year terms.

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Pastor James Jones (2021/2), Rev. Susan LaClear (2021/2), Rev. Henry Jonker (2021/1), Judy Cook (2022/1), Rev. Felix Fernandez (2022/1), Rev. Mark Hilbelink (2022/2), Rev. Andrew Vander Leek (2022/2), Rev. Ashley Bonnes (2023/2), Rev. Moon Kim (2023/1), Rev. David Koll (staff), Rev. Jul Medenblik (ex officio, as the Calvin Theological Seminary representative), and Colin Watson, Sr. (ex officio, as executive director).

With sadness we note that Rev. Henry Jonker, completing his first term on the committee, passed away in December 2020. Our committee will present a slate of nominees to fill this position by way of the supplemental report to synod.

Pastor James Jones and Rev. Susan LaClear are completing their second terms and are not eligible for reappointment. Therefore the Candidacy Committee presents to synod the following slates of nominees for the election of two new members to fill these vacancies:

Position 1

Caleb Dickson was ordained as a commissioned pastor in Classis Red Mesa in 2018 for the role of pastor at Red Valley (Ariz.) CRC. He has been involved in ministry in Classis Red Mesa since 2011. He became a graduate in 2011 of the Classis Red Mesa Leadership Development Network and has since served on the oversight committee for that program. He served in the capacity of long-term pulpit supply at the Naschitti CRC from 2014 until he was called to Red Valley CRC. He has been a delegate to synod four times.

Fred Harvey was ordained as a commissioned pastor in Classis Hackensack in 2017. He currently serves as the lead pastor at Spirit and Truth Fellowship, a CRC ministry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He also continues to work as a human resource professional and consultant, a career he has been involved in for over twenty years. He serves on the interim committee for Classis Hackensack, and he serves on a joint missions committee for Classes Hudson and Hackensack.

Position 2

Adrienne Johnson was ordained as a commissioned pastor in Classis Rocky Mountain in 2013. She was originally a church planter, and now serves as a board-certified chaplain at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Denver, Colorado. She has four units of clinical pastoral education from Johns Hopkins Hospital and an M.Div. degree with honors with a focus on spiritual formation from Denver Seminary in Littleton, Colorado. She currently serves her classis as safe church coordinator and as a mentor for women pastors in her region.

Debra Chee was ordained as a commissioned pastor in Classis Red Mesa in 2017. She is in a bivocational role as pastor at Fort Wingate (N.Mex.) CRC and as an instructor at the University of New Mexico in the early childhood program. She has a B.A. from Calvin University and a master's degree from the University of New Mexico in elementary education, which includes a certificate to teach English as a second language. She serves her classis as a regional delegate on the World Renew board and has completed the Classis Red Mesa commissioned pastor training.

III. Report regarding the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy review

The Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) is designed for potential candidates who earn their M.Div. degree at an institution other than Calvin Theological Seminary. The elements of the program are integrated into the M.Div. at the seminary and afford participants the opportunity to receive required orientation into the CRC as they prepare for candidacy. The Appendix to the Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2020 described the history of recent discussions regarding this matter and offered proposals for updates to this program.

In view of the cancelation of Synod 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Candidacy Committee considered what might constitute a wise course of action regarding its proposals to synod related to the EPMC (see recommendations E and F in the *Agenda for Synod 2020*, p. 240). In summer 2020 the committee judged that it would be wise to proceed with the matters described in the proposals because the concerns they address are significant and ought not wait for another year for action. In addition, the proposed approaches in these recommendations are consistent with the history, purposes, goals and development of the EPMC program and were presented in a survey open to all synodical delegates at Synod 2019. Thus we provide here an update to Synod 2021, with a request for endorsement of our work in this area. We remain open to all input offered by churches and classes.

A. Formation of an EPMC Facilitation Team

The Candidacy Committee has worked with appropriate leaders at Calvin Theological Seminary to form an EPMC Facilitation Team (initially proposed to Synod 2020 as an EPMC Admissions and Standards Team). The team consists of nine persons—one of whom is the current and retiring director of Candidacy, and two of whom are ad hoc advisers from Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS):

Rev. Al Gelder, general member from Classis Grand Rapids East
Rev. Rob Toornstra, general member from Classis Columbia
Rev. Kang Won Kim, general member from Classis Central California

Rev. Darrell Delaney, general member from Classis Grand Rapids East
Rev. Jen Rozema, general member from Classis Holland
Rev. Emily Vanden Heuvel, general member from Classis Grand Rapids South
Rev. David Koll, director of Candidacy
Rev. Shawn Brix, staff adviser from CTS and liaison for CTS in Canada
Joan Beelen, staff adviser from CTS

As the committee finds their way, they may need to add an additioal general member, and they will need to decide whether the new director of Candidacy and/or a member of the Candidacy Committee will serve. They will also need to propose terms of three years to facilitate turnover in their membership. The design is that this team will serve as a subcommittee of the Candidacy Committee and be appointed by the Candidacy Committee under the authority of and with accountability to synod.

B. Progress on the task

Over the past academic year this team has met a number of times and has worked hard to implement a set of protocols that facilitate greater flexibility in EPMC learning plans. They also seek to bring clarity to participants that this is a denominational, not a seminary, program and to provide improved ways to walk alongside participants.

The team is developing a variety of tools for this work, including an online application, a chart for constructing a learning plan, and a schedule of interviews between participants and members of the new team. The learning plans will normally still involve nine credit hours through Calvin Theological Seminary, but there will be greater flexibility for course selection as opportunity is given to test out of material that used to be covered in mandatory courses.

Further information regarding the tools and the new process may be provided to Synod 2021 by way of the Candidacy Committee supplemental report.

C. Synodical action requested

Our hope is to receive the affirmation of synod regarding the choice made in summer 2020 to proceed with the task of updating the EPMC. We also seek synod's confirmation on the formation of the EPMC Facilitation Team and on the values of increased flexibility in EPMC learning plans, as was requested of Synod 2020 in recommendations E, F, and G of the *Agenda for Synod 2020*, p. 240.

IV. Clarifying the use of commissioned pastor as a "bridge ordination"

Observers of synod will recognize that there have been significant developments in the use of the office of commissioned pastor over the past decade. Most recently, Synod 2019 approved a major reformatting of Church Order Articles 23-24 and their supplements, implementing a planned strategy of making greater use of the record of synodical decisions regarding the office by means of a document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

During the past year, response to these developments has been remarkably positive, yet an area of needed clarity has been called to our attention in a way that prompts a proposal from the Candidacy Committee. The wording of Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a would be well served with some

simple modifications to clarify the intent of the use of commissioned pastors serving in a senior role in an established church. The proposal involves the addition of a few words, as indicated by italics and strikethrough in the following proposed text:

> Commissioned pastors may serve in positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specific circumstances. *Three of these* circumstances were specified before 2019 in Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d. *A fourth was adopted by Synod 2018. All four* ~~and~~ are now presented and explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook *(sections IV, I and J)*. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon implementation of a learning plan leading toward meeting the qualifications for minister of the Word, as described in Church Order Article 24-b. In all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church, it is mandatory that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan for denominational orientation, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The Candidacy Committee also intends to add the following statement at the end of section IV, I in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook as a transition to section IV, J, which explains using the office as a "bridge" to becoming a minister of the Word:

> To summarize, there are three scenarios, formerly noted in the Church Order and still valid, by which a commissioned pastor may serve as a lead or solo pastor in an established church. There is also a fourth scenario, referred to unofficially as a "bridge ordination," to which we now turn our attention.

V. Search for a new director of Candidacy

Because of the planned retirement of the current director of Candidacy, the committee formed a new-director search committee, reviewed the director's job description, and invited applications toward filling the position. As of this writing, the search committee aims to present a nominee for ratification by the Council of Delegates at their meeting February 17-19, 2021. We anticipate that an announcement, and even an introduction, can be made at Synod 2021.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to David R. Koll (director of Candidacy) and to an additional member of the Candidacy Committee, if one is present, when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot appoint two new members to the Candidacy Committee from the slates of nominees presented.

C. That synod affirm the formation of an EPMC Facilitation Team (initially proposed as an EPMC Admissions and Standards Team) as described in section III, A of this report, and that synod affirm the values of increased

flexibility in EPMC learning plans as the Candidacy Committee administers the EPMC with the assistance of the EPMC Facilitation Team.

D. That synod approve the revisions to Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a as noted in section IV of this report, and that synod also take note of a transitional statement to be included in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Candidacy Committee
David R. Koll, director

I. Introduction

Despite an unusual year due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and necessary changes to the schedule and form of the meetings of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), the significant work of this committee has continued. As our name indicates, there are two distinct and important aspects to our work: *ecumenical* relationships with other Christian denominations and organizations and *interfaith* interactions between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions. According to our Ecumenical Charter, "the CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel."

To guide the work of the EIRC relative to the ecumenical directive in bilateral (denomination-to-denomination) relationships, we have continued to use synodically approved categories. First is the category of *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*—those with whom the CRC has a particular affinity or history. For denominations with which the CRC is in a stage of exploration for a closer relationship, or maintaining the status quo of certain valued relationships that are not intended to progress to the level of *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*, we have used the category *churches in dialogue*. The third category is that of *churches in other ecumenical relationships,* where a relationship is important to the CRC as part of the global Christian family. Anticipated changes to the Church Order at Synod 2021 (delayed due to the cancellation of Synod 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic) resulting from the actions of Synod 2019 are expected to lead to modified categories in the future. In addition to bilateral relationships, we pursue our ecumenical work with organizations that allow for numbers of denominations to come together in unity (sometimes known as multilateral relationships).

Interfaith efforts between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions are led by a subcommittee of the EIRC. As a result of decisions by the Reformed Church in America's General Synod 2019 and the CRCNA's Synod 2019, we have begun to work together to spur on this work, particularly as it relates locally between and among Reformed congregations and those whose house of worship may be a synagogue, mosque, or temple.

II. Membership and meetings

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2021, are Lyle Bierma (2022/1); InSoon Hoagland (2023/2); James Joosse (2021/1); William Koopmans, chair (2021/1); Lenore Maine (2022/2); Ruth Palma (2023/2); Yvonne Schenk (2023/1); Kathy Smith (2021/2); John Tenyenhuis (2021/2); and Michael Wagenman (2022/1). The executive director and the Canadian ministries director serve as ex officio members of the EIRC.

The EIRC met virtually in both October 2020 and February 2021. Another virtual meeting is scheduled to be held in April 2021.

III. Nominations for membership/protocols

Kathy Smith and John Tenyenhuis are both concluding two terms of service on the EIRC. The EIRC recommends that synod express its gratitude to them for their faithful service.

Jim Joosse and William Koopmans are completing their first terms on the EIRC, and, given their contributions and willingness to continue, the EIRC recommends that synod reappoint each to a second three-year term.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination among the membership of the committee, the EIRC will present a slate of two nominees for the Eastern Canada position and a slate of two nominees for the Western United States position (due to a recent move by a committee member) by way of the committee's supplemental report.

The current EIRC membership distribution/nomination process states that there is a preference for five members to be "ordained clergy." To bring this description into alignment with phrasing in Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b, 2, the EIRC recommends that synod receive the following update for information (noted in strikethrough and italics):

> The preference is to strive for balancing the membership of the EIRC as follows:
>
> a. That five members be ordained ~~clergy~~ *ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation.*

IV. Bilateral relationships

The CRC maintains a relationship of *ecclesiastical fellowship* with 23 denominations and partners with 13 *churches in dialogue.* In addition, we have four partners in the category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships.* Of these three categories combined, we have 22 partners on the African continent; five partners in Central and South America (including the Caribbean); two partners in Europe; six partners in Asia and the Pacific Rim; and five partners in North America. A complete list is available on the "Relationships" page of the EIRC website (crcna.org/EIRC).

A. Bilateral reports

1. Activities with bilateral partners

Our *ecclesiastical fellowship* arrangement with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) as well as the accord we struck together in Pella in 2014 leads us to many collaborative efforts. The most recent of these is the Vibrant Churches effort led by Rev. Larry Doornbos (vibrantcongregations.org). In addition, the general synod of the RCA and the synod of the CRC both adopted a plan in 2018 to combine our interfaith efforts. That work continues; the Interfaith Subcommittee of the EIRC met with the RCA's Interreligious Committee two times in the past year to share updates and ways to collaborate.

One of the RCA's regional synods encompasses all of the RCA's Canadian congregations. Our Canadian ministries director, the leader of the RCA Regional Synod-Canada, and the leadership of the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC)—a denomination with whom we enjoy a *church in dialogue* relationship—meet together regularly. In ordinary, non-COVID-19 times, a subcommittee consisting of additional members from each of these three denominations also meets from time to time for dialogue and joint action.

Anthony Elenbaas has been appointed to the RCA's Commission on Christian Unity.

2. Formal exchanges

Throughout the past year, our formal exchanges and engagements have been curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, many letters and communications with our *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship* have been received and sent, expressing condolences and solidarity in the midst of the pandemic as times for fellowship have been limited.

B. Change in bilateral partnership: Reformed Church in Argentina

The EIRC received formal communication in July 2020 that the Reformed Church in Argentina has split in two, just ten years after the joining of two communions: the original Reformed Church in Argentina and the River Plate group. The EIRC remains mindful of the CRCNA's *ecclesiastical fellowship* with the Reformed Church in Argentina.

V. Multilateral relationships – ecumenical organizations and dialogues

We belong to a number of ecumenical organizations, including the Canadian Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Global Christian Forum, the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Reformed Fellowship. We also participate in important dialogues among those of various Christian faiths. The organizations and dialogues with which we have made specific connection this past year are highlighted in the following:

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The WCRC is divided into nine regions, six of which are represented by regional councils. One such group is the Caribbean and North America Area Council (CANAAC). As executive director, Colin P. Watson, Sr., continues to serve on the Steering Committee of CANAAC. He has also been asked to convene a racial justice team.

B. Canadian Council of Churches

Canadian ministries director Darren Roorda as well as other EIRC members (see section V, E) routinely participate in gatherings and initiatives of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). In October 2020 the EIRC had the opportunity to hear updates from Peter Noteboom, general secretary of the CCC.

C. Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum is a broad gathering of Christian churches representing all branches of the Christian church worldwide. Executive director Colin P. Watson, Sr., met with Casely Baiden Essamuah, general secretary of the Global Christian Forum, in August 2020.

D. Other multilateral organizations and dialogue

We benefit from partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and we participate in the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue.

E. Appointed representatives and observers

The EIRC appoints representatives and observers to many of the aforementioned multilateral ecumenical organizations and to other ecumenical efforts; often Christian Reformed Church members are asked by these organizations to serve as well.

1. Colin P. Watson, Sr., serves as the CRCNA's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and on the Steering Committee for the WCRC's Caribbean and North American Area Council.

2. Darren Roorda and Michael Wagenman serve on the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches, and Kathy Vandergrift serves as vice-chair of the board (until May 2021). Youth members of the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches are being nominated for inclusion beginning 2021. Jessica Joustra represents the CRC on the Commission of Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches. Working groups from the Commission of Faith and Witness are served by Jim Payton (National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee), Jim Rusthoven (Faith and Life Sciences Group), Greg Sinclair (Christian Interfaith Reference Group), and Janiece Van Oostrom (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity). Dayna Vreeken and Michael Wagenman are part of working groups relative to the Commission on Justice and Peace. Bruce Adema has accepted the nomination to serve as chair of the Project Ploughshares board (a Canadian peace research institute with a focus on international security).

3. Mike Hogeterp serves on the board of KAIROS; a number of CRC members serve on KAIROS's partnership circles.

4. Darren Roorda represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).

5. Matthew Lundberg serves as the representative on a commission of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.

6. Steven Timmermans serves on the board of World Reformed Fellowship.

7. Since the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue has not yet moved to its next round of dialogue, our CRC members are in a holding pattern. We anticipate that the conversation will resume after COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed.

VI. Interfaith activities

The Interfaith subcommittee of the EIRC continues its work. Membership includes Bernard Ayoola, Raidel Martinez, Jim Payton, Greg Sinclair, Ben Van Haitsma, Mark Wallace, Cory Willson, and the executive director. The subcommittee met in October 2020 and January 2021. Another meeting is scheduled for March 2021.

The Ecumenical Charter that guides the EIRC states that our "responsibility is expressed locally (between and among neighboring congregations), regionally (among churches in a given geographical area), and denominationally (among churches nationally and internationally)." For interfaith

efforts, the EIRC and its Interfaith subcommittee emphasize regional and local engagement. To that end, they seek to highlight regional groups that are open to CRC members and to publicize local efforts.

Jim Payton, chair of the Interfaith subcommittee, has also been serving on the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee. Greg Sinclair leads Resonate Global Mission's Diaspora project. Raidel Martinez is a military chaplain, and Mark Wallace leads Resonate's campus ministry efforts. Cory Willson, professor of missiology and missional ministry at Calvin Theological Seminary, organizes interfaith gatherings for seminary students. Including these leaders on the subcommittee provides ample evidence of the interfaith opportunities in a variety of settings.

The RCA Interreligious group and the CRC's Interfaith subcommittee met October 7, 2020, and January 25, 2021. Another meeting is scheduled for March 2021. Members of the RCA Interreligious group are drawn from many different ministries and regions of their denomination. Collaboration between CRC and RCA leaders continues with Peer to Peer Interfaith Network and Journeys into Friendship. Possible new joint activities continue to be discussed, such as developing joint web resources, creating a joint mission statement and related values, building a network of champions to guide local congregations into interfaith engagement, and/or developing regional contextual learning experiences that include the interfaith dimension.

VII. Synodical assignments

A. U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue

Synod 2018 instructed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to make the report of the most recent round of the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue, *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*, accessible to the churches, along with study materials; and synod asked the EIRC to consider the recommendations in the report for their applicability to the CRCNA and to report its conclusions to Synod 2019. Unfortunately, the final release of the report (introduced in summary form at Synod 2018) has not yet occurred, necessitating postponement of work on these assignments.

B. Categories of affiliation

As mentioned in the Introduction of this report regarding changes to our categories of affiliation as proposed to Synod 2021, the EIRC has been discussing the implications of these changes on our work.

C. Reconciliation

As a follow-up to previous synodical actions ("addressing unresolved conflict in our history and the need for reconciliation"—*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 473), the EIRC has initiated contact with the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches in North America and will seek to promote a spirit of Christian unity between our denominations.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to William T. Koopmans, chair, and Colin P. Watson, Sr. (ex officio), when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are discussed.

B. That synod express its gratitude to Kathy Smith and John Tenyenhuis for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect two new members from the slates of nominees presented to serve on the EIRC for a first term of three years, effective July 1, 2021.

D. That synod reappoint both Jim Joosse and William Koopmans to a second three-year term.

E. That synod receive the following update to the EIRC membership distribution/nomination process description as information (noted in strikethrough and italics):

> The preference is to strive for balancing the membership of the EIRC as follows:
> a. That five members be ordained ~~clergy~~ *ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation.*

Ground: This would bring the description into alignment with phrasing in Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b, 2.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
William T. Koopmans, chair
Colin P. Watson, Sr., acting executive director (ex officio)

I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is the standing committee of the Christian Reformed Church established by Synod 1934 to oversee the work of the denominational archives and to promote publication of denominationally related historical studies. Current committee members are John Bolt, chair (2023/2); James A. De Jong, secretary (2021/1); Herman De Vries (2022/1); and Tony Maan (2022/1).

James De Jong is completing his first term of service on the committee and is eligible for election to a second term. As the committee secretary, he has provided administrative leadership and experience from previous service on the committee that has been especially useful during the past several years of review of the committee's mandate and work. Since he is willing to continue serving, the committee so recommends.

The committee met via videoconference on October 29 and November 19, 2020, and on February 24, 2021. The committee also met with the reconstituted COD ad hoc committee via videoconference on February 2, 2021.

II. Committee initiatives

A. Archives Advisory Council

The committee designated John Bolt and Herman De Vries to serve as its representatives on the Archives Advisory Council created by the administrations and boards of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 629-30, 637-38) and acknowledged by synod (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 761). The committee recommended through these representatives that the "one external person" serving on the council be one of the Van Raalte Institute research fellows because of their expertise and close relationship to Heritage Hall and the Historical Committee. The committee is grateful that the council has that recommendation under consideration as of the drafting of this report.

B. Contacts with classical representatives

Throughout 2020, committee members directly contacted most of the classical representatives appointed to work with them and the Heritage Hall staff in promoting the work of the archives and enhancing the collection of materials related to the committee's mandate. This specifically includes congregational and classical minutes and reports. But it also involves anniversary booklets and photographs, historical studies, family histories and genealogies, papers of key leaders, and other related items.

What these contacts yielded is that the representatives are dutiful in reminding churches to submit their council minutes and anniversary materials to Heritage Hall. They are also faithful in forwarding classical minutes. Several reported knowing of and reading the magazine *Origins*, but most said they did not know of it, of the newly created web blog, or of how to access Heritage Hall information and resources through the Hekman Library website. One timely suggestion was that a list of suggested ideas and resources be sent to all stated clerks along with an appeal for them to become more involved in promoting the work of the archives.

The committee is committed to giving attention to this matter with the Heritage Hall staff. We are deeply grateful for these representatives and their work. Their names appear in section III of this report.

C. Publication of studies

A major part of synod's mandate to the Historical Committee is "to promote publication of denominationally related historical studies."

In the era of E.R. Post as the committee's field representative, this work occurred in the form of a number of monographs translated from Dutch and printed with subsidies from synod.

It continued with the subsequent appearance of *Origins* and several monographs in the 1990s and early 2000s, the publication and distribution of which was supported both by committee fundraising and by subventions from the Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund approved collaboratively by the archivist and the Historical Committee.

In the past several years the committee has considered a few manuscripts for publication but has adopted none. Last year the committee made synod aware of a significant translation and publication by a related organization of a Geerhardus Vos set of lectures on natural theology, given when he taught at Calvin Theological Seminary.

This year the committee was approached by Ryan Faber, a pastor affiliated with Faith CRC in Pella, Iowa, about the possibility of the committee publishing his doctoral dissertation *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: A Church Juridical Inquiry into the Sacramental Liturgies of the Christian Reformed Church*. While the work is commendable and qualifies according to our committee mandate, the committee lacks the expertise and resources to produce its publication in print. Dr. Faber is generously willing to make this work available online at no charge through Heritage Hall, however. This proposal stimulated the committee to initiate a conversation with the curator of the archives about the possibility of creating a Heritage Hall site that could make this study and similar ones related to denominational history available electronically.

The committee will pursue that possibility with the curator and Heritage Hall staff as a priority.

D. Expenditures

The committee approved the following expenditures from the Friends of the Archives Endowment Fund:

1. Support for a student research assistant to help the archivist create a multicultural CRCNA history website.

2. An estimated $9,000 for the Albertus Van Raalte digitalization project being undertaken in cooperation with the Van Raalte Institute and as matching funds to a grant from the government of the Netherlands.

III. Report of the curator

A. The Archives staff

The past year was marked by minor transitions in staff and significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those challenges have persisted into 2021.

Heritage Hall staff continued to serve the CRCNA, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin University, but for about five months (March to August 2020) they did so mostly from home, as the university reduced in-person functions in response to the pandemic. In-person functions at the denominational offices and the seminary were also largely reduced for parts of the year. As a result, less material than usual was deposited in Heritage Hall, and a planned project was postponed (transitioning the Faith Alive catalog of material to the archive). Since August 2020, staff members have staggered shifts or moved their workspaces to meet the university's social-distancing requirements.

Staffing in Heritage Hall did not change significantly in 2020. The most notable transition was in William Katerberg becoming the curator of Heritage Hall on a continuing, full-time basis. Hendrina Van Spronsen continued her work as office manager and in supporting production of *Origins*, the historical magazine of the archives, and providing archival assistance in processing material related to the denomination. Laurie Haan continued her work as an archival assistant, focusing on material related to the seminary and university. Emily Koelzer continued her work as an archival assistant, specializing in processing manuscript collections and digital archival projects. Janet Sheeres retired as editor of *Origins*. Calvin University professor of history emeritus Robert Schoone-Jongen edited the fall 2020 edition of *Origins*. William Katerberg has taken over the continuing work of editing *Origins*, beginning with the spring 2021 issue. Heritage Hall also hired a student worker to focus on digital projects and plans to hire one or two more student workers for other projects in 2021.

The work done by the denominational field agent in the past has been reconfigured. The curator, Will Katerberg, is the primary contact for clerks of church councils and classes. Hendrina Van Spronsen also communicates with local churches about submitting minutes. A volunteer processes the minutes, preparing them to be microfilmed, and gets the originals ready to be returned to churches or classes if they were submitted in paper form.

Heritage Hall thanks and honors Janet Sheeres for her many years of service in Heritage Hall as a volunteer who translated records from Dutch to English, compiled genealogical material, and organized collections. She also worked for Heritage Hall as the editor of *Origins*, and she conducted research and wrote widely on Dutch immigration and the Christian Reformed Church, notably producing a groundbreaking book and a variety of articles on women and Dutch Reformed history. She exemplifies the ideal of a non-academic historian whose research and writing reaches popular audiences and are of value to scholars.

Volunteers have long been essential to the work of Heritage Hall. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented volunteers from working in Heritage Hall from March to August 2020. Since then, Phil Erffmeyer has been the only volunteer working onsite. His primary role is to process minutes from congregations and classes. He also processes new material to be archived, mostly related to the denomination. Limits of space related to social-distancing requirements have prevented other volunteers from working in Heritage Hall. We plan to welcome back volunteers more generally as soon as it is safe to do so.

B. Archival activity during 2020

The amount of material accessioned by Heritage Hall in 2020 was smaller than in a typical year. Notably, Faith Alive Christian Resources planned to send a copy of its entire catalog to Heritage Hall, but that process will not happen until the CRCNA offices in Grand Rapids open for regular business and onsite staffing. Nonetheless, the archives received and processed a variety of materials:

- records related to faculty development at Calvin University
- Christian school records
- photographs
- records from congregations that closed in 2020
- Sunday school material of the CRCNA
- writings and other material from Henry J.G. Van Andel
- sermons and speeches of John B. Hulst
- records from the Calvin Theatre Company at Calvin University
- records of the Plaster Creek Stewards project at Calvin University

C. Research

Heritage Hall received fewer visitors than usual for research in 2020. It closed to patrons from March to August 2020 and since then has been open to receive up to three researchers at a time, by appointment only, following the COVID-19 policies for university staff and students. The archives addressed many requests for material in digital form.

The most commonly requested material in 2020 was related to immigrant letters and memoirs, genealogy and family history, photo collections, congregational and classical minutes, the history of the denomination (in relation to a variety of topics), and rare books. Specific topics include Native American and First Nations history related to missions and Indigenous spirituality, the CRC and the Civil Rights movement in Detroit, chaplains in World War II, postcards, the Calvin Theatre Company, the Dutch in Kansas, the CRC and lodges, Diet Eman, Calvin University's "Project Neighborhood," and Reformed thought during World War II.

A noteworthy book project completed with some material from Heritage Hall was *The Fort: Growing Up in Grosse Pointe during the Civil Rights Movement* (2020), a memoir written by Rev. Douglas J. Vrieland. Justin Vos, a history graduate student at Florida State University, is conducting research on the Dutch ethnic community and its relationship with North American Christianity, especially post-World War II evangelicalism.

The curator, William Katerberg, regularly posted on *Origins Online* (origins.calvin.edu/) about history related to the CRCNA, the seminary, the university, and Dutch North American immigration and enclaves. Thus far, the blog has reached over 9,000 unique readers. He also is developing a project on the history of race relations, diversity, and the CRCNA and two rephotography projects. Rephotography involves taking old postcards and photos and rephotographing them as closely as possible to show change or continuity visually. The two projects will use images from Heritage Hall and will include research and writing to provide context for the photographs. One project will focus on Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America church buildings on the U.S. Plains (e.g., Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota); another will focus on West Michigan.

D. Digitization

Work in digitization continued in a variety of areas: creating a database of Heritage Hall's photograph collections, continuing the process of making online finding aids for our collections, and focusing on Calvin University records, the largest of the archive's collections. Due to COVID-19, Heritage Hall was unable to work with a digital humanities class in 2020; that relationship will resume, hopefully, in the 2021-2022 academic year.

The most noteworthy digital project begun in 2020 is in cooperation with the Van Raalte Institute at Hope College and is being supported by the Dutch Consulate in New York City. It involves digitizing and making publicly available the A.C. van Raalte and Dirk van Raalte collections in the two institutions. Doing so will aid scholars and local history researchers. Heritage Hall and the Van Raalte Institute also hope to curate some material for use by middle schools and high schools.

E. Indexing and digitizing denominational magazines

The work of indexing articles published in *The Banner* continued; this indexing can be used via the CRC Periodicals Index hosted by the Hekman Library website. The work of volunteers in indexing obituaries and birth, death, and marriage announcements in *The Banner* stopped when Calvin University closed on-campus activities in March 2020. Heritage Hall hopes to continue the genealogy indexing when social-distancing restrictions end. Heritage Hall and Hekman Library also are planning to include the Calvin University student newspaper, *Chimes*, in the CRC Periodical Index (calvin.edu/library/database/crcpi/).

Heritage Hall is cooperating with Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, to help digitize *Calvinist Contact* (now *Christian Courier*) and its predecessor magazines, *Contact* and *Canadian Calvinist*. Redeemer is doing the bulk of the work; Heritage Hall is helping with issues that Redeemer is missing. In the future, Heritage Hall plans to digitize *The Banner* and *De Wachter*.

F. Promotion and outreach

Staff presentations were made to Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary classes via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Origins Online, a blog started in October 2019, continued to be a vibrant form of outreach to a variety of audiences. Its stories are promoted through the Heritage Hall Facebook page, which enables the blog to reach out to local audiences for some stories. Heritage Hall will continue to assess its social media presence and find ways to connect with denominational, university, and seminary related audiences and people interested in the history of Dutch North Americans.

The spring 2020 issue of *Origins*, the last issue edited by Janet Sheeres, has articles on a variety of topics. The fall 2020 issue, edited by Robert Schoone-Jongen, focuses on Dutch immigrants, their descendants, and politics. The spring 2021 issue will focus on religious education in Dutch immigrant and ethnic communities in the United States and Canada.

The curator is developing plans to reach out to classical representatives to promote *Origins* magazine and the work of Heritage Hall more generally.

IV. Regional classical representatives and significant anniversaries

A. Classical representatives

The following is a list of classical or regional representatives for gathering archival material, particularly congregational and classical records and documents, and for encouraging the use of archival material in understanding and appreciating our denominational legacy. The historical committee and the Heritage Hall staff, with Phil Erffmeyer as the denominational field representative, would appreciate being updated on any changes to this list.

Alberta North – Stated clerk Gary Duthler
Alberta South/Saskatchewan – Stated clerk Nelly Eyk
Arizona – Rodney Hugen
Atlantic Northeast – Richard Vanden Berg
British Columbia North-West – Anne Kwantes
British Columbia South-East – Stated clerk Leonard Batterink
California South – Stated clerk Cornelius Pool
Central California – Stated clerk Larry Fryling
Central Plains – Stated clerk Jonathan Spronk
Chatham – John Koole
Chicago South – Stated clerk Jeremy Oosterhouse
Columbia – Stated clerk Roger Kramer
Eastern Canada – Jean Lauziere
Georgetown – Stated clerk Glenda Tebben
Grand Rapids East – Stated clerk Robert Arbogast
Grand Rapids North – Stated clerk Pete Byma
Grand Rapids South – Stated clerk George Vink
Grandville – Stated clerk Daniel Mouw
Greater Los Angeles – Stated clerk Aaron Solomon-Mills
Hackensack – Stated clerk Sheila Holmes
Hamilton – Stated clerk Dick Kranendonk
Hanmi – Charles Kim
Heartland – Stated clerk Robert Drenten
Holland – Stated clerk Calvin Hoogstra
Hudson – Stated clerk Jeremy Mulder
Huron – Stated clerk Fred Vander Sterre
Iakota – Garry Zonnefeld
Illiana – Jeffrey White
Kalamazoo – Stated clerk Dan Sarkipado
Ko-Am – Charles Kim
Lake Erie – Stated clerk Benjamin Van Arragon
Lake Superior – Stated clerk Henry Gunnink
Minnkota – Stated clerk LeRoy Christoffels
Muskegon – Stated clerk Drew Sweetman
Niagara – Stated clerk Wendy de Jong
North Cascades – Stated clerk Steve Van Noort
Northcentral Iowa – Brian Hofman
Northern Illinois – Gerald Frens
Northern Michigan – Stated clerk Roger Hoeksema
Pacific Northwest – Matthew Borst
Quinte – Stated clerk Joan Crawford

Red Mesa – Stated clerk John Greydanus
Rocky Mountain – Stated clerk Mark Hilbelink
Southeast U.S. – Stan Workman
Thornapple Valley – Stated clerk Roger Bultman
Toronto – Hendrik Bruinsma
Wisconsin – Stated clerk Rodolfo Galindo
Yellowstone – Stated clerk Del VanDenBerg
Zeeland – Stated clerk Ronald Meyer

B. Ordained ministers—anniversaries of service

Names are listed according to years of ordained service in the CRCNA; in some cases, the date of prior ordination in another denomination is indicated in parentheses.

50 years (1972-2022)
Bierma, Merle H.
Bierman, Harry J.
Boot, Joel R.
Borrego, Ramon C. (1964, 1972)
Cooper, Dale J.
Davies, Mark A.
De Boer, John
DeHaan, Peter W.
Den Bleyker, Merle
de Vries, John, Jr.
De Vries, Stanley
Erffmeyer, Gerald R.
Flikkema, Melvin J.
Fynewever, Ronald L.
Hekman, Donald E.
Heslinga, Frederick F.
Holwerda, Peter J.
Kammeraad, Carl L.
Kortenhoven, Paul
Lagerwey, Donald W.
Lamsma, John H.
Lindemulder, Al
Palsrok, Russell
Postema, Gerald D.
Postuma, John
Remeur, James F.
Roels, Edwin D.
Stob, Harvey A.
Tigchelaar, David J.
Van Daalen, Siebren A.
Vanden Bosch, William
Vanden Heuvel, Jack
Vander Plate, Jack C.
Van Schepen, John
Van Wyk, Kenneth E.
Visser, John

55 years (1967-2022)
Blankespoor, Edward J.
Brouwer, Peter
De Vries, Ecko
De Vries Gerald E.
Duifhuis, Richard
Evans, Aalt Dirk. A.
Grevengoed, Richard O.
Koops, Ralph
Lunshof, Henry
Mans, Peter J.
Numan, Henry
Pool, Melle
Pruim, Jay R.
Rietema, Fred D.
Sprik, Ronald
Tinklenberg, Duane E.
Uken, Charles D.
Van Tol, William
Wagenveld, Louis W.
Warners, Douglas A.
Witvliet, John L.

60 years (1962-2022)
Bierling, William A.
Boonstra, John
De Berdt, Michiel M.
Eshuis, Henry
Hofland, Gary G.
Hofman, John, Jr. (1955, 1962)
Kerkstra, Louis
Mulder, Alvin A. (1958, 1962)
Steinstra, Arthur J.
Van Antwerpen, Berton
VanderBrug, Duane E.
Vos, Jack B.
Vriend, Cornelius

65 years (1957-2022)
Kranenburg, Peter P.
Los, Eugene W.
Ouwinga, Harvey A.
Rubingh, Eugene
Rumph, Arnold E.
Stulp, Jack
Tamminga, Louis M.
Uittenbosch, Hans
Wisse, Donald P.
Wolters, Lloyd J.

70 years (1952-2022)
Tadema, Rits

C. Church anniversaries—at 25 year intervals

25th Anniversary (1997-2022)
Albuquerque, New Mexico – Korean Presbyterian Galilee (founded in 1996; organized in 1997; emerging in 2016)
Anchorage, Alaska – Alaska Korean (started in 1994; organized in 1997)
Bellflower, California – Grace United Church (started in 1994; organized in 1997)
Buena Park (Anaheim), California – Orange Han Min (founded in 1994; organized in 1997)
Hudsonville, Michigan – Evergreen Ministries (started in 1993; organized in 1997)
Jersey City, New Jersey – Jersey City Mission (started in 1989; organized in 1997)
Tualatin, Oregon – Christ Community
Tucson, Arizona – The Village Community Ministries (started in 1997)

50th Anniversary (1972-2022)
Cedar Rapids, Iowa – Peace (started in 1970; organized in 1972)
Hudsonville, Michigan – Forest Grove
Kelowna, British Columbia – Kelowna
Sheldon, Iowa – Immanuel

75th Anniversary (1947-2022)
Edgerton, Minnesota – Bethel

100th Anniversary (1922-2022)
Rock Rapids, Iowa – Rock Rapids
Sioux Center, Iowa – Bethel

125th Anniversary (1897-2022)
Pella, Iowa – Second
Allendale, Michigan – Rusk

150th Anniversary (1872-2022)
Cleveland, Ohio – East Side
Midland Park, New Jersey – Midland Park (organized in 1872; joined the CRC in 1892)
McBain, Michigan – Vogel Center

175th Anniversary (1847-2022)
Zeeland, Michigan – Drenthe (organized in 1847; joined the CRC in 1882)
Holland, Michigan – Graafschap (organized in 1847; joined the CRC in 1857)
Holland, Michigan – Pillar (organized in 1847; joined the CRC in 1885)

V. Response to the COD

Subsequent to the meeting of the Council of Delegates on February 17-19, 2021, the committee was informed of its response to the directive given to it by Synod 2019: "That synod instruct the COD to work with the Historical Committee to review their mandate and clarify the continued relationship between the committee and all of the stakeholders" (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 761).

That decision affirms the recognition by Synod 2019 of the Historical Committee as a valued partner with "all of the stakeholders" in the work of the archives. It proposes no change in the mandate of the Historical

Committee, and in reaching this decision the COD reviewed without registered objection the document that its ad hoc committee for working with our committee had requested of us at our February 2 meeting with them. That document is titled "Historical Committee Oversight Specified" and is reproduced here.

Historical Committee Oversight Specified

Overseeing "the work of the denominational archives" mandated by synod to its Historical Committee involves the following from the committee acting on behalf of synod:

1. Identifying materials that preserve the spiritual, confessional, communal, institutional, and theological legacy of the broader CRCNA community.
2. Advising the Heritage Hall staff and collaborating with it in soliciting, procuring, and properly preserving these materials.
3. Participating with the Heritage Hall staff in planning effective ways of making archived materials available for appropriate research and other use.
4. Stimulating knowledge of and appreciation for our legacy through the archives.
5. Advocating for the resources needed for achieving this purpose.
6. Being meaningfully involved in the hiring and evaluating of Heritage Hall staff and management.
7. Recruiting, orienting, and inspiring synod's regional representatives in carrying out its mandate.
8. Receiving the information needed and requested from staff to fill its mandate.
9. Taking such additional initiatives, with appropriate consultation, as may be needed from time to time to carry out its mandate.
10. Keeping synod informed on the work of the archives and issues related to it.

The Historical Committee's oversight of the work of the archives through Heritage Hall does not involve managing the day-to-day work of staff or management or administering personnel matters delegated by synod to the boards and administrations of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary.

These specifications have characterized the work of the Historical Committee in the past, as shown by its own minutes and documents as well as by the synodical record. In light of the COD's decision and support, the Historical Committee will continue its work as specified in this document.

The committee expresses its deep appreciation for the open, attentive, and supportive approach the COD's ad hoc committee took in working with us on clarifying our mandate. We extend that appreciation to the COD itself for its February decision.

Synod's positive action on our committee's recommendation to expand its membership as set forth in our report last year (see *Agenda for Synod 2020*, section VII of the report, pp. 263-65; and Recommendation E, p. 266)

will greatly enhance the collaboration of all stakeholders in the work of the archives.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to John Bolt, chair, and to James A. De Jong, secretary, when matters pertaining to the mandate and work of the committee come before synod.

B. That synod appoint James A. De Jong to a second three-year term on the Historical Committee.

C. That synod recognize the document "Historical Committee Oversight Specified" as providing the clarification directed by Synod 2019.

Historical Committee
John Bolt, chair
James A. De Jong, secretary
Herman De Vries
Tony Maan

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Dordt University

Greetings to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church. We are grateful to God for the partnership of our mutually beneficial ministries for equipping Christ-followers for kingdom work.

What a year it has been. Dordt University is thankful to have been able to offer in-person instruction to students for the 2020-21 year despite the COVID-19 pandemic. This academic year has required immense faith, creativity, dedication, planning, and pivoting, but God has blessed us as we have tackled these challenges.

Dordt kicked the year off with a record enrollment. Our overall enrollment for the fall semester was 1,666—the largest in our history. We welcomed 397 freshmen, our second-largest incoming class in ten years. This, along with new graduate programs and our highest-ever online enrollment, led to our overall enrollment growth. We feel blessed that we can grow and continue to pursue our mission of equipping students to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all areas of life.

Dordt University was also blessed through the Hope Fund, which began with a vision: How might Dordt help current students who had financial hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic? The Hope Fund was established to provide scholarships to more than 185 Dordt students in need of additional tuition assistance. In total, we raised more than $625,000 for the fund.

We also celebrated another milestone in fall 2020 when Dordt received, for the fifth year in a row, the *Wall Street Journal's* top ranking in the United States for student engagement. This highlights how well the university inspires, challenges, and informs students. To receive external validation of the transformational impact we are having on our students as we prepare them to be Christ's hands and feet is certainly encouraging.

Dordt launched two new online master's programs this past fall—in social work and in public administration. Taught from a Reformed perspective, these programs offer social workers, city managers, government officials, police officers, and others an opportunity to integrate biblical truth into their continued education. Our world needs well-equipped Christians serving in these areas now more than ever. We also created an online bachelor's degree in business administration that is designed to be flexible for working adults who want to pursue or complete their degree.

Dordt also launched two new centers: the K and K Dooyema Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and the Thrive Center for Applied Behavior Analysis. The Dooyema Center elevates entrepreneurship as a Christian calling by providing students with internship experience and mentorships, engaging them in consulting projects with external businesses and organizations, and facilitating business and farm succession planning. The Thrive Center uses Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)—a research-based behavior intervention strategy—for behavior therapy and skills acquisition. This technique has been identified as an evidence-based practice for children with autism spectrum disorders.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, it has also encouraged us to continue looking for ways to improve, grow, and innovate. We ask

that you continue to pray for us as we seek to be faithful to the task of training up effective kingdom citizens. Dordt remains committed to Christian education, and we pray that all our educational work is continually permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Dordt University
Erik Hoekstra, president

Institute for Christian Studies

The 2020-21 academic year began amid the throes of the global pandemic, and as with all other educational institutions, the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) worked diligently to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. After being suddenly forced to switch to remote online learning in the middle of the winter 2020 semester, we took this learning experience to heart and launched SOLI, our Summer Online Learning Initiative, dramatically increasing the number of summer courses we normally offer. We offered six courses in this mode, which allowed us to reach new students who were not required to study in person on our campus in Toronto. From this positive experience we learned that many international students are interested in the unique learning opportunities ICS provides. So, going forward, we plan to continue to make our courses and programs available in remote-access mode, even after it is safe to physically gather again.

ICS has been blessed through these challenges as our small-size seminar and mentoring pedagogy has adapted well to a videoconferencing platform. We have been pleasantly surprised by our ability to maintain vibrant, engaged learning opportunities during the pandemic. One example is our Winter 2021 Interdisciplinary Seminar, based on Hendrik Hart's book *Understanding Our World*, in which students joined us from Jakarta, Krakow, London (UK), Edmonton (Alta.), and Kingston (Ont.)!

The ongoing, generous commitment of CRC churches and our support community has encouraged us in the pursuit of our educational mission amid the pandemic, providing essential support to our efforts to shape Christian leaders for service in the academy and in the wider society. This support helps us provide a learning environment that expects and encourages the integration of faith and learning and nurtures the ability to join God's work of blessing and healing in all areas of contemporary life. We thank the CRCNA for standing with us as we continue to seek effective and innovative ways to serve God faithfully in the arena of Christian graduate education.

Following are some highlights of the ongoing work of ICS in 2020-2021:

First and foremost, God blessed our search for a new faculty member to serve ICS as associate professor in the philosophy of education and the practice of pedagogy with the hiring of Dr. Edith van der Boom. In this position, Edith also became the director of the educational leadership stream of ICS's M.A. program (or MA-EL), a professional development program ICS launched in 2018 to serve the leadership development needs of Christian school teachers and administrators. Edith hit the ground running on July 1, working energetically to further develop and grow the program, adding increased flexibility to it so that busy Christian educators can take better advantage of the learning opportunities the MA-EL provides. We give God thanks and praise that, at the time of this writing, we are expecting the first two students in this program stream to receive their M.A. degrees!

In addition, our M.A. and Ph.D. degree programs in philosophy continue to provide integral Christian education at the graduate level. This year three students completed all the requirements of the Ph.D. program (one in the ICS-only stream, and two in the conjoint ICS/Vrije Universiteit stream). Benjamin Shank successfully defended an ICS-only dissertation titled *Resounding*

Empathy: A Critical Exploration of Ricoeur's Theory of Discourse, to Clarify the Self's Reliance on Relationships with Other Persons; Shane Cudney successfully defended a conjoint ICS/VU dissertation on Kierkegaard titled *Where the Truth Lies: Pseudonymity, Complicity, and Critique in Fear and Trembling* (to be published in 2021 by Wipf and Stock's Pickwick Publications); and at the time of this writing, Dean Dettloff's ICS/VU dissertation, *Christwreck: An Accidentology of Christianity*, is before his examination committee.

At our Annual Convocation in May 2021, we are planning to celebrate the graduation of these five junior members (students) during a remotely accessed online convocation ceremony.

At present, total course enrollments for the 2020-21 academic year are 132. In terms of full-time equivalency (FTE), this number translates to 22 full-time students, a modest but noticeable increase from last year. In addition, we had seven full-time students in non-coursework portions of our programs, which brings our FTE total to 29. So far, 120 individuals have enrolled in at least one course at ICS in 2020-21. That number represents a high proportion of our overall enrollment, reflecting the current reality that a smaller core of full-time ICS degree program students is now being joined by a growing penumbra of students taking individual ICS courses for continuing adult education and professional development purposes. We welcome this trend, as it extends ICS's reach while maintaining the health and robustness of our time- and resource-intensive full-time M.A. and Ph.D. programs.

While the pandemic has interrupted our intentional partnering dialogue with the King's University, this year still witnessed the fruit of that discussion in the form of a course led by King's professor and ICS alumnus Michael DeMoor (with assistance from ICS Ph.D. candidate Samir Gassanov) titled "Capitalism(s) in the West: Intellectual History, Core Institutions, and Architectonic Critique."

Our senior members (faculty) continue to make significant contributions to academic research (in addition to their teaching and graduate supervision duties), giving popular and academic presentations and publishing articles in popular and academic publications. This year, ICS's six faculty members made seven presentations at academic conferences, 24 presentations at public events, published two articles in academic journals, and completed work on one edited book manuscript. ICS's junior members have been productive as well, making two presentations at academic conferences, three publications in academic journals, two public presentations, and four popular publications.

ICS's Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics (CPRSE) swiftly adapted its programs and collaborative projects to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The CPRSE offered a number of public online-access events, helping to develop strategies for ongoing remote learning and community outreach at ICS. The following are a few highlights of this year's activities:

– Interfaith Dialogue—CPRSE continued to collaborate with the Canadian Interfaith Conversation (CIC), Canada's largest interfaith dialogue and cooperation network, to plan and convene the biennial Our Whole Society Conference. This year's online edition of the conference, "Free to Believe, Responsible to Act," was livestreamed on May 4, 2021.

- Race, Racism, and Race Relations—During the 2020-21 academic year, CPRSE helped curate a conversation for people within and outside of ICS to speak meaningfully about issues related to race. This initiative generated the Ground Motive blog series "Uprooting Racism," which features reflections by ICS faculty, students, and special guests on our community's responsibility to help dismantle systemic racism. Additionally, the spring issue of ICS's semiannual magazine *Perspective* explores the intersection of race, philosophy, and education.
- Scripture, Faith, and Scholarship Symposia—In keeping with the institutional focus on race, systemic racism, and race relations, this year's public Scripture, Faith, and Scholarship Symposia featured scholars dedicated to the study of biblical interpretation within minority groups. On December 14, 2020, CPRSE welcomed Dr. Néstor Medina, assistant professor of religious ethics at Emmanuel College, to speak about "Decoloniality, Hermeneutics, and Theo-Ethics." For the winter edition of this program, CPRSE collaborated with scholars from Stellenbosch University to discuss issues surrounding land and decoloniality through a biblical lens.
- Fourth Annual Undergraduate Workshop—This year CPRSE hosted ICS's Annual Undergraduate Workshop in a virtual format. On November 13-14, 2020, CPRSE welcomed students from around the world to share their interdisciplinary reflections on the theme "Evil, Resistance, and Judgment: Creating a World Fit for Human Habitation," inspired by the life and work of Hannah Arendt. The event opened with a public keynote presentation by renowned scholar and activist Dr. Mary Jo Leddy.
- Critical Faith Podcast—This year our podcast focused on promoting ICS's shift to remote learning, exploring our faculty's courses in their new online formats. Additionally, the podcast aired two topical series: the first with ICS theology professor Nik Ansell on some key topics in biblical interpretation today; and the second on the challenges facing political philosophy—especially as it intersects with Christian and Reformational thought—in a "post-2020" world. At the time of this writing, we have posted 11 episodes, with an average of 180 downloads per episode and a total reach of 3,600 downloads since May 2020 (an increase of 13% over the previous 10 months).

This academic year has been both challenging and rewarding as we continue to experience God's blessing our efforts—even amid all the difficulty introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has led us to learn new ways for ICS to serve the academic and wider community, and we plan to make the most of these learnings as we continue to pursue the mission in Christian higher education our Maker and Redeemer has entrusted to us. We cherish the prayers and other forms of support we receive from members and congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and we thank you once again for supporting Christian graduate education at ICS.

May God grant you wisdom and discernment in your work during Synod 2021.

Institute for Christian Studies
Ronald A. Kuipers, president

The King's University

The past year has given all of us an interesting journey as we have dealt with the upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic in our lives. The King's University has been stretched and tested and forced into operating in unconventional ways—and yet we are comforted by knowing that we are in God's hands, and we marvel at his continued blessings on our work. We remain committed to fulfilling our mission of equipping learners to bring renewal and reconciliation to every walk of life as we pursue our vision of building a more humane, just, and sustainable world.

Contrary to speculation about how the pandemic might affect enrollment numbers this year, we were surprised and grateful to experience another year of increasing student enrollment. This fall we welcomed 858 students to their studies at King's. In spring 2020, when the impact of the pandemic was being realized, some were forecasting declines in enrollment of up to 20 percent. While some higher education institutions did experience dramatic decreases in enrollment, we are incredibly thankful that we were not only spared an enrollment decline but also blessed with an increase. Thanks be to God! We continue to covet your prayers and support in encouraging prospective students in your community to pursue their Christian university education at King's. Despite positive student enrollment numbers this fall, the financial impacts of the pandemic continue to put pressure on the institution's revenues, making planning and budgeting a challenge. Please pray for wisdom and guidance for the university's board and executive leadership team as we wrestle with difficult decisions and develop strategies for moving the institution through these challenging times.

The impacts of the pandemic have required all post-secondary institutions to modify and adapt their education delivery to adhere to public health measures in order to ensure the safety of our community. While many institutions opted for exclusively online learning, King's capitalized on the advantages of being a small university and has been able to continue to provide students with the option of having some in-person instruction. For most courses this year, students have had the option to take one class per week in person while taking the remainder of their classes online. A lot of work went into planning and rescheduling to accommodate in-person instruction in a way that would ensure that no classroom had more than thirty students and that appropriate classroom spaces allowed two meters of physical distancing.

King's has partnered with Classes B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East to offer an online education series for all members of CRC churches in British Columbia from January through May 2021. Titled *1Life: Five Callings*, this conversation series aims to encourage theological reflection, leadership, and faith-filled practice surrounding the five ministry priorities of the CRC: faith formation, global mission, mercy and justice, servant leadership, and gospel proclamation and worship. We are honored and excited to be given the opportunity to partner with our community's churches in British Columbia in offering this online lecture series, and we hope there may be future opportunities to do something similar with churches in other regions.

King's is a unique and beautiful community in which transformation occurs in the lives of students. We are deeply grateful for this space that

you are helping to provide. The faithful and generous support of various churches that are a part of the Christian Reformed Church in North America continues to have a profound impact on King's and our students. Through your investment in Christian higher education at King's, you are building the future and changing lives. You are helping to fulfill the vision of building a more humane, just, and sustainable world through King's as we prepare our students and alumni to serve as teachers, businesspeople, missionaries, politicians, researchers, nonprofit leaders, doctors, and more. Together we are offering first-class educational experiences and ensuring they are accessible to all students seeking a King's education. Thank you for your continued partnership!

The King's University
Melanie Humphreys, president

Kuyper College

One of my first experiences with Kuyper College, then Reformed Bible College (RBC), was in participating as a college student in RBC's Summer Training Session in Mexico. At our language school site, we learned a song composed by Dr. Dick Van Halsema, then president of RBC, based on 2 Corinthians 5:7: "By faith we walk and not by sight." Over the years, this text and song has guided my journey as God has led me into various areas of ministry and service.

During the past year, the Kuyper College community has claimed the truth of this Scripture while continuing to equip students for lives of ministry and service amid the disruptive time of the coronavirus pandemic. Walking by faith, with our mission before us, our faculty and staff have responded to a host of challenges and changes with outstanding diligence, innovation, collaboration, and care for our students.

Being a small college, we demonstrate a nimbleness that is particularly necessary when the unexpected and the unthinkable occur. Last March we faced such a situation, as we were required to end our 2019-2020 academic year and conduct all of our year-end events virtually. Thankfully, God enabled us to work together, meet individual student needs, and develop effective ways to address the numerous challenges presented by the pandemic. We accomplished much, and we are grateful for the outcomes.

In fall 2020, we implemented a hyflex, split-semester educational model to enable a dynamic and doable teaching and learning environment where students and faculty can meet in-person or virtually, if needed. Our faculty spent the summer reformatting their courses; our IT department upgraded our classrooms with state-of-the-art equipment; our facilities department implemented health and safety protocols; and our students became well oriented to this new model. The results have been so positive that we are considering ways in which we will continue using this educational model in the future as we hold firm to our commitment of establishing an engaging and caring college community.

Even within a vital community such as Kuyper, the pandemic has caused a great deal of isolation and anxiety. This past fall our student development staff and retention committee stepped up to address the personal needs of our students and to implement new programs and procedures to help them flourish. Our enhanced professional counseling services now allow our students to receive free counseling sessions from caring and capable Christian mental health providers who understand the challenges that college-age students are facing today. In August we implemented our new Student Success Coach program, which partners students with trained student success coaches to provide them with peer mentoring and accountability opportunities so that they can work through their academic, emotional, social, and spiritual challenges together. These programs and the many other ways in which we provide personal attention to our students have contributed to our highest retention rate in the past ten years.

The pandemic situation has certainly created more problem-solving and adaptation on a level we have not experienced, but our faculty and staff have not been deterred by this. They have worked tirelessly to accomplish our strategic priorities. So far during this academic year we have realized

small but measurable growth in our undergraduate and graduate student enrollments, showing our students' desire for a close-knit college community that offers programs focused on ministry and service. We also extended our business leadership course offerings to more than 20 dual-enrolled students at The Potter's House High School in Wyoming, Michigan. As well, we are completing our third year of the KuyperWorks program, which connects work and academics in meaningful ways to provide undergraduate students with professional, workplace ready skills and a more affordable education. And at our commencement program in April 2021 we plan to acknowledge our first graduates in our Master of Ministry program; these are women and men who are well prepared to serve within the church and parachurch organizations.

This past year we also focused on extending our reach to a broader community of scholars and practitioners who identify with our mission. By implementing new technology in our chapel, we have the capacity to include speakers and participants from around the world in our weekly Ora et Labora series, Youth Pastor Lunch 'n' Learns, and faculty and student scholar events. Several Kuyper faculty have worked together to create the *Kuyper Collective* podcast as a way to explore with church leaders pertinent topics that affect the church and society. And our faculty members continue to contribute to written scholarship with the release of two books—*From Lament to Advocacy: Black Religious Education and Public Ministry* and *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession*—as well as a doctoral dissertation titled *Pacing Presence: Impact of the Relational Ministry Course for Graduates of Kuyper College Working with Adolescents*.

Within higher education we are aware of the financial implications of the ongoing pandemic for institutions as well as students. Through the generous support of our donor constituency, the funds received via the CARES Act, and the careful oversight of our expenditures, we achieved a balanced budget without the use of loans for the fourth consecutive year, and we provided additional funds to aid students in need. Because we are committed to helping our students and families access an affordable education, we implemented a tuition freeze for all first-year and transfer students. This is the latest of several initiatives over the past few years that we have taken to increase affordability and access for all students. We continue to manage our financial situation carefully, and we have received commendation from our auditors and accreditors. For FY2020 we reported our Department of Education financial composite index score at a record high 2.85, our operating budget covering institutional programs at 86 percent, and our student loan default rate at a very low 4.4 percent.

Let me conclude by highlighting one initiative involving our business leadership students that demonstrates how we are fulfilling our mission to "equip students with a biblical Reformed worldview to serve effectively Christ's church and his world." Undergraduate students in Kuyper's entrepreneurship class study the basics of starting a business, including the development and creation of business models and learning about risk management, financing, and gaining startup capital. What makes this class unique is the real-time, real-world impact that students have by lending money to small-business startups around the globe through a process called microfinancing, which involves providing small business loans to people in poor

communities. Over the past five years, the entrepreneurship classes have collectively made 56 microfinance loans in 28 different countries, including startup businesses in agriculture, food, and retail—the majority of which are run and operated by women—through an organization called Kiva, using real money gifted to the class from an anonymous donor. These students are understanding firsthand the concept of business as mission, and they are making a difference in the lives of others around the world.

This past year has seen a vivid demonstration of the Kuyper College community drawing together to prepare students to be the next generation of Christian leaders—leaders who are fulfilling our end goal of education, "to live faithfully for Jesus Christ in God's good world," as our alumni are doing throughout the world. The world needs such Christian leaders. We at Kuyper are committed to equipping them for such service. Please join with us in praying that God raises up more workers for the harvest.

We are thankful for our continued partnership with the CRCNA, and we look forward to more tangible ways to serve Christ's church and his world together.

Kuyper College
Patricia R. Harris, president

Redeemer University

Greetings from Redeemer University! We are thankful for this opportunity to share with you the exciting ways that God has been at work at Redeemer this past year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant role in the 2020-21 academic year at Redeemer University. This pandemic presented both a challenge and an opportunity for the university. Redeemer made the decision to preserve learning in community while simultaneously offering a choice for students to participate in classes either in person or remotely. The first semester of dual delivery was not without challenges, but overall it was successful. Redeemer has decided to continue to offer this mode of learning in the 2021-22 academic year. The decision to offer this choice for students between synchronous remote and in-person learning allows for flexibility at a time when there is still uncertainty about the future of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This fall, despite many obstacles brought about by the pandemic, we welcomed the largest incoming class in Redeemer's history. A total of 896 students chose to enroll in Redeemer's unique offering of Christian university education that integrates faith, life, and learning. With the growth of Redeemer's student body, there are many opportunities ahead.

Redeemer's strategic plan "Learn. Forward." was released this past spring and includes many promising initiatives. Our vision is to develop kingdom-centered, innovative graduates who make a profound impact in a rapidly changing, complex, and digital world.

One of the exciting opportunities to come out of the strategic plan is a new building project. Redeemer's new residence and learning facility is currently being constructed in the heart of the campus, with an expected opening in September 2021. The building will help to accommodate our steady growth in enrollment and will ensure that Redeemer can continue its mission on a modern and spiritually vibrant campus.

As of December 2020, legislative changes were made, allowing Redeemer the ability to grant new degrees. This significant change will provide new opportunities for many more students. Redeemer plans to offer three new degree programs next fall that will provide its students with a post secondary education more tailored to their chosen career path. This legislative change is a historic milestone, building on the legacy of the university's founding vision.

Redeemer's recent name change to Redeemer University has created a unique opportunity to rethink Redeemer's brand. The institution went through a rebranding process over the past year that resulted in a vibrant logo and fresh look for Redeemer. The new brand reflects the reality that we are moving forward and adapting to a changing world while remaining anchored in the Reformed Christian tradition.

This has been a year of significant change for Redeemer, and we are immensely grateful to see the many ways in which the Lord has provided for us in the midst of a challenging but exciting time.

Redeemer University
Robert J. Graham, president

Trinity Christian College

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update to synod on behalf of Trinity Christian College, particularly during these remarkable times of great change, discord, and pandemic. Throughout our six-decade history, we have valued our relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Quite literally, without the CRC and key leaders within it, Trinity would never have come into existence.

Beyond those founding moments, we remain grateful for support from CRC congregations to advance our mission of providing a distinctive Christian higher education experience at Trinity. We cherish the students from CRC families who select Trinity as their college. We relish the opportunities to be in partnership with the CRC in a variety of ways—from hosting classis and denominational meetings (a practice that we earnestly desire to resume in a "post-COVID" world), to serving as a resource for local congregations, to preparing students to be leaders in the church. Trinity's partnership with the CRC is valuable and, we believe, mutually beneficial!

As a young college, the present Trinity community has had the great privilege of knowing, personally, people who were "in the room" in the 1950s when this college was envisioned and then created. Sadly, though, over the past few years we have lost many of the remaining first connections to our past, in the passing of Dr. George DeJong in April 2018 (the last of our founders) and in the passing of Dr. Derke Bergsma in November 2020 (the professor who taught the first class at Trinity in October 1959). Their faith and determination are not merely matters of historical interest; they energize and motive us today.

> We stand today before a golden opportunity to plan for tomorrow. This type of building for tomorrow always demands Courage, Faith, and Vision. Remember, Trinity stands for the extension of God's kingdom. Nothing can be more important than that.

These words, penned long ago by founder Dr. Richard Prince, is as close to an unofficial mission statement that Trinity could hope to have.

We are a relatively young institution (America's oldest college, Harvard University, was "our age" more than 75 years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence). And yet we are also a blessed institution, grateful to God (and to God's people) for the providential hand that has guided us through good times and bad, over mountains and through valleys.

And what an impact Trinity continues to have! Trinity is an excellent institution of higher education—not just because the college's president says so (to the surprise of no one!). Consider, instead, these examples of external indicators of recognized excellence:

- Our nursing program is ranked number 1 among all college and university programs in the state of Illinois (with 100% passage rates in five of the past six years on the national licensure exams).
- A top-20 nationally ranked education program
- Top CPA passage rates among Illinois universities
- A nearly 100 percent medical school placement rate
- A 97 percent post-graduation placement rate for vocations or graduate study

– A partnership—along with six other institutions such as the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the University of Illinois, and Loyola University—at North America's largest and the world's top-ranked technology start-up incubator, 1871.

We are seeing hopeful signs that this recognition is positively affecting enrollment as well: Trinity's 2020 freshman class was 13 percent larger than it was in 2019 (which was 6% larger than in 2018). Moreover, we had more overall students studying at Trinity in 2020 than we did in 2019. This report, to put it mildly, is an atypical one for higher education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and from the Midwest, where double-digit declines (rather than growth) are more the norm.

I am pleased also to report that we are seeing even stronger fidelity to our mission as well. Our curricular offerings and faculty teach from a Christian worldview (as has always been the case). And our students are increasingly diverse, recognizing that the Reformed Christian perspective is not the province of any particular ethnic, socioeconomic, or national background. We seek to be a faithful institution translating a timeless mission into the contemporary vernacular.

We know that while the ultimate matters of faith and mission transcend time, the world in 2021 is very different from that of even a few years ago, let alone more than 60 years ago. Trinity needs to constantly pursue purposeful, intentional adaptations that allow us to be particularly attuned to its mission in our time—just as Trinity has been particularly attuned to its mission at every point in its history. This calls for connecting the *who* and *why* we are with the *where* and *when* we are.

In a post-Christian and significantly polarized world, this task has never been more challenging or more necessary. If Trinity and institutions like it do not do this work, who will? Where and from whom will students learn breadth and depth of the Christian faith, how to engage with culture and transform it, or what a faithful witness in "every square inch" of the world looks like?

These are the serious questions we wrestle with on a near-daily basis. Surely these are similar to questions being asked in denominational meetings and CRC congregational gatherings across the continent.

God can and will do as he chooses to do. I firmly believe, however, that God's plan for places like Trinity is for a greater reach instead of a lesser one; it is for a larger impact rather than a smaller one. I also believe that God is calling us all to a serious and earnest assessment of who we are, what we should become, how we travel that path, and where our priorities must lie. Every significantly impactful institution of higher education—from Yale to Stanford, Duke to Vanderbilt—was at one time young and earnest, like Trinity is today. Can you catch a vision for what our Reformed colleges and universities might do with a circle of faithfulness: faithfulness in mission, in education, in spiritual formation, in prayer, in resources, in support? Who among us is so bold as to limit God's purposes for these places?

Back in the summer of 2019—seemingly a lifetime ago!—the college's president and his wife attended a vesper service at Westminster Abbey in London and were randomly seated in front of the lectern in the sanctuary. Inscribed boldly on that lectern is the phrase "Attempt Great Things for

God." This powerful phrase is attributed to William Carey, the 18th-century pastor, missionary, and educator who is often credited as the "father of modern missions." Carey caught a large and transformative vision for what God's people might do to spread the gospel and help to transform the world.

How might we, in our time and place, get in on a similar expansive God-given vision for Christian higher education—a vision that works in partnership with congregations and denominational partners? These are pivotal months and years for our churches and for our colleges. May the generations who come after we are long gone recognize our sacrificial commitment to effective and faithful witness to God's good work in this world.

Although this is technically an annual report to the denomination, in reality, it is also a generational report to the church and to Christian people everywhere. Now is the time, like never before, to invest in us and to pray for us. And, in return, we endeavor to be faithful witnesses to the broader world, incubators for future leadership in our congregations and denomination and in many other places of serious Christian formation and teaching.

Thank you again for your partnership with and support of Trinity Christian College. We are a better and more faithful place because of our cherished relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and we look forward to many future years of deep and rich partnership with the church.

Trinity Christian College
Kurt D. Dykstra, president

STUDY COMMITTEE AND TASK FORCES

I. Background, mandate, and methodology

A. Background

Mandating a committee to study some aspect of marriage is not new to the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Several study committees have been appointed in the past in order to articulate the essence, nature, and purpose of marriage as well to grapple with questions related to divorce, remarriage, and the distinctive character of Christian marriage. Recently, though, churches across the denomination are being confronted with questions that the CRC's previous statements and studies on marriage address only indirectly or not at all. The new questions are being driven by complexities involved in an increasing number of late-in-life second marriages, other unique life situations such as increased immigration, and a growing divide between civil and religious definitions of marriage. In brief, the new questions concern the advisability and legality of performing ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages and how pastors and elders should respond to situations in which a couple specifically requests an ecclesiastical marriage only, apart from any civil obligation. Synod 2019, in response to an overture from Classis Georgetown, mandated an "Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force" to address these questions and to articulate a biblically grounded, theologically informed, and pastorally nuanced response. Acceding to the overture, synod identified the need to study the advisability, legality, and morality of ecclesiastical marriage on the following grounds:

a. Churches are being confronted with questions and situations related to specifically ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages.
b. Pastors and elders need guidance on how to respond to these questions.
c. The current CRCNA position on marriage does not specifically address the relationship between civil and ecclesiastical marriage.

(*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 791)

B. Mandate

On these grounds Synod 2019 mandated this task force to study and address, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Is it legal in the various states, provinces, and territories of Canada and the United States to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding ceremony?
2. What implications do the current CRCNA position on marriage and the Church Order have on ecclesiastical (non-civil) weddings and marriages?
3. Is it morally legitimate to perform an ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding in order to avoid the financial costs and obligations of a civil marriage?
4. If people are declared married in a non-civil ceremony in a home country outside the United States or Canada, should that marriage be recognized by the CRCNA?
5. What are the implications for the church with regard to a specifically ecclesiastical marriage?
6. What are the implications of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages for senior citizens, including such matters as pensions and end-of-life care issues?
7. What, if anything, have other faith communities done with regard to this issue?
8. Consult with the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for insights that might be beneficial to this task force.

(*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 792)

C. Methodology

To fulfill this mandate, the task force undertook the following approach. First and foremost, the task force listened to the stories of people seeking or raising questions about ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages so that we could understand their stories and identify the kinds of situations that pastors and elders are facing. Second, having listened to some of the stories and having read through the mandate, the task force developed a working definition of *ecclesiastical marriage*. The task force recognized that the definition of *ecclesiastical marriage* was often assumed, and thus remained implicit rather than explicit, in the synodical mandate and in people's minds. As a result, the task force sought to develop a clear and concise definition of *ecclesiastical marriage* that would help provide clarity and coherence to the questions surrounding ecclesiastical marriage. The task force also realized that their conclusions and pastoral recommendations would depend on what is and is not considered an ecclesiastical marriage. Third, the task force studied the biblical, theological, and legal aspects of ecclesiastical marriage with an emphasis on understanding the feasibility or nonfeasibility of ecclesiastical marriage from a scriptural and up-to-date legal perspective. Fourth, the task force approached other denominations to see if they have grappled with the issues and might have some wisdom to share. In its consultation, the task force found that other denominations had not addressed the question and were interested in the CRC's study. Finally, the task force thought through recommendations concerning the advisability of ecclesiastical marriage as well as how to provide pastoral care to those seeking such a marriage because of unique or challenging situations.

II. Hearing the stories: Listening to couples in unique and challenging situations[1]

As the task force listened to stories, it realized that there were many situations in which couples considered entering into an ecclesiastical marriage or thought they had obtained one. The following is a sample of the kinds of stories the task force heard. Each story here raises certain questions about marriage pertinent to the work of the task force.

A. Late-in-life couple finding love after each lost their spouse

Denise and John are lifelong friends in their late sixties who have each lost their spouse to a serious illness. Sometime after grieving their spouses' deaths, Denise and John begin to spend significant time together and to bond with one another in surprising and unexpected ways—so much so that they begin to talk seriously about getting married to one another. Eventually they get engaged. But as they begin to plan their wedding, they start to ask questions about whether or not it is possible to get married in the church and by the church. This will be their second marriage, and civil marriage comes with all sorts of implications—especially with regard to financial matters. John and Denise both have adult children and are concerned about the implications for their children if they enter into a civil marriage. So they go to meet with Denise's pastor to ask about the possibility of an ecclesiastical marriage. In their conversation they mention how they do not want the entanglement

[1] The names of the individuals in these stories are pseudonyms.

of a civil marriage and that they just need the blessing of the church, which they believe would be the simpler solution in their situation. They want to care for each other and be the companions that they both now feel they need. They also raise the point that if civil authorities allow for common-law marriage, how would an ecclesiastical marriage be any different? Beyond the matter of similarities and differences in civil and ecclesiastical marriages, Denise and John's story raises several questions: Can an ecclesiastical marriage be a way to avoid the legal entanglements of a civil marriage? Should the church perform a marriage that is never going to be solemnized by the state (civil government)? How should the pastor of the church approach Denise and John in terms of pastoral care?

B. Immigrant couple straddling two cultures

Joseph and Ruth are a Sudanese couple who have been married for ten years. They met in a refugee camp in Kenya prior to immigrating to the United States. After coming to the United States, Joseph and Ruth decided that they wanted to get married. Desiring to maintain and honor their cultural customs, the couple began the process of getting married according to their tradition in Sudan. This meant that even while Joseph and Ruth were far away in the United States, their families in Sudan participated in the process and enacted the marriage customs, after which Joseph and Ruth were pronounced married—and they moved into an apartment together. Today, Joseph and Ruth still have not completed one important part of the marriage custom, however: according to their local tradition, Joseph's father and Ruth's father are to give their blessing to the couple in person. But expenses and difficulties with visas have prohibited them from doing so.

After 10 years of marriage and living in the United States, Ruth and Joseph have not obtained a civil marriage in the state in which they live, and they have no intention of doing so—for two reasons. First, they want to honor their customs and family by saying that what their family did is sufficient for them and should be sufficient for anybody else. Though they have been accused by some in their church as not being married but simply living together, they vigorously contest that accusation. The second reason is that they see no value in a license to help them stay together. They argue that the divorce rate is exceedingly high among couples who have marriage licenses, but separation is almost unheard in their tribe. The entire family has a stake in their marriage, and their honor of their culture gives them great strength in keeping their marriage intact.

Joseph and Ruth's story raises legal and pastoral issues. How should the church embrace and celebrate the marriage customs of Joseph and Ruth's culture? Should a pastor offer legal advice about getting married or recommend that Joseph and Ruth get legally married in the United States? If Joseph and Ruth do not desire to get legally married in the United States, does that make a difference in how the church should engage them as a couple? What can the church learn from Joseph and Ruth's cultural understanding of marriage and its relationship to the community?

C. Young couple worried about debt

Tim and Angie are recent college graduates and are engaged. Tim, however, has significant school debt. As they learn that getting married means that the couple will bear the burden of Tim's debt together, they begin to

wonder if there is a way to get married without Angie accruing and bearing Tim's debt. They seek advice and hear their grandparents talking about something called an ecclesiastical marriage, which could help them avoid the implications of a civil marriage. Tim and Angie bring it up to their pastor at their next marriage counseling session. Tim and Angie's story is raising concerns similar to those in Denise and John's story, showing that these kinds of questions are not just related to late-in-life second marriages. Is marriage intended to be a full joining of lives with its joys and responsibilities?

D. Couple kept apart by COVID-19 restrictions

Peter and Kate are both anxiously awaiting their wedding. They found each other late in life after each had lost their spouse to illness. Their wedding plans, however, have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. They are unable to get a marriage license due to the closure of government offices, and they are not sure when the offices will reopen. Peter and Kate both live alone at their own residences in a senior-living complex, and they were planning to move in together as soon as they got married. With the onset of a strict quarantine in their residential complex, they want to get married as soon as possible so as not to be apart for months. They approach their pastor to see if she is willing to perform a wedding ceremony even though they do not have a marriage license. They tell their pastor that they are going to obtain a license as soon as they are able, but they would like to get married as soon as possible so that they can live together during quarantine.

Should the pastor perform an ecclesial ceremony for Peter and Kate so that they can live together during quarantine? When are they really married? Who needs to be involved in the marriage for a couple to be fully married? Must all the parties (state, couple, witnesses, church community) be present at only one ceremony for the marriage to be considered valid? Or is it acceptable to perform separate ceremonies in extenuating circumstances, provided the intent is to have both a civil ceremony and a religious ceremony?

E. Couple with cross-border connections

Jennifer and Jared meet at Dordt University, date, and eventually become engaged. Jennifer is a Canadian citizen, and Jared is a United States citizen. Since Jared has a job lined up in the U.S. and Jennifer has already been accepted into a graduate program near his job location, the couple are planning to settle there, and it would make the most sense for them to get legally married in the U.S. However, Jennifer's extended family members all live in Alberta, where she grew up, so she and Jared decide to have a large church wedding and reception in Alberta several weeks before they move to settle in the U.S. together. Jennifer then crosses the border into the U.S. with her student visa. They also have a small commitment ceremony and get legally married before a judge in the U.S. several weeks after their church wedding date, thus separating the civil and ecclesiastical marriage ceremonies. When are they really married? Again, is this acceptable because the intent is to have both a religious ceremony and a civil ceremony, even if the two events cannot take place at the same time and location?

Listening to these and other stories, the task force recognized that there are many questions to be answered. The task force also recognized that the

stories they heard are not exhaustive and that many other possible stories include scenarios that these accounts do not capture.

III. Definition of *ecclesiastical marriage*

For the content of this study we are particularly interested in knowing (1) what "makes" a marriage, (2) what the life implications of such a relationship are in terms of its purposes and mutual responsibilities by the parties, and (3) what the church's obligations are toward the state (civil government) in our North American context.[2] Knowing the reasons why people may want to bypass state involvement, both intentionally and perhaps unintentionally, is also an important consideration. Since the CRC has considered the matters of marriage and divorce in some depth previously in several reports and has dealt with individual cases, it seems unnecessary to cover all of that ground again. Instead, the main focus of this task force is on delineating, as far as possible, the relationship between the church and the state in the matter of marriage.

In determining the first point—what "makes" a marriage—the task force is concerned particularly with what parties are required to solemnize a Christian marriage. More specifically, the questions under consideration deal with what the respective roles are of both church leadership and the state, considering our current North American context.

Some might argue that marriage is simply a commitment rite between two people, with God as their witness. In their view, such a private ceremony of covenant vows should be enough to be considered married in the eyes of God.

Some might argue that for a marriage to be Christian, these commitments need to be solemnized and validated by a pastor or other certified officiant.

Some would add that, in addition, these vows or commitments need to be witnessed by others. In this view, there needs to be a public rite of commitment. As with baptism, the public nature of the ceremony invites witnesses to support and pray for the couple making commitments, and the witnesses can participate in holding the marriage partners accountable to their vows.

Finally, in recent centuries it has also become the norm to cooperate with the state in solemnizing such a marriage commitment. Marriages are registered with the state, and certain obligations are followed in order for a marriage to be considered legal. In fact, in North America ministers are licensed to formalize marriage on behalf of the state.[3]

One of the primary questions before this task force is this: Must the marriage ceremony be approved and cemented by the state, or can a Christian marriage be considered solemnized without that? Behind this lie questions about what joining one's life with that of another means concretely in terms of shared relationships, goods, income, pension, property, duty of care, and so on. Does the state have the authority and right to regulate these matters if the need arises? Further, our denomination asserts that, aside from being a personal commitment, marriage is also "a structure that enriches society

[2] See Report 29, *Acts of Synod 1980:* "What is marriage? What is its essence, its purposes, and its obligations?" pp. 468ff.

[3] It should be noted that in his theology of what "makes" a marriage, John Calvin identifies each party (God, couple, pastor, witnesses, and magistrate) as essential components to the solemnization of marriage. See Section III, B ("Historical/theological") of this report for further information.

and contributes to its orderly function."[4] How does that assertion affect our understanding of the state's role in solemnizing marriage?

As this task force considered these questions, it developed a definition of ecclesiastical marriage in order to provide clarity and consistency in its responses to these questions and pastoral care issues. It is hard to respond to a question about whether a pastor should perform an ecclesiastical marriage when the definition of ecclesiastical marriage is unclear. Using the synodical mandate and the original overture, the task force developed a definition of ecclesiastical marriage. For the purposes of this report, an *ecclesiastical marriage*, therefore, is a marriage sanctioned and solemnized solely by the church to the exclusion of the state (civil government) whereby a couple is considered "married in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state."[5] By this definition, then, ecclesiastical marriage should be differentiated from religious marriage or even from a religious service/ceremony/celebration because ecclesiastical marriage intentionally excludes the state as a sanctioning or governing authority.

For many, as evidenced in the stories in section II of this report, ecclesiastical marriage seems like a plausible solution to a myriad of distinct problems. It could be seen as a way to avoid the legal and financial implications of civil marriage, particularly in late-in-life second marriages like Denise and John's. Similarly, ecclesiastical marriage could be a way to help or aid immigrant couples who were married ceremonially in their home countries—and yet for one reason or another their marriage is not recognized or they cannot obtain a civil marriage in their new country. Alternatively, ecclesiastical marriage could serve as a way to protest against the state's redefinition of marriage insofar as an ecclesial marriage refuses to participate in or seek a marriage sanctioned by the state. Further, as definitions of civil and religious marriage diverge, many proponents of ecclesiastical marriage seem to argue that if a couple can get legally married without the church, should the reverse not also be the case? Why can't a couple receive a Christian marriage without the state? And, if that is the case, then why not allow the church to perform ecclesiastical marriages? These are the kinds of situations and questions that pastors and elders are facing in their local contexts.

The answers to these questions, as our task force discovered, are not simple, and they require addressing complex issues about the legality of ecclesiastical marriages in Canada and the United States. They also require thoughtful reflection within a larger scriptural and theological framework concerning the relationship between the church and the state with regard to marriage. The complexity extends to considering any unintentional legal consequences to the parties, the officiant, and the church as a result of entering into or performing an ecclesiastical marriage.

A. Biblical background [6]

Within our denominational context, any discussion of marriage will necessarily begin with a biblical consideration of the topic. As previous CRC studies have covered the nature, essence, and purpose of marriage in Scripture, our task force focused on biblical material pertinent to the

[4] CRC Form for the Solemnization of Marriage (1979).

[5] *Agenda for Synod 2019,* Overture 14, p. 518.

[6] Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are from the *New International Version* (2011).

question of ecclesiastical marriage. While no biblical accounts explicitly spell out stipulations about marriage ceremonies and relative obligations, we can nonetheless glean answers and implications from various texts and accounts. Consideration of Christian marriage begins, of course, in the opening chapters of Genesis. Relying simply on that narrative, it would seem that what happens is only between the marriage partners and God. There is only one man and one woman. God created them to be fitting complements to each other, and that is God's design. The man rejoices that he has found a suitable partner. Genesis 2:24 then adds, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." There is no state license needed; no publication of banns; no cleric; no witnesses; and no signing of forms. Yet we understand this to be a marriage in which "a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity."[7] However, the "leaving" part also indicates that there is something public and formal about this relationship, with a shifting of allegiances and responsibility from one household to another relationship that is publicly acknowledged and recognized.

Information about Old Testament marriage customs, ceremonies, and obligations has been deduced from some of the biblical narratives and the Mosaic legal code concerning betrothal, marriage, and divorce, as well as from material recorded about other civilizations in the ancient Near East.[8] Although these texts do not provide a full picture of what is involved in arranging a marriage, it "seems likely that there was a formal set of rites and procedures that accompanied the arrangement of a marriage alliance."[9] Marriage in the Old Testament was not without its rules and protocols: intentions were declared, parents were asked for permission, a bride price was paid, a sort of contract was entered into, and there would be a brief ceremony before the couple would live together.[10] David W. Chapman asserts that during the Second Temple period (roughly 516 B.C. to 70 A.D.) the formal union of marriage "was generally preceded by a betrothal and often vouchsafed by a marriage contract obligating certain financial arrangements."[11] The woman might also be given a significant gift by her father with the understanding that it could provide for her if the marriage was dissolved. In addition, in the case of Rebekah leaving her parental household to "marry" Isaac, her family also formalized matters by sending her off with a blessing (Gen. 24:60).

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[7] CRC Form for the Solemnization of Marriage (1979).

[8] "We recognize the wide variety of literary genres that yield information on ancient family life: laws, narratives, polemical prophetic texts, songs, didactic wisdom compositions, etc."; Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel" in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), p. 34.

[9] Victor H. Matthews, "Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East" in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), p. 7.

[10] We see some of these elements in Genesis in the marriage arrangements between Rebekah with Isaac, and then Jacob with Rachel and Leah. "For a marriage to be arranged, the groom's family must provide a bride price, while the bride's family provides a dowry"; John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), p. 531.

[11] David W. Chapman, "Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism" in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), p. 184. "Certainly some marriage and family practices could be left to custom, but other aspects of family life required legal discussion—especially when money was involved"; Chapman, p. 239.

Indeed, phrases referring to parents "giving" sons and daughters in marriage (cf. Deut. 7:3) "suggests that the institution itself involved more than the mere union of one man and one woman; this was a momentous occasion uniting families."[12]

Another consideration is that throughout the Old Testament we see God's care for vulnerable people, especially in a patriarchal society in which women had few rights and could be economically destitute without a male (father, husband, brother, or son) who would provide and care for them. As Daniel Block explains,

> Practically, in the ancient context, unless a woman was taken in by her father or brothers, divorce put her in extremely vulnerable economic protection. Like the widow or the orphan, she would be without male provision and protection, and in many instances would turn to prostitution simply to earn a living.[13]

Witness, for example, God's continued concern for "the widow and the orphan," as well as protections for women in cases where they had been taken advantage of sexually, legally, by divorce or otherwise.[14] Protocols, regulations, and provisions were a necessary part of regulating sinful society and protecting persons with lower social status. By supplying procedures and a legal code, God was at work enacting his plan for maintaining some order, right relationships, and justice in society.

In the New Testament we can see that again more is assumed about marriage than is explained. The Old Testament theme of God in relationship with his people, as in a covenant of marriage (in Hosea, for example), is expanded in the New Testament in an extended metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. Thus marriage is held in high regard as something to be regulated and guarded. Infidelity and divorce were not matters to be taken lightly, since the marriage covenant was representative of God and his people. In fact, Jesus intensifies the teaching on divorce, saying that God had allowed it because of hardness of heart but that it was not God's original intent (Matt. 19:8).

It is not possible to ascertain from the New Testament alone exactly what the relationship between Christians and the state was in terms of legalizing a marriage. Peter Coleman says that in the Second Temple period (up to 70 A.D.), "the actual procedures for marriage were largely the same in Palestine as in other parts of the Near East, unchanged for centuries."[15] He adds that the Jewish marriage ceremony itself was a simple procedure that "did not involve a visit to the synagogue nor the presence of a rabbi, but this did not mean it was a civil rather than a religious ceremony. Prayers and blessings would be said by senior members of the families. . . ."[16] It seems that early Christians continued wedding practices unattached to church authorities. In researching marriage rites during the New Testament and the early centuries of Christian practice, Willy Rordorf found that marriages proceeded "according to the contemporary laws" and that "the first generation of Christians

[12] Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," p. 56.

[13] Ibid., p. 51.

[14] Deut. 24:1-4.

[15] Peter Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage: From Ancient times to the Third Millennium* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p. 86.

[16] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

gave no additional juridical or liturgical form. . . . It is only from the fourth century onwards that we begin to see the clergy participating in marriage festivities."[17] Rordorf summarizes his findings about early Christian marriage conventions in a manner that is worth quoting at length:

> First, we have to admit that the Early Church did not conceive a new form of marriage; it simply took over and conventionalized those local rites which it found. Secondly, we see that it is not an ecclesiastical act of blessing which makes a valid Christian marriage, but each marriage, contracted by either Christian or non-Christian according to the ordinary civil laws of a given time and place, is recognized as valid by the Church. In reality, during long centuries, the religious ceremony of marriage was considered optional rather than obligatory.[18]

Surprisingly, then, the conclusion here is that the early church abided by state regulations and practices regarding marriage, and only later did some ecclesiastical oversight or involvement become an optional convention.

On the other hand, given the New Testament's silence on the matter, perhaps this conclusion is not surprising. The New Testament is simply assuming that people will follow the customs of the day to solemnize a marriage. There does not seem to be any discussion or argument about how such a Christian marriage should be solidified. In addition, the fact that writers such as Paul address divorce as a procedural reality means that it was also a formalized possibility, not only under rabbinic teaching but also for Christians.

Attending to the more general topic of the relationship of Christians to the state, the New Testament is not ambiguous, even in a time when, under Roman rule, that relationship was detrimental to Christians in many instances. This is most clearly addressed in the letter of Romans, where Paul says, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom. 13:1). Paul asserts that, on the whole, government has been instituted for the good of citizens and has been given authority to regulate and enforce orderly judgment of right and wrong in society, a theme that we find in God's expectations of rulers in the Old Testament also. Paul then goes on to spell out respect for government in more concrete terms as well, saying, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Rom. 13:6-7). Respect, honor, and obedience to governing authorities was and is expected of Christians.

Further, writers of the New Testament were pretty clear about the importance of how believers interacted with, and were perceived by, their unbelieving family, colleagues, civil authorities, friends, and neighbors. Part of this obligation involved obeying authorities that were placed over them. In 1 Peter 2:13-17, for example, the apostle Peter exhorts believers this way:

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[17] Willy Rordorf, "Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (20:2; Oct. 1969), p. 209.

[18] Ibid.

> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Such teaching applies to the whole life and practice of the Christian and should also be taken seriously in relation to marriage. Andreas Kostenberger comments: "Marriage, as well as other human relationships, is thus set in the framework of a believer's Christian testimony in the surrounding unbelieving world."[19] In our North American contemporary context, where marriage commitments are often treated lightly or disregarded altogether, this is an area where Christian commitment and fidelity can speak volumes.

Summarizing, then, what we might ascertain of the biblical witness, it seems that God's people in the Old Testament acted within certain accepted procedural parameters for marriage that included a contract of some sort and the exchange of a dowry or similar payments. A marriage was understood to include mutual obligations, and there was also a legal code surrounding divorce. The New Testament does not expressly address the matter of how a marriage was constituted and what the relative involvement of religious or civil authorities was. So it is safe to assume, as scholars do, that in this era, as well, believers adhered to local customs and cooperated with civil authorities to ratify a marriage, however that was done in their region. What is clear is that in both the Old and New Testaments God intends law as a benefit to regulate society in a sinful world. In the New Testament believers are clearly instructed to respect and honor governing bodies. As we shall see, this is a theme that continues in the Reformed tradition through its leaders, particularly John Calvin.

B. Historical/theological

Although there is ample scriptural evidence that marriage is a God-ordained institution and a societal norm, Scripture does not dictate that the civil authorities must be involved in the solemnization of marriage. It does, however, teach that marriage is a creational and societal good with benefits beyond the married couple. Further, there are no scriptural grounds claiming that the solemnization of marriage belongs solely to the church, meaning that the state does not usurp ecclesiastical authority if it claims marriage as its own.[20] In summary, there is no set marriage form or ceremony in Scripture, and yet that does not mean that any kind of ceremony or understanding of the parties involved in a marriage is allowed. Scripture provides guidance, guidelines, and an underlying logic concerning marriage and the parties involved in "making" a marriage. As mentioned above, the goal of this report is not to cover this ground again but to focus on the specific question of whether or not the CRC's scriptural, theological, and historical understanding of marriage would allow for its pastors to perform ecclesiastical marriage.

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[19] Andreas Kostenberger, "Marriage and Family in the New Testament" in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003), p. 254.

[20] *Acts of Synod 1955,* p. 247.

1. The CRC's forms and statement on marriage guidelines

While the institutional shape and practices of marriage have differed throughout history and throughout many cultures, in the Reformed tradition both the church and the state are considered to have a God-given, relative authority with respect to marriage. In most cases this means that the state is considered to have authority over the governance, regulation, and registration of marriages, and that the church has authority over the spiritual and moral aspects of marriage. These exist side by side, with each having its own role to play on the basis of its sphere of authority. Such an approach of granting dual yet relative authority to church and state is rooted in the tradition's theology of marriage, particularly its identification of marriage as a divinely ordained institution established at creation, its conception of marriage as a covenant, and its commitment to marriage as a good because it serves as a foundation for society. These aspects of marriage are evidenced in the CRC's forms for the solemnization of marriage as well as its 1980 statement on marriage guidelines. In the 1912 Form for the Solemnization of Marriage, marriage is described as "instituted by God himself at the very dawn of history," "a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness," and "an institution of the highest significance to the human race." The 1979 Form for the Solemnization of Marriage explicitly describes marriage as a covenant "instituted by God" in creation and "a structure that enriches society and contributes to its orderly function." In addition, synod's study and statement on marriage in 1980 affirms marriage as a foundational creational structure,[21] a covenant, and a vital relational and societal reality.[22]

While affirming marriage as a creational reality, covenant, and societal good, the forms and the 1980 statement often assume or allude to a particular understanding of the authority of the church and state in relation to marriage. The 1912 and 1979 forms recognize the minister as an agent of the church who is at the same time vested by the authority of the state. Thus the minister serves as an agent of the church and the state in the solemnization of a marriage, and marriage is presented as both an ecclesial and civil institution. The forms also clearly identify that in the case of marriage, the pastor's authority to solemnize the marriage is tied to the state and the church. The pastor's authority from the church is granted by virtue of his or her ordination, while the capacity to solemnize the marriage is granted to the pastor by the state. As the 1979 form states:

> As a minister of the church of Christ and by the authority which the state has vested in me, I now pronounce you, (name) and (name), husband and wife, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6).

The Synod 1980 statement similarly reaffirms the essence, purpose, and obligations of marriage as it identifies changing societal norms and

[21] *Acts of Synod 1980,* pp. 468-69: "Marriage was instituted by God at creation. Declaring that it was not good for the man to be alone, God created woman as a helper fit for him (Gen. 2:18). Man and woman, created in the image of God, were made for each other to become one flesh in marriage. Thus marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will. It is a God-ordained, monogamous structure, requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife."

[22] Ibid., pp. 469-71.

discusses divorce and remarriage. While the 1980 statement does not specify the roles or authority of the church and the state in relation to marriage, it does not respond to changes in societal norms by resituating marriage within the jurisdiction and authority of the church alone.

2. Church Order Article 69 (formerly Art. 70)

A similar approach is evident earlier in the CRC's history, when societal norms regarding marriage and divorce were changing. Between 1947 and 1955 the CRC debated whether or not Church Order Article 70 (now Art. 69),[23] regarding marriage, should be removed or changed. Article 70 at that time read, "Since it is proper that the matrimonial state be confirmed in the presence of Christ's Church, according to the Form for that purpose, the consistories shall attend to it."[24]

The question of whether this article belonged in the Church Order arose for discussion in 1947 when Peter Van Dyken submitted an overture to synod requesting that Article 70 be removed. While recapitulating the entire overture is unnecessary, some of Van Dyken's grounds in the overture are pertinent. First, Van Dyken argued that

> *there is . . . nothing spiritual or ecclesiastical in a marriage.* The married state as such and its consummation are matters in the realm of common grace. Whereas God solemnized the first marriage, it is proper, that God's representative in the territory of common grace, which is our civil government, now performs this rite.[25]

He also argued that the CRC Church Order represented the cultural context of the Netherlands. Van Dyken maintained that the language of confirmation was not valid because a marriage solemnized by the state did not need confirmation by the church in the United States. He claimed that in the Netherlands such a practice was a "relic" of Roman Catholicism. Further, he noted that within the United States the government grants judges and ministers of the gospel the power to solemnize marriages. In other words, ministers are agents of the state when they solemnize a marriage, acting on behalf of the civil government, not the church. To Van Dyken, including an article on marriage in the Church Order causes confusion by presenting marriage as "semi-civil" and "semi-ecclesiastical," when in reality the solemnization of a marriage properly belongs to the state as an "authoritative representative of God's justice."[26]

In summary, Van Dyken argued on the basis of common grace and the God-ordained role of civil government that an article on marriage does not belong in the CRC Church Order. In response to Van Dyken's overture, Synod 1947 commissioned a study to determine if the article should be removed, retained, or changed.

Synod discussed these issues until 1955 and ultimately decided to retain but change Article 70 (now Art. 69). For the purpose of this report, while it is not necessary to trace the discussion from 1947 to 1955 in full,

[23] At the time of discussion, the Church Order article regarding marriage was Article 70 (now Art. 69). The numbering of this article changed after Synod 1965 adopted a revision of the Church Order.

[24] See *Agenda for Synod 1947*, p. 181.

[25] *Agenda for Synod 1947*, p. 181.

[26] Ibid., pp. 181-82.

it will be helpful to highlight some of the arguments given by the Church Order Revision Committee to Synod 1955 for retaining but changing the Church Order article. First, they acknowledged the authority of the state in marriage. They wrote, "Ministers of the Gospel, when they solemnize marriages, act upon a prerogative attributed to them by the civil government."[27] However, the Church Order Revision Committee also highlighted that pastors "have received this prerogative because the churches ordained them."[28] Drawing a balance between the role of the state and the church, the committee argued that the church should retain an article on marriage and recommended that it be rewritten as follows:

> Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care to marry only in the Lord. Christian marriages should be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, as provided for in the official Form. Marriages may be solemnized either in a worship service or in private gatherings of relatives and friends. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.[29]

By adopting the revised version of Article 70 (now Art. 69), Synod 1955 highlighted the pastor's role in solemnizing marriage, which is a role granted to them by the state. But in acknowledging that civil and religious definitions of marriage may differ, they also required pastors to solemnize marriages in line with the Word of God.

The CRC's discussion of this Church Order article shows that the CRC has engaged in discussions regarding the relationship between the state and the church. Further, throughout this discussion the CRC affirmed the role of the civil government in marriage, sometimes even going so far as to claim that the civil government has sole jurisdiction over marriage. However, the question remains whether the references and allusions to the roles of the church and the state in the CRC's forms and statements on marriage are a result of the CRC's context, or if they are rooted deeper in the CRC's theology regarding marriage itself. Simply affirming marriage as a creational, covenantal, and societal reality does not necessarily imply that the church and the state should be granted relative authority with respect to marriage. It is possible and could be argued that these realities could be identified and maintained within an ecclesiastical marriage. To be clear, the CRC's current forms and statements are certainly influenced by its cultural context. The legal structures of Canada and the United States, in which ministers are granted the authority of the state to perform legal marriages, allow for one ceremony to be both civil and religious.

3. Reformed theology of marriage

For the Reformers, issues related to marriage and marriage reforms were not peripheral concerns. Rather, they were rooted in and were an expression of the theological and societal concerns of the Reformers. As historian Joel Harrington asserts, marriage "stood by implication at the heart of almost every major legal, religious, and social reform of the period."[30]

[27] *Acts of Synod 1955,* p. 251.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 250 (cf. Article 69 in the current Church Order).

[30] Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 26.

Concerned with the medieval Catholic Church's practices and abuse of marriage, the Reformers accepted the traditional church's teaching of marriage as a divinely ordained institution rooted in creation, but they rejected the sacramental model of marriage and the Catholic Church's jurisdiction over marriage. John Witte, Jr., articulates in his book *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* that the Reformers saw the "Catholic Church's jurisdiction over marriage [as] . . . a particularly flagrant example of the church's usurpation of the magistrate's authority."[31] For the Reformers, marriage was a creational, God-ordained, human institution and as such could not fall under the jurisdiction of the church alone. In fact, for Luther, marriage was an institution of the earthly kingdom alone, meaning that the proper jurisdiction of marriage belonged to the magistrates (the state). The church, according to Luther, should not have formal legal authority over marriage but should serve the Christian magistrate as a pastoral aid. While following Luther's early theology of marriage, Calvin developed his mature theology of marriage around the idea of marriage as a covenant. For Calvin, the covenant of marriage was grounded in the order of creation and was a public and God-ordained human institution whose formation involved the whole community. As Witte articulates,

> Marriage . . . was . . . a covenantal association of the entire community. A variety of parties participated in the formation of this covenant. The marital parties themselves confirmed their engagement promises and marital vows before each other and God—rendering all marriages triparty agreements, with God as a third-party witness, participant, and judge. The couple's parents, as God's lieutenants for children, gave their consent to the union. Two witnesses, as God's priests to their peers, served as witnesses to the marriage. The minister, holding God's spiritual power of the Word, blessed the couple and admonished them in their spiritual duties. The magistrate, holding God's temporal power of the sword, registered the couple and protected them in their person and property. Each of these parties was considered essential to the legitimacy of the marriage, for they each represented a different dimension of God's involvement with the covenant. To omit any such party was, in effect, to omit God from the marriage covenant.[32]

According to Calvin, the formation of the God-ordained covenant of marriage involved the minister, the magistrate, the couple, and the community. As all of these parties participated in the formation of the marriage covenant, the marriage itself was both private and public, a civil and ecclesial reality. The magistrate's role was to register the couple and protect their person and property. The minister's role was to bless the couple and remind them of their spiritual duties as a married couple. The magistrate and the pastor served different roles, pointing to different aspects of marriage—the spiritual and the social. Therefore, by highlighting the different parties, Calvin affirmed that marriage was under the dual yet relative authority of both the church and the state.

[31] John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2012), p. 113.

[32] Ibid., p. 8.

While the working out of Calvin's covenantal theology of marriage in Geneva represents a unique practical example of his theology that the church today need not nor should not try to emulate, his teaching about marriage as both civil and ecclesial has shaped the Reformed tradition and the Western legal tradition. The state or civil government is considered to have rightful authority and governance over the registration of marriage. It is also called on to protect the persons entering into the marriage relationship. The church is considered to have authority not as the body that registers or protects the persons and property in marriage but in the spiritual health and care of the marriage partners, admonishing and encouraging the couple to embody the biblical conception of marriage. Calvin's teachings were carried forward by other Reformed thinkers, such as Herman Bavinck, and Calvin's understanding of marriage can be found in the CRC's teachings about marriage and its marriage forms. Thus, while the CRC's forms are representative of their North American context, their affirmation of marriage as an institution of the state and of the church—each with its own respective and God-given authority—is rooted in the CRC's Reformed theological heritage.

4. The relationship between the church and the state in other CRC reports

Interestingly, the CRC's affirmation of marriage as civil and ecclesial is evidenced by Appendix C in the majority report to Synod 2016 by the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage.[33] While the whole report was only received as information, Appendix C grappled with the relationship between the church and state regarding marriage, identifying four different options that it had earlier asked delegates to Synod 2015 (in a listening session) to consider regarding the church-state relationship:

> a. Marriage is fundamentally a religious institution. The state should recognize the religious nature of marriage and only authorize marriage as understood by religious authority.
> b. Marriage as the covenantal union of a man and a woman is grounded both religiously and by proper recognition of the created order. The state, even if it attempts to be religiously neutral, makes a profound error when it ignores what nature itself teaches. . . .[34]
> c. Both the state (civil government) and the church have a direct interest in family structure and well-being, but these interests are not identical. Both the state and the church have latitude (within limits) to define marriage to pursue their legitimate interests, even though those interests may not be the same. The state and the church may end up with different definitions of marriage.
> d. The church does not tell civil authority what to do. The church simply defines marriage as it finds itself compelled by Scripture and orders its internal life as Scripture and the gospel requires. What the state does is the state's business.
>
> (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 421)

[33] See *Agenda for Synod 2016,* pp. 421-25.

[34] This option has been modified for the purposes of this report. The modification was made in order to focus this section of the report on the relationship between the church and the state outside of the question of same-sex marriage, which this task force was not commissioned to study.

Appendix C identifies the first option (marriage as fundamentally a religious institution) as corresponding to the medieval Roman Catholic view and the fourth option (separation of church and state) as "expressive of an Anabaptist approach."[35] Appendix C also reports that the majority of delegates to Synod 2015 identified the second and third options as fitting within a Reformed framework. The study committee's minority report—received for information as well—also affirmed the second and third options as two different ways of applying a Reformed understanding of the relationship between the church and the state. However, the minority report implicitly argued that option 2, wherein marriage is described as a covenantal union grounded religiously and by proper recognition of the created order, is closer to the historic Reformed position. Thus, while option 3, wherein marriage is a concern and a legitimate but distinct interest of the state and the church, may represent some voices within contemporary Reformed theology, option 2 is closer to the historic position developed by Calvin and his followers. Further, the minority report highlighted the role of the state as a God-ordained yet relative authority that is called to discern the patterns of creation with regard to marriage. What is important here is not to rehash the debate surrounding the 2016 report or to enter into a discussion on the redefinition of civil marriage and its attendant issues. What is important is that both options 2 and 3 point toward the role of the church and the state in the Reformed tradition's theology of marriage.

To reiterate, it would be impossible to address all the attendant issues related to our current context regarding the societal redefinition of marriage. However, it is important to note that when considering the definition of ecclesiastical marriage, one could identify it with either option 1 (medieval Roman Catholic) or option 4 (Anabaptist) but not option 2 or 3 (Reformed), both of which can be considered variations of the Reformed approach to the relationship between the church and the state in relation to marriage.

Recognizing options 2 and 3 as Reformed does not mean that a couple who has been married by a civil magistrate must have a religious ceremony upon coming to faith in Christ. This is an essential point that highlights the central role the Reformed tradition grants to the civil government in authorizing, solemnizing, and legally registering marriages. As long as the marriage in question is in line with the Word of God as articulated in the CRC's forms and synodical decisions, Christian churches recognize a couple as married even if they have had only a civil ceremony.[36] Rather, upon coming to faith in Christ, the couple enters into the rich theological conception of marriage that the CRC teaches.

Further, the CRC's understanding of the relative relationship between the church and the state means that even though the church has a vested interest in the health and vitality of the marriage and has some measure of ecclesial authority over the marriage, it does not have the power to grant a

[35] *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 422.

[36] This statement is made so that no couple who comes into the church will have to go through the process of having a "religious ceremony" to make their marriage "valid."

divorce. That power belongs to the state. This is one of the challenges presented by the idea of ecclesiastical marriage. If there were such a thing as an ecclesiastical marriage regulated only by the church, would the church then also have to regulate an ecclesiastical divorce? The church continues to deal with marriages that break down and end in divorce. This simply begs the question, *What will the church do with an ecclesiastical marriage that breaks down?* Not only does the idea of ecclesiastical marriage contradict the CRC's theological understanding of the relationship between the church and state in relation to marriage, it also presents practical problems.

IV. Legal issues

Civil and legal implications of marriage and ecclesiastical marriage

We begin with two caveats. The first is that this report is absolutely not intended as legal advice for any specific persons or situations. Across all of the states of the U.S. and the provinces and territories of Canada, there is no common approach to the set of questions raised by ecclesiastical marriage that can be definitively spelled out.[37] This is because so much is contextual, and in both Canada and the U.S. each province and state has its own set of regulations and laws. Further, the case law that has interpreted the legal code in each jurisdiction is widely varied. It is therefore not possible or advisable for this task force to gather legal advice from each different locale. Instead, we looked at some broader issues and their consequences in terms of considering whether the denomination could bless ecclesiastical marriage. The second caveat, therefore, is that this material, while pertinent, is decidedly not exhaustive or even comprehensive. It is only intended to give a taste of some of the possible implications.

As the task force began to research the implications of pursuing ecclesiastical marriage as a valid option, it became increasingly clear how complex the issue is, and that a myriad of complications and possible consequences, whether intended or unintentional, exist. This is partly because, despite views to the contrary, governments in both of our nations take the marriage relationship seriously. There is an expectation that certain commitments and responsibilities are to be upheld in a marriage partnership, and in some jurisdictions this applies even if it is a common-law relationship.[38] Such commitments and responsibilities are especially pertinent to matters of financial support and have specific implications, even if the common-law marriage breaks down or if one partner in the relationship dies.

There are some major differences between Canadian and American law and practice that make the repercussions of this discussion even more complicated. The most prominent difference is whether or not there is a legal

[37] For more information on the Canadian context, see the Appendix to this report.

[38] Common-law marriage is rooted in the British common-law tradition. An early example of common-law marriage in the British commonwealth legal tradition in North America was the 1730 union of Benjamin Franklin and Debbie Read in Boston. The thread of this cultural practice runs through the shared fabric of U.S. and Canadian marriage laws and customs. See H.W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010).

recognition of common-law spouses and common-law partnerships with some rights and duties afforded such spouses. Such official recognition of common-law relationships is central to this discussion because the task force assumes that ecclesiastical marriages (done outside of any civil contract) would be considered common-law relationships or marriages wherever such a designation would apply.

In Canada there is a widespread legal recognition of common-law partnerships, even if they are not officially recorded legal marriages; whereas less than a dozen U.S. states presently recognize any aspect of such a common-law relationship. A relationship is considered common-law in Canada when someone is living with a person who is not his or her spouse but is having a conjugal relationship with that person. In addition, at least one of the following situations also needs to apply to that relationship—namely, that (1) the parties have been living together in a conjugal relationship for at least twelve continuous months, (2) the parties are the parent of a child by birth or adoption, and/or (3) the parties have custody and control of a child (or had custody and control immediately before the child turned 19 years of age) and the child is wholly dependent on that person for support.

In the U.S. only seven states have legislation describing and accepting a common-law marriage. They are Colorado,[39] Iowa,[40] Kansas,[41] Montana,[42] New Hampshire,[43] Texas,[44] and Utah.[45] Two other states—Rhode Island[46] and Oklahoma[47]—and the District of Columbia[48] have created common-law marriage (and still recognize it) via case law only.[49] Despite some recognition of common-law marriage, most state courts do not favor it, preferring parties to be "legally" married for cases of dividing property, settling estates, receiving Social Security benefits, and so on. The elements that define a common-law marriage can have slight variations from state to state, but the generally recognized elements in the U.S. are these:

[39] C.R.S 14-2-109.5.

[40] IA Code Ann. §595.1A. It should be noted that this portion of the Iowa Code does not expressly reference common-law marriage (and thus neither prohibits nor endorses common-law marriage). However, Iowa courts, as recently as 2019, have noted that Iowa does recognize common-law marriage.

[41] Kan. Stat. §23-2502 (parties must be over 18 for the state to recognize common-law marriage); Kan. Stat. §23-2714 (in a dissolution action, testimony regarding common-law marriage is admissible).

[42] Mont. Code Ann. §40-1-403.

[43] N.H. Stat. §457:39. New Hampshire requires that the parties cohabitated for at least three years prior to the death of one of the parties. New Hampshire has very limited case law regarding common-law marriage; it seems to be only for probate/inheritance purposes.

[44] Tex. Family Law §1.101; Tex. Family Law §2.401-402.

[45] Utah Stat. §30-1-4.5. Utah requires a court order to establish the validity of a common-law marriage. If a relationship terminates, then the parties must petition for recognition of the marriage within one year of the end of the relationship.

[46] See, e.g., *Luis v. Gaugler,* 185 A.3d 497, 502–03 (R.I. 2018), *as corrected* (June 21, 2018).

[47] Brooks v. Sanders, 2008 OK CIV APP 66, 190 P.3d 357, 358.

[48] See, e.g., *Coates v. Watts,* 662 A.2d 25, 27 (D.C. 1993) ("The District of Columbia has long recognized common law marriage. . . .").

[49] Since only seven U.S. states explicitly recognize common-law marriage, there is also far less case law to study in order to ascertain the implications.

– present agreement to be married;
– living together as husband and wife after the agreement; and
– representations to others that the couple is married.[50]

Additionally, though not explicitly stated in all the common-law states, a fourth element should be included—that of competency/capacity. Courts will not recognize a common-law marriage if one of the parties is not competent or does not have capacity to enter into the marriage (i.e., a minor at the time of the marriage).[51]

We will now proceed to spell out some of the intended but also unintended complications that may arise from an ecclesiastical marriage, particularly in jurisdictions that legally accept common-law marriages. As will be explained, though, while a common-law partnership is excluded from some marital obligations, many of these responsibilities still do apply to the partners in case of death or a breakdown of the relationship. If, as the task force surmises, those who enter an ecclesiastical marriage are considered as having a common-law marriage, that does not nullify some of the legal and financial responsibilities the parties would have to each other, some of which the parties might think they could avoid.

Although many of the complicating issues surrounding ecclesiastical marriage might only apply in situations where difficulties arise (incapacitation, expensive care or financial obligations, death, or the dissolution of the relationship), these nonetheless need to be taken seriously. In a legal marriage there are certain rights and obligations that the partners have toward each other. Laws guard matters such as the rights to spousal support, division of family property, the right to benefit from increased property or business value, and the right to occupy the family residence. The rights to these are prescribed in law (depending on the circumstance), and some have also applied in cases of common-law relationships. Thus ecclesiastical marriages would not be exempt from some of these same responsibilities, even if the couple intended to bypass them by means of a nonlegally compliant marriage.[52]

More serious, perhaps, are the many issues related to end-of-life situations. Late-in-life ecclesiastical marriages present parties and their families with additional complications and concerns. Where persons fail to plan for end-of-life issues, there are numerous instances when the law intervenes to provide guidance in relation to a person's estate. In the province of Ontario, for example, a will is automatically revoked once a person gets married.

[50] See, e.g. *Martinez v. Furmanite Am. Inc.,* 2018 WL 4469973, at *3 (Tex. App. Sept. 19, 2018), *review denied* (Mar. 29, 2019). See also *In Re Dallman's Estate,* 228 N.W.2d 187, 189 (Iowa 1975); *Budd v. Tanking,* 425 P.3d 373 (Kan. Ct. App. 2018), *review withdrawn* (Apr. 17, 2019); In *re Estate of Ober,* 62 P.3d 1114, 1115 (Mont. S. Ct. 2003).

[51] *Estate of Ober* at 1115.

[52] In Canada, ecclesiastical marriages as we have defined them would generally be regulated by the body of law that governs common-law marriages. That body of law may make one party subject to an obligation to provide financial support for the other party after the relationship ends, whether by death or by separation. While there is no statutory protection for ecclesiastical marriage partners with regard to the division of family assets, this has not stopped the courts from intervening in situations where one partner has benefited from the union more than the other has.

This means that the entire will is canceled unless it was made with the new marriage in mind. However, if parties engage in ecclesiastical marriage, would their last will be revoked? What if the last will benefits persons other than, or not including, the ecclesiastical marriage partner, such as a former partner or their children, without accounting for the present partner? Or what if the ecclesiastical marriage lasts for fifteen years with one partner bearing a considerable burden of caring for the other? None of that would matter. The ecclesiastical marriage would not revoke the previous will, whereas a legally compliant marriage would. Thus the surviving ecclesiastical marriage partner would have little recourse to access from the estate—no matter what the couple might have lived through, or no matter what the surviving spouse might have contributed through personal and financial support.

There are, however, also instances in which an estate can be challenged, since some places have laws to ensure that an individual who provided support for dependents while alive must continue to provide adequate and proper support after death. Ecclesiastical marriage partners could meet the definition of a spouse for purposes of a dependent's relief claim in some jurisdictions, since, in such a case, the definition of the spouse would include a common-law spouse who had lived with the deceased continuously for a period of at least three years, or a person with whom the deceased had a relationship of some permanence and with whom the person had a child. Thus, again, ecclesiastical marriages might in fact lead to some consequences that a partner might think they could avoid.

Canadian law also provides another instance in which an ecclesiastical marriage partner would be treated in the same manner as a legal marriage partner. This would be in regard to being executor of a will if no executor has been appointed or if the named executor is unable or unwilling to act. Canadian succession law generally attributes the right to administer an estate to the deceased's spouse, legal or otherwise. In Ontario, for example, the Estates Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter E.21, provides at section 29(1) that where a person dies intestate or the executor named in the will refuses to prove the will, administration of the property of the deceased may be committed by the Superior Court of Justice firstly to "the person to whom the deceased was married immediately before the death of the deceased or person with whom the deceased was living in a conjugal relationship outside marriage immediately before the death." In this regard, it appears that an ecclesiastical marriage partner would have no different rights than a legal spouse, even if the partners entered an ecclesiastical marriage thinking they might avoid this complication.

If a person dies without leaving a valid will (thus dying "intestate"), Canadian provinces have different approaches to whether a common-law partner could inherit (and thus be considered as a legal partner for the sake of the inheritance). Eastern provinces (from Ontario to the east coast) do not consider such partners to be eligible for the estate in cases of intestacy, while western provinces (Manitoba to British Columbia and north) do. The western provinces have a broad definition of the term *spouse*, which includes common-law partners (as defined by each province). Thus common-law partners in these provinces will have a statutory entitlement to the estate in the event that their partner dies intestate.

Common-law marriage in the U.S., though recognized in some states, may still be difficult to prove upon the death of one of the common-law partners

because courts are concerned about fraud when examining a claim for common-law marriage. Thus, when the first person in a common-law partnership dies, the living party has the burden of proving that a common-law marriage existed. The elements to establish the existence of a common-law marriage, as defined by Iowa courts for example, are as follows: (1) intent and agreement to marriage (by both parties) together with continuous cohabitation and public declaration that the parties are husband and wife; (2) burden is on the party asserting the claim; (3) all elements of relationship as to marriage must be shown to exist; (4) claim of marriage is regarded with suspicion and will be closely scrutinized; (5) when one party is deceased, the essential elements must be shown by clear, consistent, and convincing evidence.[53]

Ecclesiastical marriages, as defined in the Classis Georgetown overture to Synod 2019, which cites the example of a marital union officiated by clergy and in which the process has been designed by the parties and the officiant to be deliberately noncompliant with local marriage legislation, are not legally valid. These would eventually be considered as any other common-law relationship in locales that recognize such, but it is not lawful for a minister to conduct them. In both the U.S. and Canada, officiants who solemnize marriages in churches claim to do so, saying, for example (as in the CRC's 1979 marriage form), "As a minister of the church of Christ and by the authority which the state has vested in me, I now pronounce you . . . husband and wife . . ."—thus clearly acknowledging that their state authority to do so is dependent. Officiants are required by law to register marriage ceremonies that they lead, just as couples must get official marriage licenses. The state thereby assures that the people are not barred from legal marriage (by close familial relationship or because they are still legally married to someone else, for example). For a minister to perform an ecclesiastical marriage is, by this very reason, quite simply against the stated law of the land.

In the U.S., state regulation of marriage is assumed, and very little case law exists regarding state recognition of "ecclesiastical marriage." However, Illinois tackled this exact issue, releasing an opinion in 1991 regarding a marriage that had been conducted in a church and "without a marriage license."[54] In that case, the state criminally prosecuted the defendant for conducting a marriage ceremony "knowing that his performance was not authorized by law, in that the celebrants had not obtained a marriage license. . . ."[55] In Canada, likewise, officiants who lead ecclesiastical marriage ceremonies stand open to penalization for abuse of relevant marriage legislations. In addition, it is possible that churches might leave themselves open to legal proceedings, as well, if a party of such a marriage might become aggrieved.

Where disputes have arisen between people who deliberately avoided a legal marriage, the record shows a lack of legislative certainty as well as inconsistent judicial interpretations of such situations. This is especially so in contexts where it appears that the participants tried to manipulate or avoid the application of law that would otherwise apply if they were legally

[53] In *re Dallman's Estate,* 228 N.W.2d at 189.

[54] *People v. Schuppert,* 577 N.E.2d 828 (Ill. 1991).

[55] Ibid. at 829.

married. These examples should warn the church of the risks that ecclesiastical marriage participants and officiants would assume if they actively engaged in such ceremonies without expert legal counsel regarding the impact of the union. In light of the complexity and uncertainty of existing laws, participants would be well advised to seek legal advice about entering into future partnerships if they wish to have a more reliable understanding of the legal impact such a relationship would have upon them and their estates. The task force can foresee situations in which pastors or churches could become liable if they enthusiastically supported and conducted an ecclesiastical marriage but then the couple later became disgruntled at not having understood all the legal implications and then held the pastor or church responsible for not informing them properly. For these matters alone, we would deem it ill-advised to pursue ecclesiastical marriage as a valid option.

In addition, the task force can foresee many possible scenarios in which ecclesiastical marriage could make matters messy, particularly in the event of a radical change in the relationship, such as the incapacitation or death of one partner or the dissolution of the conjugal relationship.[56] What if a partner from an ecclesiastical marriage went into an expensive care home or medical facility—would their "spouse" then use their own savings to pay for that? What if the spouse's adult children protested such an arrangement, claiming that the savings were their inheritance and were not to be used to support a partner in a nonlegal marriage? The reality in late-in-life marriages in particular is that children of the unions also have a vested interest in property rights and distribution of assets, and that they may interfere and pursue legal action even if the partners in the ecclesiastical marriage have intended something different. Laws have been written to protect people from unjust situations, and it seems exceedingly wise that any people entering a new relationship should seek legal advice and clarify all such matters so as to avoid future possible litigation.

Finally, if people are entering an ecclesiastical marriage explicitly in order to avoid certain obligations of a civil union (i.e., the requirement to give up benefits from the pension or social security plan of a deceased spouse), is the church not simply aiding in perpetuating fraud? Such action cannot be condoned, since it would be deceptive and unlawful. If God's intention is for people to become "one" in marriage, then people must assume a new relationship with new loyalties and responsibilities. The task force would advise this high view of marriage, even if, as in some late-in-life marriages, no conjugal relations are intended.

V. Pastoral care for people who might contemplate entering into a non-civil marriage

A. General considerations

In stating what pastoral care and advice we would give to churches, pastors, and constituents, we want to follow the biblical and historical advice in this report, along with the wisdom of adhering to established laws. Each situation and circumstance can be very different; however, there is enough guidance already given to propose this counsel to the churches.

[56] Would the church then also have to consider granting an ecclesiastical divorce?

First, we advise all couples thinking of marriage to consider seriously not entering into an ecclesiastical marriage as defined in this report. Based on the biblical and historical information as well as the legal matters mentioned here, we cannot condone an ecclesiastical marriage. Though the Bible does not seem to clearly anticipate such a thing as an ecclesiastical marriage, it does show that the early church submitted to the authority of the civil government, even allowing it to regulate both marriage and divorce. Historically, the Reformed tradition has given a prominent place to the role of the state regarding marriage. Additionally, if one considers the legal considerations already noted, there could be serious legal implications for all parties involved in conducting an ecclesiastical marriage.

As shown in the stories we told at the beginning of the report, people of all ages might try to avoid certain financial complications and feel that an ecclesiastical marriage is the answer. However, a deeper question needs to be asked, and it has to do with the depth of commitment expected of a couple entering into a Christian marriage. A Christian marriage has long been understood as a couple coming together and covenanting to live together, come what may. Through tough and trying times they promise to stay with each other and to care for each other with the help of the Lord. Married couples face difficult times with confidence in the Lord's provision. In fact, times of difficulty can often strengthen a marriage. In contrast, an ecclesiastical marriage could well begin with the assumption that the parties would not share in life's difficulties and trials with the same level of commitment.

B. Possible temporary exceptions

In defining ecclesiastical marriage here as intentionally excluding the state as a sanctioning or governing authority, we want to allow for possible temporary exceptions in which the state would not initially be involved but would be involved later. Here are a couple of examples.

A young woman from the United States is engaged to be married to a man from Canada. They intend to settle down and live in Canada, but they want to get married in the U.S. at the woman's home church. So instead of getting a marriage license in a state in the U.S., they perform the wedding ceremony at her church in the U.S. and, after moving to Canada, they proceed to get a marriage license from the province in Canada where they go to reside. From the time of the ceremony in the U.S. until they are married in Canada there has been a lapse of two months. However, during that intervening time, they and the church have considered the couple married.

Or let's say a young couple has been planning their wedding day for over a year. They have the details worked out, and the date is set. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, they are unable to follow through with their plans. They, along with their church and pastor, decide to go ahead with a simple wedding in the church with only immediate family. They have not been able to obtain a marriage license because in their area the county clerk office has been closed. However, they have gone through with the ceremony with the intention of obtaining a marriage license and getting legally married in their state when possible. In this case, the church has considered them married ever since the wedding service took place in the church.

In both of these cases (and potentially others), the couples are not seeking an ecclesiastical marriage because they are not intentionally excluding the state.

Their intentions include both the church and the state in "making" their marriage. However, for one reason or another, they have stretched the process and included a religious ceremony at a time different from that of the civil ceremony. A religious ceremony in such a situation is distinct from an ecclesiastical marriage insofar as it is not done to the exclusion of the state. In fact, most religious ceremonies in the U.S. and Canada include the state as the minister acts as an agent of both the state and the church. In these special circumstances, the religious ceremony does not include the state, but the couple still intends to obtain a legal marriage. The task force does recommend that if a couple wishes to extend the process in a way like this or to have a separate religious ceremony to celebrate the marriage with a particular community, it would be best to obtain the civil marriage first. However, it may be that, as in circumstances such as those described above, such a process may not be possible. The task force also recommends that pastors seek legal advice from an expert before engaging in an exclusively religious ceremony. We recommend this because of the legal context of the U.S. and Canada in which the pastor is vested with the power of the state to solemnize marriages. The pastor's dual role as an agent of the state and of the church in marriage is something that should not be overlooked even in these types of circumstances in which there could be legitimate reasons to extend the marriage process or have multiple ceremonies.

C. Special circumstances that seniors can face

People who have been widowed can become lonely for companionship and may wish to enter into a marriage with someone with whom they have developed a loving relationship. As previously mentioned, some people in situations like this do not want the involvement of the civil authorities because of pension or social security issues. These couples do not want a situation in which they would lose significant financial benefits from the pension or social security plan of a deceased spouse.

However, as our legal research has shown, if people want to be married and still keep the financial benefits from a previous marriage, they could be committing fraud, and the pastor and local church could be accomplices in such cases. This is not something that the pastor and church should take lightly. As we have noted above, the church has biblically and historically been very careful about submitting and honoring our governing authorities because they are seen to have been instituted by God. It would be very unfortunate if churches in general and pastors in particular disregarded this understanding by officiating at an ecclesiastical marriage that is designed to exclude the authority of the state.

D. The value of maintaining a strong commitment to marriage

We have to acknowledge the need for companionship for people of all ages, but we should not diminish what the church has determined to be expected in a marriage bond. Marriage values the idea that we are totally committed to each other and are willing to sacrifice for each other. We put it all on the line together. An ecclesiastical marriage seems to amount instead to a "marriage lite." Sanctioning such a marriage, which is distinct from the civil marriage recognized both by the church as well as the state, would bring the church into a dangerous situation whereby we would be serving as arbitrators of quasilegal relationships that could easily put us in legal conflict with the states and provinces in which we reside.

Because of the possible legal consequences and the different types of legislation in states and provinces, pastors should recommend that couples seek independent legal advice—especially if there are estates and children from previous marriages involved. Seeking such advice could allow for couples to think through ways to care for children from a previous marriage and for each other in the marital relationship. Pastors can walk couples through spiritual and ethical questions that may arise as they work with independent legal experts, but pastors should never consider themselves legal experts or let their congregants presume that they are. Rather, pastors have the wonderful role of working with a couple to enrich their relationship and to walk with them as they ask spiritual and ethical questions.

E. Cultural considerations

Culture and context play a large role in shaping understandings and traditions. While the CRC was first considered an immigrant church in North America, it is now itself also continually welcoming a diversity of new immigrants into its fellowship. Every different immigrant group brings new life, color, culture, and customs, as do Indigenous peoples who were present before European immigrants settled here. As there has been in the past, there is now a great opportunity to learn from our immigrant sisters and brothers with regard to marriage. After all, many aspects of the marriage ceremony and the marriage itself are heavily steeped in cultural background.

An increasingly common situation today with many immigrants coming to North America is that the persons have spent considerable time in refugee camps. In such camps many immigrants have grown up and even married, often without being able to obtain a state certificate of marriage. Others have obtained certificates of marriage so as to be able to immigrate as a couple or as a family at the same time and to the same place. Additionally, there are people who have come to North America having a "common-law" marriage because getting a marriage certificate is a hardship in their home country due to geographic isolation or cost. How is the church to respond to these situations and others like it with people who have immigrated to North America?

Our advice is that the church recognize such marriages regardless of the authorizing body. This approach respects the couple's commitment to each other and their intention to establish a family in their new homeland. Certainly care should be taken to evaluate and encourage their commitment to each other and their desire to establish a Christian home. Additionally, care should be taken in their assimilation process to meet the expectations of their host country, state, or province with regard to marriage regulations. But this should be done in a way that does not imply the immigrant couple has a deficient marriage. However, at the same time, care should be given to help them understand the marriage laws of their new home and, in the event that there needs to be a recognition of their marriage by the state, to help them move in that direction. Again it is advisable to gain legal advice as warranted.

We must also be mindful that there are immigrant couples who do not feel a need to obtain any type of recognition by the state regarding their marriage. For them to do so would almost serve as an insult to their families, who sanctioned the marriage and gave them their blessing in the first place. For them to think that their marriage was not complete would be to imply that their family's blessing was insufficient. They might even add that, as far

as they know, marriages from their culture end in divorce much less frequently than marriages solemnized legally in churches in North America—and they might be correct in that view. They might also know that the tribal/familial/cultural marriage that they are privileged to be a part of might not be something their children will participate in, at least not entirely. In such situations we must use care and understand that, as the church helps immigrants assimilate into their new homeland, it would be a shame to lose their culture, beauty, customs, and traditions that in so many ways can help us understand how the gospel has flowered in other contexts. We should look for ways in which we can learn from the strong social and familial ties that have brought immigrant couples together and have kept them together in loving relationships. We can and should learn from our brothers and sisters who have come to us as blessings from God to enrich us by demonstrating the gospel as it has grown and flourished in their cultural context. It is important to remember that we are not the proverbial melting pot in which any variety is destroyed and blended into one metal. Instead it is better to see the church as a stew pot in which each element adds its own unique flavor, color, and texture to a meal that becomes more delicious with each addition.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Gerry Koning (chair), Gayle Doornbos (reporter), and Loren Veldhuizen when the report of the Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force is discussed.

B. That synod instruct the executive director to disseminate the report on ecclesiastical marriage to the churches of the CRC to serve as guidance regarding the issue of ecclesiastical marriage.

C. That synod strongly advise pastors of the CRC not to solemnize ecclesiastical marriages (as defined in this report) as sanctioned and solemnized solely by the church to the exclusion of the state (civil government) whereby a couple is considered "married in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state."[57]

Grounds:

1. The biblical record clearly teaches us to submit to the governing authorities in all matters that do not conflict with the Word of God.
2. Historically, Reformed churches have acknowledged the role and right of civil authorities to regulate marriage in their jurisdictions.
3. In both the United States and Canada there could be negative legal consequences for the participants and/or for pastors who solemnize a non-civil or ecclesiastical marriage.

D. That synod encourage the churches to respect and honor the marriages of immigrants who did not obtain a civil marriage prior to arriving in Canada or the United States and counsel them in the understanding of Christian marriage and its relationship to civil authority in our countries.

[57] *Agenda for Synod 2019,* p. 518.

Grounds:

1. It is not the case that in every country where immigrants have come from that the civil authorities regulate marriage, so it might not have been possible for a civil marriage to occur.
2. In the interest of grace and acceptance, we want to acknowledge the beautiful Christian marriage traditions that have developed in various cultures.
3. The law is permissive but not prescriptive in this regard.

E. That synod caution pastors against acting as legal experts or offering legal advice, especially with regard to the issue of ecclesiastical marriage, and that synod encourage pastors to advise couples to seek independent legal counsel as necessary.

F. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force and dismiss the task force.

Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force
Bernard T. Ayoola
Joan DeVries (reporter)
Henry Doorn, Jr.
Gayle Doornbos (reporter)
Gerry Koning (chair)
Loren Veldhuizen
David van der Woerd
Lis Van Harten (staff adviser)

Appendix
Ecclesiastical Marriages—A Canadian Legal Perspective
Memorandum from Legal Counsel, David van der Woerd

I. Introduction

Synod 2019 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America considered an overture submitted by Classis Georgetown and appointed a committee to study the morality and advisability of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages. Classis Georgetown believed that this type of study committee would assist congregations and pastors in their ministry to couples seeking to be united in marriage where they requested the omission of the registration of the marriage with the relevant governing authorities for reasons to avoid the financial entanglements that are associated with civil marriage unions. Classis Georgetown posed a number of questions relating to the topic.

In acceding to the overture, Synod 2019 acknowledged that churches are being confronted with questions and situations related specifically to ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages and that pastors and elders need guidance on how to respond to these questions. Synod also observed that the CRCNA position on marriage does not specifically address the relationship between civil and ecclesiastical marriage. Synod 2019 declared that the synodical task force's mandate was to include, among other things, what the law of various states, provinces, and territories of Canada and the United States had to say

about performing ecclesiastical (non-civil) wedding ceremonies. This memorandum provides a Canadian legal perspective.

Among other things, this memorandum asks the basic question whether ecclesiastical marriages are even recognized in Canadian law. On its face this question may seem puzzling, because in this memorandum an ecclesiastical marriage is a marriage that is deliberately not registered with the relevant governing authorities. That, of course, is not the end of the analysis. In this memorandum the term *ecclesiastical marriage* is sometimes also interchanged with other terminology, such as *non-civil marriage* or *non-compliant marriage*. These types of unions have found their way into the Canadian court system on many occasions.

There are many instances in which couples have sought to unite with one another in a marriage-type relationship that is established by a form of a ceremony but have deliberately, inadvertently, or otherwise not registered the union with the government. That may be to avoid the financial entanglements of civil marriage, as Classis Georgetown points to in the rationale for their overture. Such couples may seek to unite as couples in a committed relationship in which all the attributes of a traditional marriage are present, while not wishing to be encumbered by the legal implications that are associated with civil marriage, such as the establishment of spousal support obligations or entitlement to a division of property. Some may do it for religious reasons, such as wishing to be married to more than one person at the same time, but are unable to do so in Canada, which does not recognize polygamous marriages or polyamorous unions. Others may desire to marry but for practical or other reasons have been unable to register with the governing authorities for the marriage. Some may have intended to marry civilly but failed to complete the formal validity requirements to have their marriage properly registered. Some religious beliefs collide with civil marriage practices. Some unite for reasons of immigration. Some desire to enter into polyamorous marriages. These are all examples of non-civil unions. Canadian law has delved into some of them, not all, but in time it likely will.

The Canadian judiciary has been asked on many occasions to adjudicate situations in which the parties have engaged in a non-civil marriage ceremony and to rule upon the legal implications of that union. In my research I have been unable to find examples of how the law treats the myriad of non-civil unions in Canada as described above, and there are likely other examples of existing non-civil unions that I have not considered or found legal authority on. This memorandum deals with the law of the courts and statutes in Canada that I have uncovered. The common law is a living organism that is prone to change, especially as societal norms evolve. This is not necessarily an exhaustive summary, but it is instructive and elucidates various principles that can be drawn from the Canadian cases that have considered non-civil unions, and it can help us to forecast how non-civil unions may legally affect people who engage in the process of them, either as participants or as officiants.

II. Analysis

Ecclesiastical marriages are, in general, not recognized by Canadian law. What I mean by that is that generally the same rights and privileges granted by provincial statutes for parties that have met civil marriage requirements

do not apply to parties who are married only through ecclesiastical ceremonies. However, marriage legislations across Canada do allow for ecclesiastical marriages to be recognized as valid marriages if parties solemnized the marriage in good faith, intended to comply with legislation, are not legally disqualified to marry, and cohabit as a married couple after the ecclesiastical ceremony. If a marriage is solemnized in good faith, parties who have been married through an ecclesiastical ceremony will be considered to have a valid marriage and afforded the same statutory rights and privileges as traditional married couples. Furthermore, there may be a risk for a church or officiant to perform ecclesiastical ceremonies for parties engaged in these unions without registering such marriages, as provincial legislation across Canada requires officiants of ceremonies to register marriages.

A. Instances in which ecclesiastical marriages have been recognized as valid marriages

Ecclesiastical marriages, as defined here, are non-civil unions in which parties undergo a religious or cultural ceremony without obtaining a provincial marriage license. These unions are generally not recognized as traditional marriages because they do not comply with the relevant legislation. However, a principle that has been affirmed throughout Canada is that legislatively non-compliant marriages formed in good faith may still be recognized as valid (see the case of Dwyer v Bussey, 2017 NCLA 68). Many provinces, such as Ontario, Alberta, and Newfoundland have saving provisions in their marriage legislations that allow for the courts to recognize a legislatively non-compliant marriage, such as an ecclesiastical marriage, as valid if the parties intended to marry in good faith.

In Ontario, for example, section 4 of Ontario's Marriage Act, RSO 1990, c M-3, says that no marriage can be solemnized except under the authority of a license. However, under section 31 there is a saving provision that allows an ecclesiastical marriage to be recognized as a valid marriage under certain conditions. That section says, "If the parties to a marriage solemnized in good faith and intended to be in compliance with this Act, are not under a legal disqualification to contract such marriage, and after such solemnization have lived together and cohabited as a married couple, such marriage shall be deemed a valid marriage."

The case of Isse v Said, 2012 ONSC 1829 is an example in which the courts recognized a religious marriage as a valid legal marriage, having been solemnized in good faith—and because of that, the legal implications of a validly registered marriage were attributed to the couple. In Isse v Said the parties had participated in an Islamic wedding ceremony with an officiant who had the authority to perform civil marriages in Canada. After a breakdown of the union, the respondent filed for equalization of marital property. The court deemed the marriage to be valid under section 31 because the respondent was found to have had an honest but mistaken belief that the marriage was valid in Canada. The court found therefore that the parties were married in good faith and, as such, recognized the respondent's claim for a division of marital property after the breakdown of the relationship.

In comparison, consider the case of Debora v Debora [1999] 116 ONCA 196, 167 DLR (4th) 759. In that case the parties engaged in an ecclesiastical ceremony but deliberately failed to comply with provincial marriage laws (in this case in Ontario). They participated in a Jewish religious ceremony in

1987. They later became married in a civil ceremony in 1994. The marriage then broke down. They disputed over whether the equalization date for the division of assets was to be 1987 or 1994. The husband had acquired significant assets after the ecclesiastical marriage in 1987 and before the civil ceremony in 1994. However, the parties wanted the husband to continue to receive his widower's pension under the Canada Pension Plan Act, so they deliberately avoided the registration of their religious marriage with authorities in 1987. The court concluded that the 1987 religious marriage was therefore not solemnized in good faith and was found to be invalid. The equalization date for the division of property was therefore set at 1994, when the parties entered into legal marriage. With the benefit of 20-20 retrospect, it seems puzzling that the court decided that where the parties together colluded to obtain pension benefits and that during the same time frame one of the parties enjoyed a disproportionate increase in wealth, that the determination of the religious marriage's validity was such to benefit only one of the colluding parties.

Nevertheless, a principle can be annunciated that a party that is seeking relief from a court will likely bear the burden to prove that they intended to comply with the relevant laws of the jurisdiction and were ignorant of any non-compliance if they hope to succeed in upholding a legislatively non-compliant marriage. This issue also arose in the case of Alspector v Alspector, [1957] 9 DLR (2d) 679, OR 454. This decision established the notion that has been affirmed as a Canada-wide principle, that the burden of proof for a party to prove an ecclesiastical marriage to be valid lies on the party seeking relief on a balance of probabilities. In another case, Lin v Re, (1999) Carswell Alta 200, [1993] AWLD 081, 99 DLR (4th) 280, the applicant attempted to prove that his marriage to the respondent was valid although they had only engaged in a traditional Chinese ceremony in Alberta and did not obtain a marriage license. This is an Alberta case, and the Alberta Marriage Act, similar to the Ontario statute, contains a saving provision at section 23 that provides that a marriage will not be invalidated by reason of non-compliance with that Act if the courts find the marriage to be lawful. In that case the marriage was found not to be lawful due to the fact that both parties understood the requirements of the statute but made no effort to comply with them and only completed their Chinese ceremony.

The previously referred to Newfoundland case of Dwyer v Bussey established that Canadian courts have consistently followed the policy that an invalid marriage was formed in good faith if parties thought it would be legally valid, but any instance of fraud is not considered to be good faith. There are many reasons that couples may avoid the legal consequences of marriage, such as difference in ages, values, stages of life, or aspirations, so "good faith" must be interpreted as an intention to be legally married. This principle should resolve any confusion, clarifying that only couples who believe they are legally married will be considered to be legal spouses when they are found to have a valid marriage. Thus, ecclesiastical marriages will generally only be found to be valid if it is proven on a balance of probabilities that the parties intended to validly marry in good faith.

B. Statutes that are applicable to ecclesiastical marriages

When parties have engaged in an ecclesiastical marriage in good faith and their marriage has been deemed valid by courts, then provincial legislation

regarding the equalization of property, the treatment of the matrimonial home, and support obligations will apply. In Ontario, the Debora case referred to above established that the definition of a spouse under the Ontario Family Law Act does not extend to individuals that have only been married through religious ceremonies in place of civil marriages. Spouses under Ontario's Family Law Act are defined parties that have been married under the laws of Ontario; however, marriage under the Marriage Act gives purpose to the definition of a spouse consistent with the Family Law Act. Where parties recognized that their religious marriage ceremonies would not be recognized in Ontario, then they would not be spouses within the Family Law Act.

C. The application of support obligation provisions to ecclesiastical marriages

When parties are found to be married in good faith, then they will also be considered spouses under the federal Divorce Act (see Nafie v Badawy, 2015 ABCA 36). This principle is demonstrated in the case of Javed v Kaukab, 2010 ONCJ 606, in which the parties had been married in a Muslim religious ceremony instead of a legal marriage. Upon a breakdown of the relationship the applicant claimed in court for spousal support. The court found that there was a genuine marriage between the parties even though it was non-compliant with the statute. The marriage had been recognized in order for the respondent to sponsor the applicant to enter into Canada, so the court would not allow the respondent to argue that she was not his legal spouse to avoid paying him spousal support. The respondent was therefore found to have support obligations to the applicant.

By contrast, consider the case of Harris v Godkewitsch [1983] 41 OR (2d) 779, 20 ACWS (2d) 107. This case shows that parties may not always be considered spouses for the purpose of support obligations. In this case the parties chose not to be married under Ontario law but instead to be committed to each other spiritually through a Jewish ceremony. The court said that extending the definition of spouse under the legislation to cover a person who has participated in a religious ceremony in good faith in the non-legal sense of a moral and religious commitment would create confusion, so in that case good faith was defined as the intention to comply with the relevant law. The support claim was denied.

D. Equalization of property, the matrimonial home, and ecclesiastical marriages

Parties that have been married though ecclesiastical ceremonies may still be subjected to equalization depending on whether their marriage is deemed valid and whether they are considered spouses. Courts will look to the evidence, such as how the parties coexisted after their ecclesiastical ceremony or where they lived or how they presented themselves to others, and whether they had joint bank accounts and/or joint status on their tax returns, to determine the validity of their ecclesiastic union.

As with support, in order for a property to qualify as matrimonial property, both parties must be spouses as defined by the relevant legislation. Once the parties separate, in the case of the matrimonial home, the property must also have been occupied by both parties as a family residence prior to separation (see Kanafani v Abdalla, 2010 ONSC 3651). In the Isse v Said case already referenced above, the parties were found to have a valid marriage although they were married under Sharia law and the marriage did not comply with Ontario law. Nevertheless, the court observed that after their

religious ceremony they cohabitated, went on vacations together, maintained joint bank accounts, and stated that they were married on their tax returns. So the court concluded that they were spouses for the purpose of equalization of assets, and their residence was declared to be a matrimonial home.

However, the case of Kanafani v Abdalla exemplifies an instance in which a joint residence between parties who engaged in an ecclesiastical ceremony was not to be considered a matrimonial home. In that case the respondent asked the court to declare that the condominium the parties resided in was not to be considered to be a matrimonial home. The parties had been married in an unregistered religious ceremony in Toronto by a religious leader under Sharia law. The judge observed that the parties made no attempt to comply with Ontario law and therefore found that it was not a valid marriage, so the property was not considered to be a matrimonial home.

Ultimately, it appears that when parties deliberately avoid the legal consequences of marriage, it is unlikely that they will fall within matrimonial property regimes. Nevertheless, this analysis demonstrates that there are many conflicting cases in point. Cases are often fact driven, and one cannot count upon any particular interpretation by the courts. In many cases the determination of the validity of the marriage is not germane to the issues between the parties or a stepping stone or link in a chain of logic that allows the court to achieve a particular result. There is an inherent risk in relying upon any principles that may become apparent from the case law.

E. Common-law principles and ecclesiastical marriages

Religious marriages that do not meet the civil requirements for marriage are not generally sufficient to consider the parties legal spouses, but they are likely sufficient for them to be considered to be common-law spouses. That is especially so where the parties have cohabited or had children together.

In the aforementioned Dwyer v Bussey case, the judge, in finding that no valid marriage existed, said, "There are only two categories of conjugal relationships outside of marriage in compliance with the Ontario Marriage Act, one where the parties intended to comply but for some technical reason failed to comply with local legislation, and a common-law union." In Dwyer, the parties began cohabiting with one another in 2006 and separated in April 2014. Ms. Dwyer said that they had gone through a "form of marriage" in July 2008 in a private ceremony in Mr. Bussey's home, in which Mr. Bussey quoted a passage from the Bible often used at weddings. The parties had exchanged rings, and that had been blessed by their pastor. Thereafter they referred to each other as husband and wife. Mr. Bussey, however, said that he never intended to be married, they never applied for a marriage license, there had been no officiant or witnesses present at the ceremony, and their relationship was not subsequently registered at any church or public registry. It was determined that there was no valid marriage for the purpose of property division. The rules about dividing property, including the matrimonial home, do not apply to common-law couples. The property the parties bring into the relationship, plus any increase in its value, typically continues to belong to the property owner. Upon separation there is no automatic right to divide property or to share in its value. Ownership usually determines entitlement to property.

Ultimately, the conclusion is that anything that does not reach the standard of an intended legal marriage will likely lead to a common-law union. While parties in common-law unions are not entitled to access the statutory property equalization provisions, property of division can sometimes be addressed by back-door means through use of equitable concepts such as constructive trusts or compensation for unjust enrichment. Courts have been known to utilize such principles to allocate an advantage realized by one party to another or for recompense to a disadvantaged party relating to contributions during the relationship or inequities arising from it. The case of Chhokar v Bains, 2012 ONSC 6602, is an example of parties that underwent an ecclesiastical ceremony who were not considered to have a valid marriage but instead were deemed to have a common-law union. The parties had gone through a Sikh wedding ceremony but never applied for a marriage license. Throughout their relationship, they lived separately but stated that they were common-law on their tax returns. After consideration of all the evidence, the court concluded that the parties were not legally married but instead had a common-law relationship in which common-law principles would be applicable.

F. Risks involved in solemnizing ecclesiastical marriages

There are typically three parties to an ecclesiastical marriage ceremony, the two parties seeking to be married and the officiant. As shown above, there are risks for the marrying parties if they seek an ecclesiastical marriage to avoid legal responsibilities. There may also be risks for the officiant.

In British Columbia, when a marriage is solemnized, it must be registered by either the religious representative or the marriage commissioner. In Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, every person who is authorized to solemnize marriages is required to register marriages in accordance with the provincial vital statistics legislation. More particularly, the Alberta Marriage Act specifies that "no person shall solemnize a marriage except for under the authority of a marriage license or within 3 months after the date that the license is issued." Furthermore, in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the church or marriage commissioner is required to provide a certificate of marriage to the parties. Likewise, in Ontario, after a person has solemnized a marriage, they are required to make an entry in the appropriate registry and, if requested, give a record of the marriage.

Since those who solemnize marriages are required to register the marriages, it therefore stands to reason that officiants who participate in legislatively non-compliant marriage ceremonies may create risks for themselves if they do not comply with governing legislation. In the case of Upadyhaha v Sehgal, [2000] OJ 3508, [2001] WDFL 71, 11 RFL (5th) 210, a priest performed a marriage ceremony between the parties on the basis that they would later apply for the necessary marriage license as soon as possible. However, the parties did not apply for a marriage license, and performing the ceremony was referred to by the court as "an egregious breach of the Marriage Act." The Lin v Re case describes policy reasons for legislating the registration of marriage, since the legislature has contemplated the issues in which an officiant may fail to issue a license or comply with provincial legislation. In this scenario, if the parties truly believe they have a valid marriage and the marriage is invalid by error of the officiant, the marriage may still be declared lawful.

Performing such ecclesiastical ceremonies without registering the marriage as a legal marriage carries penalties that can vary by province. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, anyone who solemnizes a marriage in contravention with their respective Marriage Act is guilty of an offense and liable to a fine. Similarly, in Manitoba and Ontario anyone who violates the Marriage Act will be liable to a fine. There are no other penalties provided. Ultimately, conducting ecclesiastical ceremonies in contravention with the Marriage Act could carry the risk of a fine and may compromise the officiant's ability to perform future marriage ceremonies. It would also seem that where an officiant has enabled a non-compliant marriage ceremony, the legal effect of which later proves to disappoint one or both of the participating parties, the officiant may be civilly liable for damages.

III. Conclusion

This memorandum provides a glance at law in Canada that has touched upon ecclesiastical marriages. It should be noted that in most of the cases referred to in the memorandum where ecclesiastical marriages have been considered by the Canadian courts, the fact and consideration of the ecclesiastical marriage has been mostly in the nature of *obiter dicta* in the ultimate decision of the court. *Obiter dicta* is Latin phraseology for incidental remarks that are made by a judge in the course of making a decision. *Obiter dicta* does not refer to the main thrust of the case, instead *obiter dict*a are additional observations or remarks or opinions expressed by the court on other issues made by the judge which often explain the court's rationale in coming to its final decision. *Obiter dicta* may offer guidance in similar matters in the future, but they may not be binding upon future decisions by the court. As such, the principles that may have been pronounced in this memorandum need to be read in that context and need to be reviewed with a certain degree of apprehension. The law is not clear or settled.

Nonetheless, there are patterns that can be identified in the cases referred to in this memorandum and which will be included in summary below. Ecclesiastical marriages may be recognized in Canada as valid marriages if an applicant can prove on a balance of probabilities that the parties intended to comply with provincial legislation when undergoing an ecclesiastical ceremony. Provincial legislation gives jurisdiction to the judiciary to determine whether parties have intended to comply with marriage legislation when engaging in ecclesiastical ceremonies, and to deem these marriages valid. However, if these marriages are not deemed valid, they will likely be considered to be a common-law union in which common law principles will be applicable. The church and marriage commissioners should be cautioned from performing such ecclesiastical marriage ceremonies, because legislation across Canada requires officiants to register any marriage that they perform and a fine could be applicable if they fail to comply with legislation.

A final remark relates to the limitation of this memorandum. It should be apparent to the reader, but it is worth a reminder that this memorandum is restricted to the legal treatment of ecclesiastical marriage in Canada. It is, quite frankly, only one factor (and likely one of the less interesting factors) that the task force will consider in its report. There are broader, more compelling biblical, theological, cultural, or policy questions that Synod 2019 has asked the task force to comment upon regarding ecclesiastical marriage, and that this memorandum does not address in a fulsome manner.

I. Background and mandate

In January 2017 the CRC received a grant from the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. The Financial Shalom Advisory Team was established in 2018 and gathered information. On April 24-25, 2018, a group of bivocational pastors, church planters, and other church leaders gathered to discuss "What Is the Future of Bivocational Ministry in the CRCNA?" "One surprise discovery during the gathering and in the report was that many pastors find that bivocational arrangements fit in well with their ministry design and their Reformed perspective. They are bivocational by choice rather than by need" (Council of Delegates Bivocational Task Force Report, May 2019).

Following this initial conversation, the Council of Delegates (COD) in the fall of 2018 put together a task force with the following mandate:

> to explore the challenges and opportunities for bivocational pastors in the CRC by listening to those within and beyond the CRC in bivocational situations (both pastors and congregational leaders), identifying the opportunities of such situations, and by addressing the challenges (to preparation, to the individual, to the congregation, to the denomination). Areas of specific focus could include reconsideration of items in our Church Order to facilitate normalization of bivocational ministry, improvements in denominational databases related to ministerial status, and the like. As a result, a series of recommendations would be provided to the Council of Delegates.
>
> —Council of Delegates Supplement, *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 545

In May 2019 the task force presented their report identifying six areas with suggestions for the COD to consider: Church Order requirements, theological basis for bivocational ministry, practices of the denomination, contextualization between the United States and Canada, educational matters, and supporting a cultural change.

The COD concluded that a more in-depth study should be done on the topic and asked synod to appoint a synodical task force to continue the work of the Bivocational Task Force (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 552-53).

II. Mandate

Synod adopted the following mandate for our task force:

> [To continue] the work of the Bivocational Task Force as reported in the Council of Delegates Supplement, Appendix A [pp. 558-77], to examine what it means to be a bivocational pastor today and report to Synod 2021. The new task force will be mandated to give consideration to matters such as the following:
>
> – Create a definition of bivocationality
> – Give biblical support to bivocationality
> – Address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined "proper support"; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like
> – Classical oversight
> – Cultural differences
> – Church Order implications
>
> *Grounds:*
>
> a. A compelling biblical, theological, and historical case supporting bivocational ministry is needed.

b. The report provides sufficient examples of issues needing review and of possible options for remedies.
c. Addressing this issue will provide care for pastors in varying cultures and contexts.

(*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 780)

The task force also received the following note from the executive director at the time of appointment:

> In addition, the officers of synod and the advisory committee chair and reporter suggest that the task force feel free to consider other key matters that may impact a bivocational pastor, including spouses serving the same church/ministry when both are part-time, and benefit plans (e.g., retirement and insurance).

The task force is made up of the following members: Rev. Bernard Bakker (chair), Rev. John Bouwers, Pastor Beth Fellinger, Rev. Ernesto Hernandez, Ms. Sharon Jim, Rev. Michael Vander Laan (reporter), Rev. Phillip Westra (secretary), Pastor Robert Zoerman, Rev. David Koll (staff).

III. Stories from the CRC

What do bivocational and other nontraditional ministry arrangements look like in the CRC? Before we get into the details of our mandate, the task force thought it would be helpful to hear some stories of the varied experiences of our pastors. This small sampling gives us a glimpse of the much broader and varied ministry arrangements present in the CRC today.

Rev. Jose Rayas – Socorro, Texas

"Prior to serving in ordained ministry, I studied engineering and worked on defense contracts until 1997, when I retired from that work. In 1997 I attended Westminster Seminary in California. I came to work for the CRC in 2002.

"I am a bivocational pastor with the CRC. [Jose continues to do engineering consulting.] I originally came as a church planter to El Paso, Texas. At the present time, the church is working toward moving from emerging status to organized status. However, El Paso is an economically depressed area. Because of this, the church does not pay my salary. The Borderplex is a local organization that does the fundraising for my position. Samuel Estala, on the other hand, is being paid by the church (Samuel was called from Monterrey, Mexico, to come to El Paso to help the church back in 2008, and he was ordained associate pastor in 2014.) What I had done early on was to build a ministry house where the pastor could stay. This would mean a one-time investment, but the pastor would receive a smaller salary, considering that all utilities and housing are provided for him. In my personal case, I built my own home with my funds, but the Borderplex helped to find the lot and the builder. Part of my call was to raise leaders. We have several other leaders in training. But as Samuel moves up to a stronger leadership position, he will eventually become the lead pastor, and I will step away to continue efforts in raising leaders—and possibly starting new church plants with these leaders."

Rev. Scott Van Voorst – Sergeant Bluff, Iowa

"I have been at an emerging church for nearly three years. While the church is just under average size for a church in the U.S., it is small for a CRC. The church has received outside support for many years. In addition to needing outside financial support, the church has a shortage of individuals

who are qualified to lead. Making a switch to an intentional bivocational team was seen as a way to increase our leadership while also getting us closer to financial sustainability without outside help. I have taken on a role as a reserve chaplain to make this possible. I want to be clear that I felt called, not pressured, to add this second role. I am only just getting into the role and haven't worked out all the kinks. That said, by the end of the year I will have my family's insurance and a retirement plan secured through a part-time job that increases my ministry connections. Getting off of RBA insurance and onto military insurance will save my family and my church enough money to cover most of the cost of bringing on a ministry intern or a bivocational second pastor. There are challenges. It doesn't appear that our structures help us find bivocational candidates, and it seems like being bivocational is seen exclusively as a negative in our denomination. I see it as a positive that increases community impact, increases pastoral relational capacity, and increases the gifts being leveraged for the ministry when it is done specifically to build a team."

Rev. Rick Abma – Lacombe, Alberta

"Having served as an associate pastor in four different churches, the need to address discipleship on mission seemed to be hard to do. Basically, the 'come and see' had always seemed to trump or hijack the 'go and be.' So in 2015 I resigned from my pastoral position and embarked on a missionary journey that primarily works through neighborhoods. Essentially the model is to find people to train and disciple in hopes of reaching and loving their neighbors. At the same time this started, my love for roasting coffee created a direct relationship with CRC missionaries and farmers in Central Honduras through a group called Carpenteros and Friends. This allowed for the coffee roasting to become a business, which in turn started to create funds for the missionary journey and also became a platform for the ministry. We use the retail packages to publish true stories from local neighborhoods, and we purchased an espresso bicycle (complete with umbrella), which serves a full coffee-bar drink menu at no cost when the neighborhood has a leader who has taken our training. Neighbors gather around the coffeebike with a mug in hand as we tell them why it is important to hear the message of loving one's neighbors. We do not talk about the coffee roasting business, and we remove all monetary transactions, which sets the stage for unique conversations. The training begins with a one-hour introduction and is followed by a three-hour training course, which I lead via material published in book form (*Neighbouring for Life*). We host 30 neighborhood initiatives per year, and with each neighborhood having anywhere from 10 to 80 people, those events can last a few hours. We are not trying to be literal about the term *neighbors*, but we know that we have missed many opportunities by not 'blooming where we are planted.'"

Jennifer Burnett, Commissioned Pastor – Kelowna, British Columbia

"I am pastoring a small church plant where I am currently employed for 20 hours a week. I began with an arrangement of 15 hours a week with an administrator working 5-10 hours a week. After she left, my hours increased because of the extra duties, which are not among my strengths. This leaves me as the only staff person for the church. We have no building for ourselves, so we rent a space for Sunday morning, and I do most of my

church work from my kitchen table. Along with this I am working toward a doctorate and parenting four children ages 4-15. The positives include having the flexibility to balance these roles, and my study and parenting both give me resources from which to teach and lead the church. The church receives fresh learning and deep reflection on the current moment—whether that be political or health-related or otherwise. The difficulty is of course that some weeks happen to be demanding in all three areas. Boundaries are constantly being blurred, and it can be difficult to feel 'successful' on any front."

Rev. Andrea Baas and Rev. Nicholas Baas – Truro, Nova Scotia

"I (Nick) and my wife, Andrea Baas, are copastors at John Calvin CRC. Together we fill one full-time role. We both preach and do pastoral care. We both came into this position new to pastoring. That presented some challenges, as we each had to figure out our pastoral identity/role while at the same time working at half-speed (part-time). Sharing everything in life, including work, really requires a strong and healthy marital relationship. Council has sometimes found the logistics of having two employees challenging. Having come through the challenges of starting in ministry together, we now have the benefit of a partner who knows us and our ministry life deeply. We have had to grow up quickly in our marriage and have a very deep understanding of how to encourage and empower one another. The church has been blessed by our unique gifts and personalities and by having both sexes in leadership."

Regarding issues and concerns: "Our classis has tended to treat us as two pastors when it comes to classical roles/tasks. For instance, they have struggled with understanding that when they assign me, a male, to do classical supply at a church that does not affirm women in office, they are requiring me to spend even less time preaching at my own church than a full-time pastor would in the same circumstance. Governing bodies struggle to understand what it means for two people to split one role. Sometimes this is understandable. At other times – like when your wife is the first female minister in a classis – it comes off as hurtful.

"On a more practical note, we have found that the way disability insurance works for copastors is less than satisfactory. Disability insurance requires more than part-time work, so technically neither of us qualify."

IV. Biblical, theological, and historical support

A. Biblical support

As we begin exploring the topic of bivocational ministry, we should first listen for God's guidance through Scripture. Our biblical analysis starts with a brief survey of the ministries that God's covenant people are called to support through their tithing. Three categories of ministry are introduced in the Old Testament and carried into the New Testament. We begin here because it has direct relevance to the resource constraints causing some to engage in bivocational ministry out of necessity as well as the strategic embrace of bivocationality as a choice. After the topic of tithing, this section of the report explores the apostle Paul's tentmaking in the New Testament. Here we find not only the clearest example of bivocational practice but also principles to guide us today.

1. Three purposes of tithing

A survey of the main passages about tithing from the Pentateuch reveals that Israel's tithes were to be used for three purposes. First, tithes were used for festive celebrations in God's presence (Deut. 12:17-18; 14:22-29). Second, tithes provided for the material needs of the priests and Levites (Num. 18:8-24; Deut. 12:19; 14:27-29). Third, tithes generously assisted the vulnerable and needy, mainly foreigners, orphans, and widows among the people (Deut. 14:29; 26:12-13). In other words, the firstfruits of the products and revenues of God's people were to be set aside to facilitate worship and fellowship, to support those who were ministers, and to provide tangible goods to the needy. The Lord placed the priests in charge of administering these resources (Num. 18:8; 2 Chron. 31:11-13; Neh. 13:5) and required that they also tithe the best tenth of all they received (Num. 18:25-32).

Leviticus 27:30 says the tithe "belongs to the LORD" and calls it holy. Devoting one's best to the Lord entailed providing for those whom God had designated to receive those resources. The practice of tithing was integral to carrying out the divine commands Israel had received for its religious practices and social morality. Micah 3:6-10 states on behalf of the Lord that neglecting tithes and offerings is robbing God of what rightfully belongs to him.

Two examples of how tithes were used for festive celebrations in God's presence are the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles, described in Deuteronomy 16:9-17. In both cases, joy-filled worship was funded by offerings from God's people as they were called to give "in proportion to the blessings the LORD has given you" (vv. 10, 17). These celebrations welcomed not only whole families to participate but also Levites, foreigners in the land, orphans, and widows (vv. 11, 14).

As noted above, Israel's tithe gave tangible provisions for people whose vocation it was to minister in the Lord's temple. Commenting on Numbers 18, Peter J. Naylor writes that tithing was "practical in that it ensured priests were able to serve full-time in their office, since they would not be anxious about their food" ("Numbers," *New Bible Commentary*, p. 186). When the promised land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel, the Levites were only given cities to live in and pastures for their flocks, as they relied on God's provisions in the form of tithes from the people (Josh. 14:3-4; 18:7). The great reforms enacted by Hezekiah included the reconstitution of the priests and Levites, and the restoration of tithes to support them, according to 2 Chronicles 31:3-21. In the account given in Nehemiah 13:4-5, the tithes of the people supported several people who served in the house of God, including priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers.

The three most common categories of people described as poor and disadvantaged in the Old Testament were widows, orphans, and foreigners. These categories of people, along with the Levites, were to receive the tithe of food, according to Deuteronomy 14:28-29. The Old Testament also made provisions for landowners to leave a portion of their harvest for people who needed to glean (Lev. 19:9-10), as illustrated in the story of Ruth gleaning the fields of Boaz (Ruth 2:2-3). Tithing for the sake of the poor and vulnerable is a dimension of God's call to love such neighbors and should be taken alongside the imperatives to defend them

from injustices (Ps. 82:3; Prov. 31:9; Isa. 10:5; Amos 2:7). While the wisdom literature of the Old Testament acknowledges that personal irresponsibility can also lead to poverty (Prov. 10:4; 13:18; 21:17), Scripture consistently calls God's people to use tithes to care for the poor and vulnerable in our communities.

Our focus is on how the gifts of God's people support those who are ordained to gospel ministry. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the other needs the Lord ordained tithing to serve. While churches are called to support their ministers, they are also called to allocate resources needed to hold meaningful worship as well as to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable. These imperatives are carried over into the New Testament and have guided the Christian church throughout its history. It is important to factor these into our discussion about bivocational ministry today.

The New Testament emphasizes voluntary generosity among followers of Christ. Christians are to give with joy and confidence, knowing that the Lord will use such gifts for their own blessings, to provide for others, and to bring glory to God (2 Cor. 9:6-11). Being generous with the blessings the Lord has given us is a dimension of Christian discipleship, because "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34). Believers are instructed to give generously through church leaders for proper distribution (Acts 4:34-37; 1 Cor. 16:1-3) and encouraged to help people in need directly (Matt. 5:42; Luke 12:33; James 2:15-17). Jesus criticizes tithing Pharisees and teachers of the law in Matthew 23:23 for neglecting "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness."

The New Testament upholds the practice of providing for ministers through the generosity of God's people. When Jesus sent his twelve disciples throughout Judea to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, he said, "the worker is worth his keep" (Matt. 10:10). When he sent out the seventy-two, he included the following instructions: "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). The apostle Paul echoes this same conviction in 1 Corinthians 9:1-12; Galatians 6:6; and 1 Timothy 5:17-18. The most pointed passage is 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, which states, "Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." In speaking to this issue in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 2 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." As oxen trampled on the grain, they were to eat some of it for sustenance as they worked. This is used as a metaphor for those who devote their lives to ministry. The church should provide for the needs of their pastors and teachers so that they can continue working for the Lord.

2. Paul the tentmaker

The apostle Paul is our best biblical case study for bivocational ministry. While he asserted his right to material support for his work as an apostle, he also worked as a tentmaker and did not always receive

financial gifts from churches. For example, in 1 Corinthians, immediately after Paul mentions his right to compensation, he states, "But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me" (9:15). Elsewhere in this letter he mentions working with his own hands (4:12), which enabled him to preach the gospel "free of charge" (9:18). In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul states that he and his companions worked very hard to "not be a burden to anyone." Paul expressed his gratitude for financial support from the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:10-20) and urged churches to take up offerings for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-15).

Acts 18:3 mentions that Paul was a "tentmaker." Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, who worked in this trade. Paul likely worked in this trade in the cities of Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus, all urban centers of trade where the opportunity for such work was available. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul says, "We worked night and day . . . while we preached the gospel of God to you." Commenting on this passage in his article on "Tentmaking," Paul Barnett states, "This probably means that Paul talked to people while he worked and also, almost certainly, that on some days, or during part of the day, he laid aside his apron and tools and taught the gospel. His lifestyle was characterized by both work and preaching" (*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 926).

Why did Paul lay aside his right to earn a living from his gospel ministry and engage in tentmaking? A survey of the relevant passages reveals three strategies behind the apostle's decisions. Paul engaged in tentmaking as a form of bivocational ministry to embrace missional opportunities, to distinguish himself from other traveling philosophers, and to model godliness and dignity of work. We will explore each of these strategies and apply them to our contemporary situations.

a. Embrace missional opportunities

First, tentmaking allowed Paul to strategically embrace missional opportunities. On his missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor, where he set out to establish new churches, Paul engaged in tentmaking because there was not yet a local body of disciples who could support him. Paul was blessed with financial support from established churches in Macedonia while laboring for the gospel in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9), and he received financial gifts from the church in Philippi while he labored in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16). But Paul could not expect support from the community where he ministered before a Christian community was formed there. In this way, his tentmaking enabled him to bring the gospel to new places.

In telling the Thessalonians he did not want to be a financial burden to them (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8), Paul engaged in tentmaking to embrace the opportunity to proclaim the gospel among people who were not financially well off. Tentmaking allowed Paul to establish a church among people who would find it difficult to support him financially.

We follow this same principle today when we fund a pastor, missionary, or church planter to serve a financially disadvantaged community with resources from other churches and donors. A bivocational

ministry arrangement is another way to apply Paul's tentmaking to contemporary missional endeavors. There is a biblical warrant for some church planters to both lean on funding from established churches and find work in the community to make ends meet financially. Bivocational ministry arrangements should not diminish the importance of support from other churches; nor should the availability of funds preclude pastors from pursuing bivocational opportunities.

Bivocational pastors serving small or financially challenged churches do so to not be a burden to those they serve. Such men and women inhabit the spirit of the apostle Paul. They ought to be honored for their sacrificial service rather than sidelined because their model of pastoral ministry does not fit denominational norms or historic practices in the Western church. Such pastors are embracing a missional opportunity that would not be available if they were not engaging in bivocational ministry.

b. Distinguish himself from other traveling philosophers

The second reason the apostle Paul purposefully engaged in tentmaking was to distinguish himself from other itinerant teachers and philosophers of his day. This comes through clearly in 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, where Paul contrasts himself with greedy people pleasers who speak with flattery. He also draws a contrast between himself and others who took advantage of the church as he defends his apostleship throughout 2 Corinthians. Paul identifies his adversaries as those who "peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17) and who "use deception" and "distort the word of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). A false teacher is one who "exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face," according to 2 Corinthians 11:20.

J.M. Everts summarizes the complicated historical background in Greek culture to traveling philosophers and how they supported themselves.

> In contemporary Greek society there was much debate about how philosophers and teachers should support themselves. Most philosophers either charged fees or accepted the patronage of a wealthy individual. The major criticism of this method of support was that it placed a philosopher under obligation to a patron and therefore jeopardized the philosopher's freedom to teach the truth. In Hellenistic society the giving and receiving of benefactions was an extremely important component of the social structure. The wealthy expressed their power by becoming patrons, and since benefaction was the basis of friendship, refusing a gift was an act of enmity. Philosophers who wished to avoid this network of obligation could either beg, as the Cynics chose to do, or work. However, since most of Greek society looked down on those who worked at a trade or begged, not many philosophers chose these methods of support. Those who did gained freedom at the expense of social status.
>
> ("Financial Support," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 295)

Given this background, it is reasonable to believe that the apostle Paul was also careful about who funded him, because he understood that patronage entailed influence on what he was to teach about. Gordon Fee sees this denial of patronage as the meaning of Paul's "boast" in 1 Corinthians 9:15 and goes on to explain that "in offering the 'free'

gospel 'free of charge' his ministry becomes a living paradigm of the gospel itself" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 417, 421).

Our world has grown increasingly suspicious of the church in recent times. Like the traveling philosophers of Paul's day, some churches are inordinately focused on money and commission leaders who use religion as a means to financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5). Therefore it is wise to ask what impression we are giving to our surrounding community. How are we to distinguish ourselves from religious peddlers of our day? Bivocational ministry can be an embodied apologetic for a ministry of servanthood that is God-glorifying rather than one of financial gain.

c. Model the godliness and dignity of work

In contrast to the Hellenistic devaluation of physical labor, Paul upheld the biblical perspective of work as God-given and God-glorifying. He warned the church in Thessalonica against idleness (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6) and urged them to follow his example of work as an economic and social responsibility (2 Thess. 3:7-10). Working with our own hands helps us to avoid sin and enables us to be generous toward others (Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28). It is also clear that Paul conducted some of his ministry in the marketplace and therefore modeled for others what it meant to be followers of Jesus Christ in and through their daily work.

One can detect a resurgence of the old Hellenistic sentiments in our current cultural climate. Many today aim their lives toward getting the most money for the least amount of effort, viewing labor as a necessary evil, and are captivated by a vision of the good life that entails perpetual vacations with little productive contribution to society. Some Christians are finding a growing disconnect between their daily work and their life of discipleship. Bivocational ministry can help churches recover a biblical perspective of work.

Pastors who gain credibility and influence in the marketplace are given opportunities to communicate with people they would not know otherwise, to lead as a model for people to be disciples of Jesus in the workplace, and to provide an embodied apologetic for the goodness of human labor that reflects God's character.

B. Historical considerations

A cursory glance through church history reveals unity and diversity in applying the biblical principles outlined above. While some have tried to make sweeping statements about how tithing and ministers' compensation developed over the years, these usually do not hold up to further analysis. Throughout all eras of Christian history, some churches have been able to provide abundantly for ministers while others struggled to provide for their needs. Some who have committed themselves to ministry gained wealth and prestige while others' entry into ministry involved a vow of poverty. In some eras of church history, tithes have supported one cause to the neglect of others, whether that be church facilities for worship and fellowship, compensating clergy, or giving to the needy.

The Didache, one of the earliest writings about Christian teachings, distinguishes between traveling prophets, to whom the church was to give hospitality, and prophets who settled down to serve a particular community and were to receive financial compensation. It warned the early church

against supporting itinerant prophets who only took advantage of Christian hospitality ("The Didache," *Early Christian Writings*, pp. 195-96).

It is helpful to remember that in the monastic movement, many who committed their lives to the full-time service of the church also worked gardens, produced books, maintained the building and grounds, and incorporated other productive labors into their daily rule. To this day many monasteries contain nonprofit organizations that grow or build things to sell in order to support their religious communities, which supplement any share of tithes they might receive. Most monks throughout history have been essentially bivocational.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin briefly surveys the church's practice of dividing the revenue from tithes into four categories: "one for the clergy, another for the poor, a third for the repair of churches and other buildings, a fourth for the poor, both foreign and indigenous" (pp. 1074-75). This guideline served as an application of Scripture to prevent leaders from being able to leverage their position to take more than their share of resources for themselves. Imagine how different our congregations would operate if our annual budget were divided into four equal parts this way. While some might operate in this way, we know this is not the norm across our denomination.

The Christian Reformed Church has historically been able to use its tithes to support its pastors, build adequate church facilities, do the work of benevolence in their congregation and community, and support denominational agencies, while its members establish and maintain Christian schools and support other nonprofit organizations. Until fairly recently, bivocational pastors have been rare in our 163-year history. The CRC's letter of call template for ministers of the Word notes that "laborers are worthy of their hire" (see Luke 10:7 [KJV]; Matt. 10:10) before spelling out a compensation package. We do not believe we ought to change this value but adapt it to make room for churches and ministers to live out new, diverse arrangements of ministerial vocation.

V. Definitions

The word *bivocationality* implies two vocations or callings from God, one in ministry and the other in another field of work. This simple definition falls short theologically and practically. All Christians have multiple callings from God. Likewise, this definition does not reflect the various callings a pastor may be called to. Thus defining *bivocationality* simply in terms of calling or vocation is problematic.

The COD Bivocational Task Force defined *bivocationality* in terms of financial income. Bivocationality is "any arrangement in which a pastor gains financial support from more than one employer." This definition is helpful in its practicality. Financial dynamics are often an important factor related to bivocational ministry. Yet it is not the desire of the task force to define *bivocationality* exclusively in financial terms. There are other dynamics in play.

One of those dynamics for pastors in bivocational ministry is accountability. An individual involved in bivocational ministry is accountable to at least two entities, one of which is the supervising council (and/or in cooperation with other congregations, institutions, or agencies involved). The other entity could be a corporation, the customers of one who is self-employed, a

nonprofit or parachurch organization, or another ministry. Being accountable to multiple entities is an important factor for persons in bivocational ministry.

Finally, bivocational ministry requires individuals to spend time and energy in multiple settings. The time and energy one uses ought to be significant in order to be considered bivocational. Some ministers have activities "on the side" that generate some income but do not interfere with their pastoral duties. Bivocational ministry is distinct in that the nature and time-demands of the work require mutual discernment between the pastor and the supervising council.

Given the importance of these factors, we suggest the following definition: "*Bivocationality* is the arrangement in which a pastor spends time and energy working for compensation and is accountable to another in addition to the setting in which s/he has been called to minister." It is worth noting that in this definition pastors are those ordained to the offices of minister of the Word or commissioned pastor.

However, our task force observes that this definition does not cover all the possible situations surrounding "what it means to be a bivocational pastor today" per our mandate. Historically, the CRCNA has seen pastoral ministry as a full-time profession. This is reflected in our Church Order as well as in our denominational culture and administration. In today's world creativity and necessity have resulted in multiple nontraditional arrangements that are furthering the work of God through the church and its pastors. Some of these arrangements do not properly fit *bivocationality* as defined above. While much of this report refers to bivocationality or bivocational ministry, it may be better to view this report as reflecting nontraditional pastoral arrangements rather than only bivocationality.

To help in providing this wider perspective, the task force here details nontraditional arrangements as follows:

A. Bivocational – the arrangement in which a pastor spends time and energy working for compensation and is accountable to another in addition to the setting in which s/he has been called to minister. This may mean working in a part-time or full-time capacity in a nonecclesial occupation while also leading a church or church plant and receiving financial support for that work in ministry. It may also mean working in more than one ordainable ministry position (e.g., as a local church pastor and as a hospital chaplain).

1. Bivocational by necessity – this arrangement describes a pastor whose calling congregation cannot afford to support a full-time position. Thus the pastor is required to find additional financial support through another occupation.

2. Bivocational by choice – this arrangement describes a pastor who has chosen to be bivocational, working by design both in vocational ministry and in another occupation. Often this is done for missional reasons.

B. Covocational – in this arrangement the pastor's calling and ministry occur in a traditionally nonpastoral setting. In other words, the pastoral calling is combined with a nonecclesial occupation. For example, a church planter may

open a coffee shop as a vehicle for ministry. The coffee shop is a business, yet it also provides the setting for pastoral ministry and evangelism.

C. Other arrangements

1. Part-time position – this arrangement describes a pastor who for various reasons works part-time hours. This may be dictated by the ministry position (i.e., a small congregation or an interim position) or may be due to a personal issue such as the pastor's health or family situation.
2. Clergy couples in shared or part-time positions (a clergy couple is a husband and wife who are both ordained pastors) – many different arrangements may occur for clergy couples. For this report, we have focused on arrangements in which neither spouse as an individual is in a full-time position. This may include a clergy couple who are job sharing a single full-time position or a clergy couple in which each spouse has a separate part-time pastoral position.
3. Volunteer, unpaid ministry – this arrangement describes a pastor serving a ministry without financial compensation. A situation like this can occur when the pastor's family income is provided through their spouse or when the pastor has sufficient income through other means. This kind of arrangement can occur in congregations that have little or no financial means.

It is worth observing that in the descriptions above we have referred only to part-time positions or arrangements. We have not referred to *part-time pastors*, because there is no such thing in our polity and understanding of ordination. Any ordained person, whether a minister of the Word, commissioned pastor, elder, or deacon, by God's calling through the church and by virtue of the ecclesiastical office, always bears that office regardless of the activities they are engaged in at a given moment. Every pastor in a nontraditional arrangement is fully and at all times the pastor of the community they have been called to serve. Thus we discourage any reference in any context to a part-time pastor.

VI. Cultural and contextual considerations: what is, what will be, and why it matters

A. What is

What are the cultural and contextual experiences of bivocational ministry within the CRCNA? What follows is dependent on several informal and qualitative surveys done within the CRCNA and on external resources such as the Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project: Research Report[1] and the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe (University of Toronto).[2]

Although bivocational ministry is relatively rare within churches of the CRCNA that are monoethnic and middle class, the same is not true among

[1] Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project: Research Report; James W. Watson, Wanda M. Malcolm, Mark D. Chapman, Elizabeth A. Fisher, Marilyn Draper, Narry F. Santos, Jared Siebert, Amy Bratton; May 22, 2020; canadianmultivocationalministry.ca.

[2] wycliffewellnessproject.com/

CRCNA churches that reach ethnic minorities and economically challenged communities.

To gain some qualitative understanding of the blessings and challenges of bivocational ministry among churches that reach ethnic minorities within the denomination, an informal survey was conducted among seven leaders of several ethnic subgroups within the CRC— namely, African American, Korean, Chinese, and Hispanic leaders.[3] The informal survey revealed that the percentage of pastors who are doing ministry bivocationally is 70-75 percent among African American pastors, 40 percent among Chinese pastors, and 65-70 percent among Hispanic pastors. Korean congregations had less than 5 percent of lead pastors working bivocationally while the majority of Korean associate pastors worked bivocationally.

Mixed in this informal survey were factors including the relative newness of a church as well as the economic challenges within a supporting community. Resonate Global Mission indicated that, as of April 2020, 48 percent of new churches planted today are led by bivocational leaders. This percentage would be higher if it included church planters who are paid part-time hours but are not bivocational. For example, in some cases the planter does not receive full-time pay, but their spouse provides the family's primary income.

A third factor affecting the level of bivocational leadership has to do with whether the churches served exist in economically challenged areas, such as the inner city or in a remote rural community.

In short, congregational ethnicity, the newness of a church, and the level of economic challenges facing the supporting community are key indicators of increased levels of bivocational leadership within the CRCNA today.

B. What will be

The percentage of pastors working bivocationally in the CRCNA will likely radically increase in the coming years for the following reasons.

Changing population trends in North America have spurred the conversation around bivocational ministry. When the CRC began, North America was a largely rural country, and our churches were generally monoethnic, multigenerational, and growing congregations. In the years following World War II the CRC produced an influx of suburban daughter churches. We are now a denomination with many struggling inner-city and rural congregations in which supporting a full-time pastor position is a challenge.

The average CRC congregation size has been historically larger than that of most non-CRCNA congregations in both Canada and the United States. While the 2020 CRCNA *Yearbook* statistics show that our average congregational attendance is 156 people, less than half of that number (70 regular participants, including children[4]) are in attendance in the average congregation in the United States. Our task force was unable to find comparable gross numbers for Canadian church attendance averages since 2001. Our denomination has not struggled with maintaining smaller congregations as much as have many other denominations in North America. However, current CRCNA statistics indicate that an average 2 percent annual decrease in

[3] These were informal and qualitative surveys connected to bivocational ministry experiences among ethnic-minority church leaders (by David Koll), church planters (by Erica Ezinga, Kevin Schutte) and CRCNA church leaders (by Beth Fellinger) in general.

[4] See soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf

congregational size will put increasing pressure on congregational financial sustainability based on full-time pastorate models. In other words, more of our established and declining congregations who wish to continue as functioning churches will be led by bivocational pastors as their budgets decline below the capacity to pay a full-time pastor.

Positively, if we continue to plant new churches, then more of our new and emerging congregations will be led by bivocational pastors. And they will likely continue to be, as they are now, an important resource in growing the church.

Also positively, we expect to see an increase in immigrant and ethnic-minority congregations. These congregations are more likely to be led by bivocational pastors. Bivocational pastorates or other nontraditional arrangements will be an important tool for the CRCNA in pursuing the growth of the church in new fields of harvest.

C. Why it matters: challenges and opportunities

The current experience of bivocational ministry and its expected increase in the coming years present bivocational pastors and our denomination with challenges and opportunities.

1. Bivocationality and proper care

   In this context the importance of proper care for pastors and their families will increase. Bivocational pastors face many challenges, as highlighted in the surveys we have reviewed. These challenges include the following:

   - Financial care: Because financial resources are low, a tension between financially supporting a pastor versus financially supporting ministry growth can arise. This tension can be difficult for both the pastor and the church council to hold in balance in a healthy manner.
   - Quality of life care: Various challenges exist for bivocational pastors, such as
     - health insurance choices (a top concern in completed surveys).
     - life, ministry, family-time balance.
     - anxiety about supporting one's family.
     - busy households with both parents working more than full-time.
   - Call satisfaction: Many pastors can struggle with a sense of having a divided mind between direct ministry work and their other job(s), whereas some love and thrive on the diversity of their experiences. Many may wish they had more time for ministry. Others may feel that their other job is part of their ministry and part of their divine call. Others may prefer full-time ministry and even feel that their work is not honored when not fully compensated.

   There is an intensity to the challenges that may be faced by pastors working bivocationally. Beyond the anxieties of finance, life balance, and foundational understanding of one's call to ministry, there may also be experiences of feeling defeated, emotional and relational breakdown, and even ministry-ending trauma.

   The following four suggestions highlight moves that the CRCNA can make to help pastors discern their calling for bivocational ministry,

balance ongoing bivocational ministry, prevent breakdown, and learn from breakdowns that occur.

a. Multivocational training

Multivocational training is the first step in bivocational leader care. Various forms of training, such as leadership skills development, business skills, and job application training can help future bivocational leaders. Pastors who have developed a second collection of skills while in college or university will be better prepared for the eventuality of needing to work bivocationally.

While it's not within the mandate of our task force, we encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to consider ways to provide training with the realities of bivocationality in mind. Future pastors need to be prepared for challenges and opportunities that come from bivocational and nontraditional ministry arrangements.

b. Balancing unique stressors and satisfiers

All pastors, including bivocational pastors, need a unique balance in their vocations to sustain both their ministry and other aspects of their lives. The Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project (canadianmultivocationalministry.ca), a multidenominational and multiagency research project, released their findings in May 2020. The project was launched to learn about issues faced by multivocational pastors, including both challenges and opportunities. The report provided our task force with insight into the importance of balance for long-term, healthy ministry and life.

Relying on the work of the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe, an online questionnaire for assessing wellness in congregational ministry run by Wycliffe Seminary at the University of Toronto, the report notes that every pastor is wired differently in what tasks and responsibilities are core satisfiers and core stressors. By knowing what these are, pastors can minimize the potential for burnout. The report noted that 90 percent of multivocational participants identified time and workload strain as a core stressor (p. 9). Positively, shared ministry and workload among ministry partners, both vocational and volunteer, was noted as essential (p. 10).

A challenge to bivocational leaders is that even moderately satisfying tasks can become a potential irritant when frequently required. In the study, one example of a positive role becoming an irritant was management responsibilities. One may enjoy doing these tasks in small amounts, but as the demand for administrative work escalates, it can become an irritant. The pastor perceives a lack of balance that, over time, contributes to burnout. An inventory of stressors and satisfiers shared within the context of team ministry can yield a greater chance of bivocational longevity.

The report notes that perceived balance in bivocational ministry depends on how one categorizes the interplay between ministry work and other work—namely, is it *integrated* ("a synergistic relationship between congregational leadership and other work"), *complementary* (in which the arrangement provides a benefit beyond financial support to the pastor that is not ministry related), *lucrative* (in which the arrangement

only provides financial benefit), or *conflicted* (making the arrangement unsustainable)? "Asking questions which help the multivocational leader clarify to what degree they fit with any of these categories . . . can encourage reflection on how the different forms of work are perceived. If other work is perceived to be a positive contributor to ministry, then there are positive implications for sustainability. If other work is considered more important than the congregational ministry or detrimental, something will need to change in the current situation" (p. 18).

In the CRC, the respondents to our ethnic-minority bivocational leaders survey included people in each of these categories of bivocational balance. Intermixed with these perceptions of balance are unspoken theologies of work, particular understandings of the division of or mixing of sacred and secular, and the cultural importance of pastoral honor and value being linked to a fully paid position.

The most significant challenge toward satisfying bivocational ministry is having a clear sense of call that fits the bivocational reality. If the sense of call to bivocational ministry is absent, the leader will remain at best seeing other jobs as lucrative and at worst conflicted.

We encourage pastors, especially bivocational pastors, to learn what contributes to stress and satisfaction in their vocations. Such information will help pastors and supervisory councils design and execute a healthy ministry plan that contributes to long-term, healthy ministry and life.

c. Ongoing wellness assessment

Because the challenges of care for bivocational pastors are ongoing, our third suggestion is to initiate regular (and also by request) ministry wellness assessment for pastors in bivocational ministry. A tool similar to the Wellness Project @ Wycliffe questionnaire would be beneficial to bivocational pastors and the congregations they serve. It generates helpful feedback, including a burnout score. Such an assessment could help anticipate challenges before they happen, guide plans to reverse any decline, and return ministry to a positive direction.

The results of a regular ministry wellness assessment would foster regular conversation between pastors and their supervisory council regarding a shared understanding of financial support, hours at work, responsibilities, and other expectations between the congregation and the pastor.

d. Ministry postmortem

Our final suggestion assumes that some form of bivocational ministry burnout has already occurred. We recommend intentional exit interviews for the pastor and the ministry as a means of both picking up the pieces and providing healing and learning from what happened. Although this is an emotionally charged moment and would seek voluntary participation by the participants, exit interviews can yield healing while also teaching us how to avoid future burnout or breakdown for churches and pastors.

We recommend that Pastor Church Resources create an exit interview/ministry postmortem learning process for classes, churches,

leaders, and their families to heal and for our denomination to learn from the occurrence of burnout in bivocational ministry.

2. Bivocationality and opportunity

Alongside the challenges that call us to care for bivocational leaders, there is also a transformative and creative opportunity for the CRCNA in this conversation.

a. Incarnational witness

Our culture, as in Paul's day, is more and more suspicious of the motives of the church and church leaders. Churches and pastors are often seen as financially motivated with self-preserving intent while seeking to reach out with gospel ministry. Many pastors who use bivocational ministry as a strategy testify that they are better able to enter into a respectful relationship with others in the community. Thus they are given better access to the lives and spiritual needs of persons who need to encounter Jesus Christ.

b. Greater organic flourishing

As a thought experiment, if one assumes $80,000 USD or $100,000 CDN per year as the payroll cost of a full-time pastor position, this creates two interconnected challenges for a 21st-century North American congregation. First, the congregation must have an approximate minimum size to cover this full-time salary. Second, the congregation and the community the congregation is reaching must have the financial capacity to support this full-time salary. In short, they need both minimum numbers and minimum wealth.

Bivocational pastors, however, can help congregations flourish regardless of their size or wealth. Bivocational pastors can help sustain and sometimes grow small congregations. Bivocational pastors or pastors in nontraditional arrangements are also instrumental for ministry in low-income and socially disadvantaged locations. This provides greater opportunity for organic flourishing in these otherwise challenging settings.

Larger congregations can also benefit. Rather than focusing on pastors in only full-time positions, a large church with bivocational pastors can provide ministry leadership that matches the organic growth of the congregation. For example, a congregation may have one full-time pastor and then add a bivocational pastor in a 1/3 FTE arrangement as it grows. Some evidence of this type of arrangement surfaced in our survey among ethnic-minority leaders in the CRCNA. It was noted that most Korean churches have full-time senior pastors but that they also have bivocational leaders in other positions in the church, positions that would likely add to more continuous or organic growth.

c. Ecclesiological toughness

Bivocational leadership provides an ecclesiological toughness for small or underfunded congregations. These congregations may not be able to pay a pastor full-time. Thus they may feel forced to choose to either limp along without pastoral leadership or to close. Bivocationality could help those congregations maintain a greater ecclesiological toughness to weather the storm and perhaps experience renewal.

d. Missiological flexibility

Bivocational leadership provides missiological flexibility. With bivocational leadership, congregations can have the flexibility to target specific towns or neighborhoods that have challenging demographics for church growth.

Bivocational pastors also help small congregations fulfill their distinct and important roles in the spread of the gospel. For example, small congregations can have an attractive intimacy that larger congregations are unable to provide. Small congregations provide a unique and important setting for faith nurture and gospel proclamation that are necessary for the health of the broader church. Bivocational pastors help small congregations have the missional flexibility to continue their important ministry.

VII. Council and classis oversight

A. Minister of the Word

At present, ministers of the Word do not receive the letter of call until it is reviewed and signed by the classical counselor (Church Order Art. 9). This ensures that all ecclesiastical regulations for the call (Art. 8) have been followed and that the minister is provided with "proper support" (Art. 15.) There may come a time when the minister's job description changes into a bivocational ministry, and at that time it will be essential that classis, perhaps through church visitors, review and approve changes from that in the original signed letter of call.

In our recommendations in this report (section XI) we encourage supervising councils to review bivocational ministry arrangements on an annual basis to see if any changes need to be made. For example, they could consider questions like these: Does the bivocational pastor have the support of the council and congregation? Is the ministry of the church to the community benefiting from bivocational ministry? These and other questions can help to generate mutual reflection and discussion so that the work of the Lord moves forward.

B. Commissioned pastor

Commissioned pastors, including those in bivocational or nontraditional arrangements, are called by the council of their calling church. At present, classis and synodical deputies must approve the job description of the commissioned pastor (Church Order Supplement, Art. 23-a). The Commissioned Pastor Handbook gives guidelines regarding "proper support," but there is no requirement for approval by classis in the letter of call. We propose that the job description for commissioned pastors include the calling congregation's support plan, including financial support, for classis review and approval before the calling of the pastor. In section VIII of this report we recommend such changes to Church Order Article 23. This will ensure a healthy discussion.

For both ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors, we believe there needs to be a healthy discussion among the parties before the call to ensure a clear understanding about the conditions spelled out in the letter of call. Is there a clear understanding regarding "proper support"? sabbatical? personal time? self-care? time expectations? etc. In some cases, we

have heard of bivocational pastors agreeing to minimal or no salary because the alternate work outside of the church was financially sufficient or the spouse's work supported the family. Not all scenarios can be spelled out, but before the call there should be a clear and shared understanding that ensures "proper support" for the pastor and the pastor's family.

Classis also provides oversight through the annual church visit (Church Order Art. 42). Church visitors are urged to ensure the health and welfare of the church's ministry and its pastors (i.e., that there is "proper support"). We encourage all classes to ensure that its ministry of church visiting is healthy for the sake of the churches and our pastors.

VIII. Financial considerations

Synod also mandated that our task force "address financial implications and responsibilities (clearly defined 'proper support'; see Church Order Supplement, Art. 15) relative to church, classis, pastor, and the like."

Much of this is addressed in section IX of this report in our proposed changes to Church Order Article 15 and its Supplement, and in a proposed addition to Article 23 and its Supplement. In that section of the report we also clearly define the term "proper support" for both minister of the Word and commissioned pastor.

It is the responsibility of the calling church and classis to ensure that the pastor who enters into a bivocational, covocational, or other nontraditional ministry arrangement has a plan that adequately addresses matters such as income, medical insurance, disability insurance, housing provision, pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items. The majority of proper support may come from the calling church or other employer(s) or entrepreneurial business. Unfortunately, there are situations in which a pastor does not receive proper support and yet is expected to provide full-time work. Before the calling of the pastor, there needs to be a thorough discussion of and assurance of proper support. Not every situation will be the same, so the calling church, classis, and pastor must discuss proper support and where it is coming from.

In light of these concerns, we are proposing changes to the Church Order Supplement for Articles 15 and 23 in order to provide "Guidelines for Churches in Conversation with Pastors about 'Proper Support.'" Specifically, the task force is recommending that a calling council provide a support plan for the pastor. Included in the support plan should be a financial plan that includes arrangements for income, medical insurance, disability insurance, housing provision, pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items. For ministers of the Word, the support plan, including the financial plan, should be included in the letter of call. Classis should provide its input by way of the classical counselor who will approve the letter of call. For commissioned pastors, the support plan should be approved by classis as part of approving the position description. (During our work, denominational employees noted that other aspects of Church Order Supplement, Art. 15 require revision. Current guideline 1 is no longer valid because there is no longer a "synodically stated minimum salary" provided. Likewise, guideline 4 is no longer valid because ministers can only be 100 percent in the pension plan, not credited "proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church." These matters have

been taken into account in the proposed Church Order changes in section IX of this report.)

We encourage supervising councils to initiate annual discussions to review existing financial plans. We also encourage supervising councils to initiate annual discussions to review support plans, including areas such as emotional health, self-care, any changes in support, and other factors relating to pastors' well-being. This is also an area that church visitors are called to discuss during the annual visit with the church council (Church Order Art. 42).

A. A living salary

For ministers of the Word, before 2019 the CRCNA published the Ministers Compensation Survey, based on the outcome of a detailed survey mailed to churches and pastors. Over the years the returned surveys continued to drop. Since 2019 the CRCNA now publishes the "Average Total Base Salary plus Housing by Classis" report. This information is updated after synod and can be found in the Church Administration and Finance Guide on the CRCNA website (crcna.org). This information, along with regional and ministry contexts, can be used to guide the discussion of proper support for pastors.

Regarding commissioned pastors in bivocational, covocational, or nontraditional positions, proper support guidelines are found in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook posted on the CRCNA website (crcna.org).

B. Health insurance, disability insurance, and other benefits

Health and disability insurance presents particular challenges to pastors in bivocational or part-time arrangements. This is especially true in the United States, where health insurance costs have skyrocketed while coverage has decreased. Long-term disability insurance is provided as part of the ministers' pension plan. However, the pension plan is only available to ministers of the Word who pay as if they are full-time and requires a minimum of 30 hours of work per week as clergy. This excludes ministers of the Word whose positions call for less than 30 hours per week, and it excludes all commissioned pastors. The task force affirms that health insurance and disability insurance are required aspects of "proper support." Supervisory councils need to discern together with their pastors how health and disability insurance and other benefits will be provided for the pastors and their dependents.

C. Pension and other retirement considerations

While the ministers' pension plan has been a wonderful provision for ministers of the Word in full-time positions, it does require full premium payment even if the minister is in bivocational or part-time ministry. Commissioned pastors, on the other hand, have sought out other retirement-funding tools, many of which have been after-tax savings options. In November 2019, the CRCNA began rolling out a new 403(b)(9) retirement plan that supervising councils in the United States can make available to commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word (as well as church staff). This development has been welcomed. Canadian pastors continue to rely on government retirement programs such as registered retirement savings plans (RRSPs) and personal savings plans such as tax-free savings accounts (TFSAs).

The ministers' pension plan does not recognize the ordination of both spouses who share ministry together as ministers of the Word, thus requiring

two full premium payments for two separate pension accounts at a significant cost to the clergy couple and their congregation. This situation has resulted in many couples choosing one spouse to receive the ministerial recognition in the plan, while the other spouse, who is also ordained as a minister of the Word and sharing the work, is simply registered as a spouse and is limited to spousal benefits only. We urge synod to direct the U.S. Board of Pensions and the Canadian Pension Trustees, in consultation with clergy couples, to amend the pension plan to recognize the ordination of both spouses who are ministers of the Word by providing the option of a single, full membership and benefits to both spouses as a single entity who contribute to a single pension plan. Thus, when one ordained spouse dies, the surviving, ordained spouse will be recognized and honored as a minister of the Word. While we recognize that there are challenges and difficulties related to this request, we urge the boards to take this request seriously and find a way to provide due recognition.

D. Classis student aid funds (cf. Church Order Article 21)

Church Order Article 21 states, "The churches shall encourage individuals to seek to become ministers of the Word and, in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it." Each classis has its own set of rules or guidelines regarding the financial aid it offers to students in master of divinity programs who are seeking to be ordained as ministers of the Word. The classis committees overseeing these funds may struggle with how to respond to former students who then enter into bivocational ministry or another nontraditional arrangement.

While specific decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, we offer the following observations and encouragement to these committees. First, as stated earlier in this report, there is no such thing as a part-time pastor; there are only part-time arrangements. Second, we encourage these committees to view these individuals through their ordination, whether minister of the Word or commissioned pastor. The goal of Church Order Article 21 is to encourage persons to be and serve as ministers of the Word, not that they serve in a particular way or context. Third, we ask student fund committees to remember the importance of bivocationality and other nontraditional arrangements for church planting, small or impoverished congregations, and immigrant congregations. These gospel activities are hindered when their ministers are burdened with repaying financial aid. Fourth, we encourage classis student fund committees to continue to be generous. While it is not the role of our task force or synod to direct the forgiveness of aid that has been granted, we encourage financial forgiveness for pastors who are bivocational or serving in other nontraditional arrangements.

IX. Church Order considerations

The Church Order currently states in Article 15 that

> Each church through its council shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s). By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily, the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.

While well-intentioned, this and other sections of the Church Order treat bivocational ministers, covocational ministers, and ministers in other ministerial situations as exceptions to the rule rather than as normal. The Church Order also assumes in places that these arrangements are by financial necessity only rather than driven by mission and vision or other important factors. Article 15 has remained in place with its current wording since 1988 and reflects the understanding of ministry at that time, but it needs to be updated to include new trends in ministry that approach various forms of ministry as a valid choice rather than as a result of financial need.

In response, our task force recommends the following changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~).

A. Article 14-d

Article 14 deals with the release of a minister of the Word from ordained ministry. Article 14-d specifically deals with a minister who has forsaken the office (see Art. 14-c) and has entered a vocation that is judged by their classis to be nonministerial. In its current form, however, Article 14-d implies that a nonministerial vocation conflicts with the work and ordination of a minister of the Word. In other words, it assumes that bivocational ministry is not an option. We believe that the addition noted below clarifies that forsaking the work of the office is cause for a minister to be released, not simply having another vocation in addition to the calling of a minister of the Word.

Current Article 14-d

> d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

Proposed Article 14-d

> d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial and forsakes the calling of a minister of the Word shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

B. Article 15

Article 15 deals with the support the church provides for ministers of the Word in their covenantal relationship together. This support includes, but is not limited to, financial, physical, emotional, and spiritual support. While all of these are important for all pastors, these aspects can be particularly complex for pastors in bivocational or other nontraditional arrangements.

Our task force is proposing changes to Article 15 to allow flexibility of local congregations in discerning "proper support." The phrasing "attend to" (in place of "provide for") maintains the covenantal relationship between pastor and congregation while giving flexibility with regard to where "proper support," especially financial support, is coming from.

We are also proposing removal of the latter section of this article because it discriminates against bivocational ministry. The resulting simplified Article 15 will provide the flexibility required while supporting the acceptance of

various forms of ministry and maintaining the covenantal relationship of service and support between ministers and congregations.

Current Article 15

Each church through its council shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s). By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.

Proposed Article 15

Each church through its council shall ~~provide for~~ attend to the proper support of its minister(s). ~~By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.~~

C. Supplement, Article 15

The supplement to Article 15 defines "proper support," especially with regard to financial considerations, and provides "Guidelines for Churches Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment."

It was noted to the task force that this supplement has been in need of revision, and some matters in need of change are described in section VIII of this report ("Financial Considerations"). The proposed changes below address some of these issues, give further clarity to the proposed Article 15, and support flexibility in the covenantal arrangement between the minister and the calling church. We have also revised this supplement to include nonfinancial support.

Proposed Supplement, Article 15

"Proper Support" Defined

Proper support of a church's minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, ~~payment to the denomination's ministers' pension plan~~ payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To "attend to" proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the minister has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministerial service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The financial plan should be carefully reviewed and signed by the classical counselor when a call to ministry is made or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

Guidelines for Churches ~~Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment~~ in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"

~~1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.~~

~~2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister's family.~~

~~3~~1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.

~~4~~2. ~~The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers' Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church.~~ Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers' Pension Plan is made.

~~5~~3. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) ~~other than ministry shall be specified~~shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.

4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

D. Article 23-d (new)

The task force proposes an addition to Article 23 that calls for the proper support of commissioned pastors. This parallels the role of Article 15 for ministers of the Word. The same purpose and phrasing choices that are mentioned regarding Article 15 apply here as well.

Proposed Article 23-d

d. Each church through its council shall attend to the proper support of its commissioned pastor.

E. Supplement, Article 23-d (new)

The proposed supplement to proposed Article 23-d reflects similar proposed changes to Supplement, Article 15, with some alterations bearing distinctly on the nature and processes regarding the office of commissioned pastor.

Proposed Supplement, Article 23-d

"Proper Support" Defined

Proper support of a commissioned pastor is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To "attend to" proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the commissioned pastor has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministry service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The calling church's support of the financial plan should be carefully reviewed at the time classis approves the commissioned pastor's position. This includes a call to bivocational ministry or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

Guidelines for Churches in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"

1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
2. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) shall be mutually discerned by the commissioned pastor(s) and the supervising council. The support plan, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by classis along with the position description, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.
3. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of commissioned pastors, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

X. Postscript

As a task force, we are grateful to God for the men and women who serve in bivocational or other nontraditional arrangements. We pray for God's blessing on these and all pastors so that they may know "the gift of God's grace given . . . through the working of his power" (see Eph. 3:7-13). We ask synod and the congregations of the CRCNA to join us in prayers of thanksgiving and supplication for our shared mission as a denomination and for the pastors who serve our congregations.

XI. Recommendations

The Study of Bivocationality Task Force presents the following recommendations for consideration by Synod 2021:

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Bernard Bakker (chair) and Rev. Michael Vander Laan (reporter) when matters pertaining to the Study of Bivocationality Task Force report are discussed.

B. That synod propose to Synod 2022 the following changes to Church Order Articles 14, 15, and 23 and their Supplements for adoption (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~):

1. Proposed Article 14-d

   d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial and forsakes the calling of a minister of the Word shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

   Grounds:

   a. Without this addition, Article 15 implies that a nonministerial vocation is in conflict with the work and ordination of a minister of the Word.
   b. The addition clarifies that forsaking the office is cause for a minister to be released.

2. Proposed Article 15

   Each church through its council shall ~~provide for~~ attend to the proper support of its minister(s). ~~By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.~~

   Grounds:

   a. The change in phrasing maintains the covenantal relationship between pastor and congregation while giving flexibility with regard to where "proper support" is coming from.
   b. The removed section discriminates against bivocational ministry as an "exception" rather than recognizing it as a desired, missional choice.

3. Proposed Supplement, Article 15

   "Proper Support" Defined

   Proper support of a church's minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, ~~payment to the denomination's ministers' pension plan~~ payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

   To "attend to" proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the minister has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministerial service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The financial plan should be carefully reviewed and signed by the classical counselor when a call to ministry is made or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

Guidelines for Churches ~~Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment~~ in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"

~~1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.~~

~~2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister's family.~~

~~3~~1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.

~~4~~2. ~~The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers' Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church.~~ Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers' Pension Plan is made.

~~5~~3. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) ~~other than ministry shall be specified~~shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.

4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

Grounds:

a. These revisions address issues described in section VIII of this report ("Financial Considerations").
b. These revisions provide further clarity to the proposed Article 15.
c. These revisions promote flexibility while also promoting the covenantal arrangement between the minister and the calling church.

4. Proposed Article 23-d

d. Each church through its council shall attend to the proper support of its commissioned pastor.

Grounds:

a. The proposed addition calls for the proper support of commissioned pastors.
b. The proposed addition parallels the proposal for Article 15.

5. Proposed Supplement, Article 23-d

"Proper Support" Defined

Proper support of a commissioned pastor is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To "attend to" proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the commissioned pastor has a plan that addresses these items. In many traditional ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministry service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The calling church's support of the financial plan should be carefully reviewed at the time classis approves the commissioned pastor's position. This includes a call to bivocational ministry or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

Guidelines for Churches in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"

1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
2. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) shall be mutually discerned by the commissioned pastor(s) and the supervising council. The support plan, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by classis along with the position description, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.
3. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of commissioned pastors, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

Grounds:

a. This addition provides further clarity to the proposed Article 23-d.
b. This addition promotes flexibility while also promoting the covenantal arrangement between the commissioned pastor and the calling church.
c. The proposed supplement reflects similar proposed changes to Supplement, Article 15.

C. That synod encourage classical student funding committees (providing financial aid for seminary students—cf. Church Order Article 21) to treat those who are in or anticipating bivocational or other nontraditional ministry arrangements in the same manner as those who are in or anticipating full-time arrangements.

Grounds:

1. Bivocational pastors and pastors in nontraditional arrangements retain the honor of the office they have been ordained to and remain accountable to the work to which they have been called.
2. Burdening bivocational pastors and pastors in nontraditional arrangements with financial debts does not serve the church as a whole, nor does it serve the cause of the gospel.

3. Article 21 states that "the churches . . . in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it" and thus make their decisions based on their knowledge of specific situations.

D. That synod instruct the executive director to direct Pastor Church Resources to create an exit interview/ministry postmortem learning process for classes, churches, leaders, and their families to use when burnout occurs in bivocational ministry.

Grounds:
1. Exit interviews/postmortems can provide healing to those involved.
2. Exit interviews/postmortems may help to teach us how to avoid future burnout or breakdown situations between churches and pastors.

E. That synod instruct the executive director to direct Pastor Church Resources to provide a ministry wellness assessment for pastors in bivocational ministry and their supervisory councils to use as part of their regular conversations.

Grounds:
1. Such an assessment could provide helpful feedback regarding a bivocational pastor's well-being.
2. Such an assessment could provide a helpful tool in the regular conversations between a bivocational pastor and the supervisory council.

F. That synod direct the CRCNA's U.S. Board of Pensions and Canadian Pension Trustees, in consultation with clergy couples, to amend the pension plan to recognize the ordination of both spouses who are ministers of the Word by providing the option of a single, full membership and benefits to both spouses as a single entity who contribute to a single pension plan.

Ground: The current rules of the pension plan do not equally recognize and honor the ordinations of clergy couples who are both ministers of the Word.

G. That synod encourage all pastors together with their supervisory councils to annually review the "proper support" required for pastors, including the financial plan.

Grounds:
1. An annual review of "proper support" will help to encourage the ongoing health of pastors and their families.
2. Annual reviews that include a review of "proper support" will fulfill the requirements regarding the same in proposed Church Order Articles 15 and 23-d and their Supplements.

H. That synod encourage church visitors to inquire about the health and welfare of pastors, including whether they have "proper support."

Grounds:
1. Inquiry about the health and welfare of pastors will encourage the same.
2. Inquiry about whether pastors have "proper support" is included in the church visitors' mandate to ascertain whether a church's officebearers "observe the provisions of the Church Order" (see Art. 42-b).

I. That synod encourage the classes and congregations of the CRCNA to affirm the challenges of bivocational ministry, support the leaders of adaptive changes that are happening in our current ministry settings, and celebrate the dedicated and creative pastoral work many are doing and will do for the sake of the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

Ground: Bivocational pastors, those in nontraditional ministry arrangements, and their work require affirmation, support, and celebration by the broader body of believers.

Study of Bivocationality Task Force
Bernard Bakker (chair)
John Bouwers
Beth Fellinger
Ernesto Hernandez
Sharon Jim
David Koll (staff)
Michael Vander Laan (reporter)
Phillip Westra
Robert Zoerman

Appendix
Internet Resources regarding Bivocational Ministry

"Why I Choose to Be a Bivocational Pastor"—story of a Canadian bivocational pastor in Saskatoon; thegospelcoalition.org/article/chosen-bivocational-pastor/

Eight Characteristics of the New Bivocational Pastor; factsandtrends.net/2018/01/26/eight-characteristics-new-bi-vocational-pastor/

"The Art of Bivocational"—Theology on Mission podcast by Northern Seminary; seminary.edu/the-art-of-bi-vocational-theology-on-mission-podcast/

Bivocational Pastor Job Description; bscln.net/ministry-description/bivocational-pastor-job-description/

Understanding Bivocational Ministry; nph.com/vcmedia/2419/2419936.pdf

"A Bivocational Minister Warns against Bivocational Ministry"—*The Christian Century;* christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2013-08/bi-vocational-minister-warns-agains-bi-vocational-ministry

Video presentations from speakers at "What Role Will Bivocational Ministry Play in the Future of the CRCNA?"; network.crcna.org/pastors/resources-bivocational-ministry-gathering-last-month

Canadian Multivocational Ministry Project; canadianmultivocationalministry.ca/master-report

The Wellness Project @ Wycliffe College (University of Toronto); wycliffewellnessproject.com/

OVERTURES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Overture 1: Pause Proceeding with Legal Separation of CRCNA along National Lines

I. Background

Early in 2020 the CRCNA Canada Corporation (Canadian members of the Council of Delegates [COD]), through its Canadian ministries director, published an article in both *The Banner* and the *Christian Courier* stating that to be in compliance with Canadian tax law the Canadian arm of the Christian Reformed Church in North America had to essentially become self-governing, in a legal sense. The authority for this surprising observation was a tax opinion obtained by the CRCNA Canada Corporation or its Canadian ministries director from an Ontario lawyer.

II. Overture

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan overtures Synod 2021 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to direct the CRCNA Canada Corporation to pause any further structural reorganization resulting in a further division between the two legal entities of the CRCNA Canada Corporation and the CRCNA U.S. Corporation. Such a move is unnecessary as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has not communicated that the CRCNA Canada Corporation is in violation of current tax law.

Grounds:

1. On enquiry of the Canadian ministries director, it was learned that the Canadian tax department (CRA) had not and still has not contacted the CRC with any concerns as to the CRC's legal structure. There has been no suggestion by the CRA that the charitable status of the CRC is in jeopardy.
2. The CRC has a respected international firm of Chartered Accountants/Certified Professional Accountants and tax consultants prepare its financial statements annually. That firm, BDO, has not mentioned any concerns with compliance.
3. The legal opinion relied upon by the COD remains undisclosed. The COD has refused to share it with interested parties, including a lawyer who is a member of Maranatha CRC in Lethbridge, Alberta, and an Ontario lawyer who has offered, at his own cost, to, upon receipt, secure a second opinion by a lawyer who is a tax specialist and well acquainted with the CRC. (*Note:* The Maranatha CRC member has made repeated requests for a copy of the undisclosed legal opinion. He has been advised that it would be costly to provide it, then advised it would be in violation of lawyer/client privilege, then

finally was advised that he would see it at a future date when it was appropriate to share it.)

4. The legal opinion is apparently full of disclaimers, and apparently expressly states it is only for use by the person(s) who requested it.
5. (An aside: If Martin Luther had kept his 95 theses locked in his desk drawer, instead of posting them to the church doors, the Reformation may have unfolded differently. If this legal opinion is so compelling, it should be shared among the laity and clergy alike.)
6. Many members of the church, clergy and laypeople alike, have read the press coverage issued by the COD as being directive; namely, that the Canadian government requires this change, or all CRC churches in Canada will lose their charitable status. THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.
7. All Christian Reformed churches prepare their own financial statements, file their own charitable returns, and have their own charitable tax numbers. A rough estimate is that only 10 percent of total donations given by Canadian CRC members flow through Burlington (where the CRC's Canadian office is located.). Certainly, Burlington will not have a challenge in being a conduit of funds from the churches to the various mission fields. Even if Burlington does, it would be relatively simple for them to continue operating "as is"—as a nonprofit—providing all the services they do now, for the individual congregations.
8. The undisclosed legal opinion overreaches, by any measurement. By analogy, if you find out that your home encroaches five inches overtop an underground utility easement, a lawyer may well advise you to demolish your home, and rebuild it five inches away from the easement. Which of us would follow such legal advice?
9. Even if the CRA expresses concerns in the future, prudent and proper practice includes having discussions with the CRA, understanding their concerns, addressing such concerns with remedial steps, which would be incremental. It is not good practice to demolish the house.
10. The COD appears, in soliciting the tax opinion in the first place, to be acting well outside its mandate and job description. It is primarily administrative, and has not been charged by synod, or in its constitution documents, to investigate, propose, or start implementation of such a radical step.
11. Based on the CRC's Church Order, even if the COD convinces synod to create a separate Canadian entity, such an entity would not be automatically entitled to assume the allegiance of each CRC Canadian congregation. That would contradict the rights of each congregation, as set out in the Church Order. No individual congregation has delegated to the COD or even to synod the power to terminate membership of such congregation with the CRCNA and to compel membership with a new entity.

II. Concerns

It is unclear whether the undisclosed legal opinion dealt with bigger issues, such as clergy mobility, that will arise if the COD splits the church along national lines. Both Canadian immigration and United States

immigration departments will look very differently at clergy movement across the border. It is our prediction that in the future, for a Canadian congregation to call an American citizen as a pastor, the congregation will have to jump over a number of hurdles, including first advertising for a Canadian to fill the position, and then providing conclusive proof that no Canadian could fit the bill. It is hoped that the COD, in their deliberations, have taken this into account. Unfortunately, there is no reference in any of the minutes and agendas disclosed to date that they have sought the legal opinion of an immigration specialist.

III. Observations

Tax law is an art, not a science.

The COD has been quoted as saying that denominational lawyers and a retired lawyer who is on the COD have all concurred with the undisclosed legal opinion. That statement is not correct. The denomination's lawyer, in Grand Rapids, has expressly stated that he has not opined on the undisclosed legal opinion. He cannot, as he does not practice Canadian tax law. The denomination's lawyer in Canada declined a request for confirmation that he vetted the undisclosed legal opinion, citing solicitor/client privilege. Conclusion, he is not saying whether he does or not. Lastly, while an individual board member who used to practice law may have an opinion, such opinion was already expressed when the member voted on the motion. It cannot be bootstrapped (given more credibility) by the same person weighing in again. And it must be recognized that a retired lawyer is not legally permitted to practice law. The insights of such a person may have tremendous value but cannot be quoted as representing legal advice.

No church historians or experts in Church Order have been involved. This does not make sense.

It could be that the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America might be enhanced by splitting the church along national lines. But that must involve some transparent debate, denomination-wide.

From our perspective, these actions are leading to dividing the denomination into two entirely separate entities. At times, the COD and the Canadian ministries director have disagreed with this assessment. Nevertheless, we believe that this will be the eventual outcome, intended or otherwise. These actions will create a separate, self-governing church in Canada.

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan
J. Cameron Fraser, alternate stated clerk

Overture 2: Halt All Proceedings Related to the Administrative Restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA Churches

Classis Toronto overtures Synod 2021 to halt all proceedings related to the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches as the actions taken by Canadian representatives serving on the denomination's Council of Delegates and the CRCNA's Canada Corporation are in violation of Church Order Articles 27-a and 28-c.

Grounds:

1. Article 27-a states, "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated." No authority for the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches has ever been "delegated" to synod, the Council of Delegates, Canadian members of the Council of Delegates, the Canadian Board of Directors, the CRCNA Canada Corporation, or the Canadian executive director.
2. Article 28-c states, "Matters referred by minor assemblies to major assemblies shall be presented in harmony with the rules for classical and synodical procedure." The rules and procedures have not been followed, as no "minor" assembly, church council, or classis has "referred" any proposals/plans for the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches to any major assembly. Logically, all actions taken to date do not have the required "delegated" authority.
3. The *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* by Henry DeMoor (p. 157) states: "The limitation that the council, classis, and synod are to deal with 'ecclesiastical matters only' is not intended to mean that the assemblies may deal only with 'spiritual' matters as opposed to 'temporal' or 'material' matters." That the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches is not an "ecclesiastical" matter does not allow for the disregard of the rules and procedures required under the Church Order for obtaining the necessary "delegated" authority.
4. "As we thought about restructuring to achieve compliance we realized there was a larger opportunity here" (Letter of June 30, 2020). Compliance with Canada Revenue Agency requirements coupled with "concerns from the local level" or the perceived imbalance of power and control related to the number of American delegates versus Canadian delegates at synod, nor any expressed legal opinions, do not constitute "delegated" authority.
5. The complete disregard of the Church Order, ignoring all of the required rules and procedures, bypassing the required and necessary delegated authority, and shutting down any and all discussion or dialogue on the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches, a matter that will forever alter the CRCNA, are more than reasonable grounds to stop all proceedings.

Classis Toronto
Richard A. Bodini, stated clerk

Overture 3: Clarify Distinctions in Synodical Decisions

I. Background

The November 2020 *Banner* article titled "Woman in Same-Sex Marriage Installed as Deacon" noted that the council of Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, does not believe it has "crossed any line of orthodoxy, only pastoral advice" and "that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been *pastoral advice* given to the churches." It is not

clear to us that this distinction is a valid one—and if it is not, the decision of Neland CRC to break covenant is based on an incorrect understanding of the nature of synodical reports.

There is some history of a discussion. Synod 1973 appointed a committee "to study the use and function of synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters, and their relation to the confessions" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 595). That committee reported to Synod 1975, and its report states, "Guidelines for study, pastoral advice, and other decisions of this nature allow for varying measures of agreement. Officebearers are expected to 'abide by' certain specified deliverances of synod as well as to synodical decisions in general" (p. 602). The report seems to suggest that, although we may not all agree on the pastoral advice offered in synodical reports, as officebearers we are expected to abide by them—and so they are binding in some respect.

Further, the second recommendation of that report states, "Synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters are subordinate to the confessions and 'shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order' (Church Order, Art. 29). All officebearers and members are expected to abide by these synodical deliverances" (p. 603).

Noting that the report to Synod 1975 still lacked clarity, Synod 1995 addressed the issue of clarifying what "settled and binding" means. A majority and minority report were presented, but both were defeated.

As a denomination, we are in need of such clarity.

II. Overture

Classis Chatham overtures Synod 2021 to clarify the distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice and the extent to which they bind the churches.

Grounds:

1. We are concerned that other churches may also make decisions based on an incomplete knowledge of which synodical decisions are binding and which are not.
2. This needs to be addressed separately from reports on the floor of synod because this is a matter of some urgency as other congregations wrestle with different issues.
3. As churches have conversations, they need to have strong, biblically supported guidance from the denomination.
4. Churches need to understand the clear boundaries of our synodical decisions as we move forward in covenant with one another.
5. Synod has not clearly articulated what it means that synodical decisions are considered settled and binding.

Classis Chatham
Ron Middel, stated clerk

Overture 4: Instruct Neland Avenue CRC to Rescind Its Decision

I. Background

According to the November 2020 issue of *The Banner* (pp. 22-23), Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, "installed a woman in a same-sex marriage as a deacon last June." It appears that, aside from the question of her marriage, this woman is well suited to serve in this role. After all, according to a Calvin University *Chimes* article ("Local CRC appoints deacon who is in same-sex marriage," Sept. 10, 2020), "the deacon in question was elected to the council three times prior to her marriage, including a term as chair of deacons."

Even so, the question pertaining to her marriage is a significant one. For while *The Banner* article indicates that the council of Neland Avenue (1) received advice from Classis Grand Rapids East before this deacon was installed and (2) "does not believe that it has 'crossed any line of orthodoxy, only pastoral advice [from synods],'" it is nevertheless also true that, since 1973, synodical decisions and guidance have consistently upheld the traditional interpretation of Scripture related to the ethics of same-sex sexual practice and, more specifically, to same-sex marriage. This suggests that in ordaining a person in a same-sex marriage, Neland Avenue CRC has acted outside the bounds of (1) past synodical decisions and guidance and (2) the CRCNA's interpretation of Scripture as it relates to same-sex marriage—and, in so doing, has broken covenant with its fellow churches.

II. Overture

Classis Holland of the Christian Reformed Church overtures Synod 2021 to instruct Classis Grand Rapids East to instruct the council of Neland Avenue CRC to rescind its decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage, thus nullifying this deacon's current term.

Grounds:

1. Past synodical decisions and guidance related to Scripture's teaching on the permissibility of a Christian to engage in same-sex sexual practice or to enter a same-sex marriage suggest that Neland Avenue's decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage is outside the trajectory of the intentions of past synods. See the CRCNA's Position Statement on homosexuality and bibliographical references to synodical reports, decisions, and guidance on this topic at crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/homosexuality.
2. Synod 2016 recommended "to the churches the pastoral guidance of the minority report" from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 917). Even though the pastoral guidance from this minority report acknowledged the possibility that a person in a civil same-sex marriage might comply with CRC teaching (for example, when a person entered a same-sex marriage before becoming a Christian and for legal reasons, while committing to celibacy within it, chose to remain in that marriage after becoming a Christian; see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 439), that same report discourages Christians from entering a same-sex marriage and concludes that entering a same-sex marriage disqualifies one from serving as an

ordained leader in the church (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 442). To add weight to the guidance of the minority report, Synod 2016 decided to add a reference to it in the Church Order of the CRCNA, with the result that Church Order Supplement, Article 69-c now reads as follows: "The pastoral guidance recommended to the churches by Synod 2016, found in the minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 436-43), represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God."

3. The Council of Delegates Fall 2020 update ("COD Highlights," October 22, 2020) includes a report of the following action taken by the COD: The COD "tasked the executive committee to draft a letter to Neland Ave. CRC, grieving their decision to break covenant with the CRC in this way before Synod 2021 has had the opportunity to address the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality." Such action by the COD suggests that Neland Ave. CRC acted outside the agreed-upon parameters by which we operate in the CRCNA.

Classis Holland
Calvin Hoogstra, stated clerk

Overture 5: Admonish and/or Discipline Neland Avenue CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

As Classis B.C. North-West, we were distressed to hear of Neland Avenue CRC's actions to ordain an individual to the office of deacon who is involved in a same-sex marriage. Out of love for God and our brothers and sisters in Christ at Neland Avenue CRC, we overture synod to administer godly admonishment and/or appropriate disciplinary action, if necessary, to bring Neland Avenue CRC back within the bounds of Scripture, our confessions, and the position of our denomination on same-sex marriage as stated in the 1973 report on homosexuality.

Grounds:

1. An officebearer holds that office within the denomination and not merely in a local congregation or classis.
2. Neland Avenue CRC has taken action contradictory to the position of the CRCNA, which is rooted in a biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman.
3. As per Report 47, section IV, B, 2 (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603): "Synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters are subordinate to the confessions and 'shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order' (Church Order Art. 29). *All officebearers and members are expected to abide by these synodical deliverances*" (emphasis added). Under the list "Compilation of Synodical Pronouncements" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 602-603) *homosexuality* is listed as an ethical matter. By ordaining a woman in a same-sex marriage to the office of deacon, Neland Avenue CRC was not merely disagreeing with "pastoral advice"; they were acting

in direct contravention to the denominationally agreed upon synodical pronouncement that was considered settled and binding.

4. On the question of whether synod is only able to intervene if an appeal is received, we draw the following to your attention:
   a. According to Church Order Article 27, synod has a broader authority than classis, and a delegated authority over classis. According to Church Order Article 28-b, "A major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies." This gives synod the prerogative to deal with the matter at Neland Avenue CRC as this matter concerns churches of the denomination in common.
   b. Church Order Article 30-b states that "synod may establish rights for other appeals and adopt rules for processing them." This entitles synod, for the well-being of the church, to hear and adjudicate appeals without being bound by precedent or even the existing current rules of appeal.
   c. According to the *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, section V (Matters Legally before Synod), B, 12 (Other Matters), it states, "All other matters may be considered which synod by a majority vote declares acceptable." This indicates quite clearly that synod need not be curtailed in discussing matters that are of concern to the entire denomination on the ground that they have not come to synod via an appeal from a classis. Synod is free to deal with "other matters" when it judges them to be of importance for the well-being of the denomination. Synod ultimately is able to decide for itself what should be on the agenda.
5. Neland Avenue CRC proceeded with its actions despite having full knowledge that the denomination's Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality was to be released prior to Synod 2021 and taken up in its agenda.

Classis B.C. North-West
Kathy N. Smith, stated clerk

Overture 6: Hold Neland Avenue CRC Accountable to Scripture, Church Order, and the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

Last fall we were grieved to hear of the action of Neland Avenue CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) to knowingly install to the office of deacon an individual who is involved in a same-sex marriage. To our knowledge, Neland Avenue CRC has not repented of this decision. Also, Classis Grand Rapids East has not disciplined Neland Avenue CRC.

While we have great compassion for individuals who experience same-sex attraction, at the same time we cannot compromise on the truth of Scripture. Out of love for God and our brothers and sisters in Christ at Neland Avenue CRC, we are compelled to overture synod regarding Neland Avenue CRC.

We bring this overture in the spirit of Christian discipleship: "The purpose of admonition and discipline is to restore those who err to faithful obedience

to God and full fellowship with the congregation, to maintain the holiness of the church, and thus to uphold God's honor" (Church Order Art. 78).

II. Overture

Classis Rocky Mountain overtures synod to hold Neland Avenue CRC accountable to Scripture, Church Order, and the Covenant for Officebearers, administering godly admonishment and appropriate disciplinary action, if necessary, so that they may be restored to live within the bounds of Scripture, our CRC confessions, and Church Order adopted by common consent.

Grounds:

1. Neland Avenue CRC has taken action contradictory to the stance of the CRCNA, which has clearly and repeatedly concluded that Scripture is opposed to same-sex behavior, specifically same-sex marriage (Church Order Supplement, Art. 69-c).
2. Neland Avenue CRC refused to provide admonition and discipline. "Members who have sinned in life or doctrine shall be faithfully disciplined by the consistory" (Art. 81-a).
3. Neland Avenue CRC's actions oppose our CRC Church Order. Specifically, these actions "violate the Covenant for Officebearers" and "seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct" (Art. 83) and fail to faithfully observe the Church Order "adopted by common consent" (Art. 86).
4. Neland Avenue CRC's actions threaten the witness and mission of the CRCNA. Both gospel witness locally and fellowship with churches globally are put at risk by these actions.
5. Classis Grand Rapids East has not exercised its responsibility to hold Neland Avenue CRC accountable for its actions, so the task of admonition and discipline falls to synod.

Classis Rocky Mountain
Mark W. Hilbelink, stated clerk

Overture 7: Ensure that Neland Avenue CRC Deposes their Deacon Living in a Same-sex Marriage or Disaffiliate the Congregation from the CRCNA

I. Introduction

Early in the summer of 2020, Neland Avenue CRC installed new officebearers in their church and our denomination. When doing so, they recognized that one of the members they were ordaining as a deacon was living in a same-sex marriage. Fully understanding that this was contrary to synod's clear decisions, and fully aware that a synodical study committee was scheduled to report to Synod 2021, their council distributed a statement to their congregation in August 2020 (Appendix A). As something like this had never been done in our denomination, news of it quickly spread, and it became public knowledge through an article in the *Calvin University Chimes* (Sept. 10, 2020) and then in *The Banner* (Sept. 14, 2020).

After the matter became public knowledge, the councils of Coopersville (Mich.) CRC (Appendices B and C); North Blendon CRC, Hudsonville,

Michigan (Appendix D); and North Street CRC, Zeeland, Michigan (Appendix E)—as well as many other churches in our denomination—sent letters of admonition to Neland Avenue CRC. Neland Avenue CRC replied with a form letter of response (Appendix F) and a copy of their communication to their congregation (Appendix A). In addition, Classis Zeeland sent a communication to Classis Grand Rapids East (Appendix G), calling them to admonish and discipline Neland Avenue CRC and bring them back into line with our covenant commitments. To date, Neland Avenue has refused to recognize our denominational covenant, including our agreement to abide by our shared decisions at synod, and to reverse their decision and rejoin our fellowship.

A. Biblical grounds

As the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality has already provided detailed arguments around the topic of what Scripture says about homosexuality (section XII, pp. 96-113), and our denominational position has been consistent since the adoption of Report 42 by Synod 1973, we see no need to make a biblical case against same-sex marriage within this overture. It is profitable to be reminded of the biblical patterns of discipline. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus gives us a clear pattern for handling sins within the body of Christ. If someone sins against you, you are expected to go and tell them. If they refuse to listen, you take others with you. If they still will not repent, you tell the church. If they will not listen to the church, they are to be considered outside church fellowship. Multiple congregations have communicated directly with Neland Avenue CRC. Failing in that, they have communicated with Classis Grand Rapids East. In the spirit of Matthew 18, the next step is to tell the broader church.

Matthew 18 is not the only word or example regarding discipline in Scripture. The situation at Neland Avenue CRC is similar to what is described in 1 Corinthians 5. The Corinthian church was boasting in their tolerance, as they let a member living in sexual immorality continue among them undisciplined. In that case, Paul did not contact that member, or his district elder or pastor. Instead, in covenant with the Corinthian church and representing the broader church, Paul declared what they must do: "Expel the wicked man from among you." If they had refused, they would have expelled themselves from that broader covenant community and ceased to be a church in fellowship. The church is local, but it is not only local. The church also exists at the broader level. Based on the precedent established by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, synod has the biblical grounds and authority to address Neland Avenue CRC directly concerning those ordained as officebearers, and to demand that they either return to living within our covenant bonds or leave our fellowship.

B. Historical precedent

While Neland Avenue CRC may be the first church to publicly ordain someone living in a same-sex marriage, this is not the first time synod has addressed a council with regard to ordaining someone living in sexual immorality. In October 2002, the council of First CRC in Toronto, Ontario, sent correspondence to Classis Toronto, informing the classis that they intended to nominate a member in a same-sex marriage as an officebearer in their church. This set off multiple communications and overtures for years

within Classis Toronto and involving synod. In 2005, though no officebearer was ever ordained, synod formed a "committee in loco," which met three times with Classis Toronto and First CRC, Toronto, until First CRC stated in writing that they would adhere to the teachings of the CRC; otherwise the congregation would have been disaffiliated from the denomination. This is a clear precedent for what our denomination has done in this very situation in the past.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Zeeland overtures synod to do the following:

A. Appoint a committee in loco to deal directly with Neland Avenue CRC on this public matter that affects our whole denomination.

Grounds:

1. An officebearer holds their position throughout the entire denomination, not merely in a local congregation or classis.
2. We all sign the same Covenant for Officebearers and, by doing so, we pledge to be accountable to one another.
3. Synod appointed a committee in loco for First CRC, Toronto, while the congregation intended to ordain an officebearer living in sexual immorality. Neland Avenue CRC has already ordained such an officebearer, and thus a committee in loco is all the more warranted.
4. Due to the very public nature of Neland Avenue CRC's actions, members and congregations are beginning to contemplate leaving the denomination if this matter is not handled. Doing nothing is neither right, practical, nor possible.

B. Declare that Neland Avenue CRC has six months from the adjournment of Synod 2021 to either repent for breaking covenant and publicly depose their deacon or begin the process of disaffiliation.

Grounds:

1. Neland Avenue CRC has entered into these actions intentionally and has broken covenant with our denomination. If they have disagreed with our stance on any issue, there are means by which they could have overtured synod. Publicly acting in defiance of our agreed-upon understanding of orthodoxy and orthopraxy is an untenable way to live together as a denomination.
2. Failure to discipline a publicly wayward church is to disregard the third mark of a true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

C. If Neland Avenue CRC removes their deacon, the committee in loco shall encourage Neland Avenue and Classis Grand Rapids East to faithfully live out their covenant vows of discipleship and discipline, as they love and care for all of their members in line with our denominational covenant commitments.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Appendix A
Neland Avenue CRC Statement to Congregation

August 2020

Dear Neland Congregation,

Earlier this summer we marked our usual transition of leadership, installing gifted members to serve in our Council. But we note the significance that for the first time this year one of our newly appointed deacons is a member of a same sex marriage (SSM). This has caused us to be reflective on Neland's identity and mission, and the journey that has brought us to this point. We hope these reflections help to clarify things and shed more light than heat on this matter.

As a church, Neland has been through many challenging chapters, and faced many challenging issues over its history – from the racial tensions of the 1960's-70's, to the debates over women in church office in the 1980's and '90's, to the church's relationship with LGBT+ persons in recent years. These periods have been times of much pain and disagreement, but also of learning to live in tension, with more grace and humility and truth. And so, while we acknowledge that Neland's journey toward LGBT+ inclusion has resulted in another period of strain, we trust in God's promise that "in Christ all things hold together." (Col 1:17)

Our Journey Together

Over a decade of active dialogue in our congregation, under the prayerful guidance of Council and a Generous Spaciousness Committee.

Both biblical and scientific experts consulted. Many educational events and speakers from a variety of viewpoints.

Much time spent in prayer, seeking God's will and the Spirit's leading.

Several specific Council retreats on LGBT+ concerns, and restorative circles.

Great patience from our SSM members, and participation from many congregants of various viewpoints.

Thoughtful engagement with the Classis GR East report, synodical reports, and pastoral guidelines of Synod.

A 2016 survey of positions in the congregation, revealing a broad range of views from traditional (40%) to affirming (40%), and in between (20%).

Several Colossian Way small groups on Sexuality and Gender, and a Sunday evening series on navigating adaptive challenges/change.

An extensive study and report by our Nominations Committee in 2019.

Requested and received assistance from church advisors from Classis GR East.

Lament over the gradual departure of some of our members who felt we needed to nail down either more 'traditionalist' or more 'affirming' positions.

An increasing number of nominations for SSM members from the congregation each year. Much greater congregational participation in the selection and election of office-bearers this year (2020), and a very strong affirmation vote of all nominees (each received over 87%).

Where We Stand Today

Identity: Neland is a 100+ year old intergenerational Christian Reformed Church.

We are reformed and always reforming. We believe Christ sent us the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. No church has ever "arrived."

We are a people on a journey, seeking to remain faithful to God's Word as we also learn more from God's world. This includes matters of gender and sexuality.

Mission: Neland seeks to be a place where all will experience the deep welcome of Christ, especially in these divisive times. We lament that so often the church has pushed away LGBT+ persons or refused to incorporate their gifts.

Gifts: We are a place where all members may fully use the gifts God has given them for the common good, and receive God's means of grace. We see the Spirit at work in our SSM members as much as any other.

Unity: We don't all agree on SSM, or on having a SSM member in leadership. However, we also don't believe that having a uniform position on this matter is necessary to maintain unity as a body of Christ. The gospel runs deeper. In opening a space for dialogue on this issue over the past decade, Neland members have grown to appreciate the important commitments that each holds dear, and to realize that "all things hold together in Christ," and not in our hard-fought opinions. In Christ, our default position should be one of gracious inclusion and hospitality; our differences need not divide.

Humility and Gratitude: Thus, although we are humbled that we could not come to complete agreement on this issue, we are grateful that there is a place at Neland for all God's children to serve with all their gifts.

Q & A

Is Neland "getting out ahead" of Synod, or breaking the rules of our denomination?

Neland remains strongly committed to the CRC, its theology, its mission. We are hardly a "rebel" congregation, but remain deeply invested in denominational ministries, including Calvin University, Calvin Seminary, and our mission agencies.

While Neland continues to work hard to follow the pastoral advice on LGBT+ inclusion of Synod 1973 and 2002, our Council found it could not do what Synod 2016 advised: namely, consider SSM persons deserving of church discipline. The SSM person we have elected and affirmed as deacon is clearly gifted and spiritually mature. She has been a deacon twice before, and on our Admin Committee as chair of deacons, in the years prior to her marriage. She was nominated by many in the congregation. Although some in our Council are not in favor of SSM, none would make a motion to put her under discipline. So Council concluded that as a member in good standing, she should be eligible for office just like any other adult confessing member. The congregation overwhelmingly voted to affirm her nomination.

Our understanding is that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been pastoral advice given to the churches (1973, 2002, and 2016). According to Calvin Seminary's Adjunct Professor of Church Polity, Kathy Smith, who spoke with our congregation in several educational sessions, this is of a less binding nature than confessional or church order matters (Synod 1975). Unlike the women-in-office issue, there are no church

order articles that explicitly regulate what congregations may or may not do with respect to LGBT+ and SSM members. So we do not believe we have crossed any line of orthodoxy, only pastoral advice.

Does this decision mean that Neland is an "affirming" church?

That depends on what is meant by the word "affirming" Affirming of LGBT+ persons and that all members may use their gifts to serve God? Yes! Certainly. Affirming in the sense that all Neland members support a particular stance on SSM? No. We will continue to be a community with diverse opinions on that.

Does Neland still believe in the authority of Scripture?

Absolutely! We continue to rely on God's Word as our only rule in faith and life. However, not all of us believe that scripture is as clear on the question of SSM as many of us once believed. Our classis (Classis GR East) submitted to Synod a very thorough report in 2016 that shows a wide range of biblical interpretations one can support with a reformed view of scripture. Many respected reformed/evangelical scholars now support the full participation of LGBT+ persons in the life of the church, including those who are SSM. We also await the report of our denominational study committee on human sexuality, though we regret that they were not given full freedom to consider questions of biblical interpretation.

Thus, given the present reality of a range of opinions within the CRC and the church at large, we do not believe it is right to bind all consciences in our congregation to one position. Could the Spirit be leading Christ's church into more truth? Challenging as it may be, we must be open to taking that journey together.

Family in Christ, it is difficult to live in tension on these important matters, but we firmly believe "there is a place for you at Neland" – that's not just a motto. We believe that God has the strength to maintain our unity, in the midst of our differences, because "all things hold together in Christ."

Please let us know if you have any questions, comments, or would like to talk more about this letter. Our journey is certainly not done! And pray with us that God will work in us together just what is pleasing to him: more and more of Christ's perfect love.

Yours in Christ,
Neland's Council and Pastors

Appendix B
Coopersville CRC Correspondence to Council of Neland Avenue CRC

September 21st, 2020

To the Council of Neland CRC,

It is not with any joy or delight that we reach out to you, but rather out of our covenant commitment and love, that we find it necessary to send this communication. Yet, this is the very reason for which we are united in a denomination, to hold and be held accountable to God's Word. We recognize how easily we can go astray, as the old hymn says, that we are all "prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." With that

truth in mind, we are compelled to contact you regarding your ordination of a deacon, that is living in a public, same-sex relationship, as reported in the Chimes, Banner, and your own position paper/explanation. This deacon must be expelled from office immediately because their ordination violates both the spirit and letter of our denominational agreement, as well as the plain teaching of Scripture.

From your writing, it is clear that you are not ignorant of how our denomination, through previous Synodical decisions and statements, has understood the topic of same-sex relationships. In 1973 our denomination explained, and has affirmed multiple times since, along with the catholic Christian church, that intimate same-sex relations are contrary to both Scripture and God's design and order. While you allude to new and unorthodox interpretations, that seek to cast doubt on what God has said; instead of making your case, as such to Synod, you have chosen to ignore our covenant by your actions, and become a law to yourselves. While all decisions of Synod are considered settled and binding, you have besmirched our denomination, by calling our understanding, merely "pastoral advice." While that is technically where it lands, you are treating it as advice that one is free to take or leave. Your actions in this way are similar to an uncle Jeb, who thinks his theory of the earth being flat is equal to the scientific understanding of gravity, as they are both called "theories." While an "uncle Jeb" may not know better, we all do.

Synod 2016 made the ruling that the ministers of our Denomination were not to participate in the solemnizing of same-sex unions. Of course, we understand that those in our culture and even other denominations or groups may do otherwise. But in our church order, we are held to a higher standard. How then, as you have reported, could you ordain to the office of a deacon, one that you could not participate in solemnizing their relationship? Our church order permits Elders, with prior approval from Classis, to lead Communion. But, there is no such provision for an Elder to ordain office bearers. Only ordained ministers are allowed to hold an ordination service, to install elders and deacons. To ordain an office bearer, publicly living in a relationship that the same minister could not participate in solemnizing, is a very serious breach of conduct.

But, while this action was a violation of both the spirit and letter of our denominational covenant, far more seriously, it is contrary to God's Word. In both 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1, Scripture lays down the qualifications for those who would be ordained in the body of Christ. These lists are both largely summarized in the opening language of Titus 1:6, that office bearers must be "above reproach." Yet this union that your deacon is living in, is far from above reproach. Speaking to the issue of marriage, in Matthew 19, Jesus affirmed the created order of union, and that such a union was only lawful, ordained by God, among one man and one woman, covenanted together for life. Any sexual and full life unions, outside of that formulation, both Scripture and our Confessions condemn as a form of adultery, breaking the seventh commandment. To have a deacon, living in open adultery among you, is a horrible reproach to the church of Christ. And so, we write to demand the immediate removal and discipline of this office bearer, as well as the public repentance for your divisive actions.

Sincerely,
The Elders of Coopersville CRC

Appendix C
Coopersville CRC Response to Neland Avenue CRC Correspondence

November 23rd, 2020

To the Council of Neland CRC,

Thank you for your response, and for forwarding to us the letter of explanation that you gave your Congregation.

In your response to us, you state that, "We have come to believe that Scripture not only permits us, but calls us to the decision that we have made." As Reformed believers, we all confess that Scripture is our final authority for both life and doctrine. When Scripture calls us to something, then we must submit. If any will not submit to Scripture, they must be disciplined, out of love and care for those in error. There certainly is no option for us all to just "find room for differing positions." But, while you are willing to ignore the "pastoral advice" of previous Synods, and the Biblical arguments that they made, you are not putting forth your arguments for how you came to this novel understanding of Scripture. If previous Synods are all in error, make the case in your gravamen to Classis and Synod, and let us open the Scriptures and reason together. If there was truly a "deep commitment" to our "Denomination" on your part, that is the path you would have been compelled to take. Instead, you are willing to let our Denomination continue in our error, and just do your own thing, while proclaiming our ongoing unity. Therefore, Neland is behaving as if you are an independent congregation and a law to yourselves. This goes far beyond just "getting out ahead of Synod." Depose your deacon, and make your case through the proper channels, and let us all reason together.

Second, from your Q & A section 1. b., you say: "our Council could not do what Synod 2016 advised: namely consider SSM persons deserving of church discipline..." and, "Although some in our Council are not in favor of SSM, none would make a motion to put her under discipline." As many of us have reminded our children, two wrongs never make a right. We are grieved that you are not living up to your covenant commitment, to discipline members of your congregation living in ongoing error, either in life or in doctrine, as you have promised you would do. Just because you are negligent in the first matter does not permit you to then go and ordain an erring member to the role of an office-bearer among your congregation, and throughout our Denomination. Again, we plead with you to be honest and make your case. Scripture does not say both "yes" and "no" upon such a critical matter as the Seventh Commandment and human sexuality. Live up to your covenant responsibilities and promises. Make the case how all of those that have gone before you are in error, and how we all must now change, or you must come back into line with our covenant bonds.

Sincerely,
The Council of Coopersville CRC

Appendix D
North Blendon CRC Correspondence to Council of Neland Avenue CRC

North Blendon CRC
7284 Taylor St
Hudsonville, MI 49426
September 14, 2020

Neland Avenue CRC
940 Neland Ave SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

Dear Council of Neland Avenue CRC,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! We wanted to communicate with you as a fellow church of Christ in the Christian Reformed Church in response to your recent decision to appoint someone in a same-sex marriage to the office of deacon as reported in the recent Banner article. We have reviewed your August 2020 congregational letter explaining Neland's journey to this point. You have certainly given this decision much consideration. However, we believe the decision to ordain someone in a same-sex marriage to be not only against the commands of Scripture but a volatile action that impacts the entire denomination. While you have determined that synod's decisions on homosexuality in 1973, 2002 and 2016 were merely advice, many if not most congregations in our denominational fellowship maintain that synod's decisions reflect what the Bible clearly teaches. While your congregation appears to be evenly divided on the topic but is able to continue together despite this disagreement, many if not most CRC congregations (including ours) believe this action to be a breaking of our covenant together only one year before we are to make decisions together at Synod 2021 on matters of sexuality.

As fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who believe the Bible is clear on God's will for sexuality, we urge you to reconsider your decision. As fellow members in the Christian Reformed Church, we urge you to reconsider your decision for the sake of harmony in our denomination leading up to the difficult decisions on the plate of Synod 2021.

Yours in Christ,
The Council of North Blendon CRC

Appendix E
North Street CRC Correspondence to Elders of Neland Avenue CRC

December 21st, 2020
North Street Christian Reformed Church
20 E. Main Avenue
Zeeland, Michigan 49464

Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church
940 Neland Avenue
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507

To the Elders of Neland Avenue CRC,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The reason for our communication with you is because of your ordination of a deacon who is living in a public, same-sex relationship as has been reported in The Chimes, The Banner and your own public explanations. You have justified your decision by stating that the decisions of the synod 1973, 2002 and 2016 are merely, "pastoral advice," but you have not repudiated the Biblical undergirding of these decisions in order to Biblically justify your decision. We are writing to you not simply because your decisions are in violation of synodical positions, but because your decisions are in violation of the Word of God (Genesis 19:1-11, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9-10, I Timothy 1:10). Synod 2016 made the ruling that ministers in our denomination were not to participate in the solemnizing of same-sex unions. How then, could you (the pastor) ordain to the office of deacon a person that you could not participate in the solemnizing of their relationship? Not only that, but this deacon does not meet the qualifications laid out in Titus 1:7 of being above reproach.

Because your decisions are in violation of God's Word, because your actions are in violation of denominational decisions, because your deacon is Biblically unqualified to serve and because you are dividing your own church and our denomination, we are imploring you as brothers in Christ, for the unity and purity of the church and the glory of Christ, 1) to repent of your sin and turn back to the Lord Jesus, 2) to remove this deacon from her office and 3) call her to repentance and if unwilling, to bring her under the discipline of the church. We offer this call out of Christian love and with the Biblical warning found in James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

In Christ,
The Elders of North Street CRC

Appendix F
Neland Avenue CRC Response to Council of Coopersville CRC

Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church
940 NELAND SE
GRAND RAPIDS, Ml 49507
(616) 245-0669
www.neland.org

Pastors:
Joel DeMoor (616) 245-0669 jdemoor@neland.org
Cindy de Jong (616) 245-0669 cdejong@neland.org

October 28, 2020
Clerk of Council
Coopersville Christian Reformed Church
200 Henry St.
Coopersville, Ml 49404

Dear Council of Coopersville CRC,

Thank you for your letter of concern. It is clear that you have a deep commitment to Scripture, the gospel, and to our denomination, for which we are grateful. We also share those deep commitments. We did not enter this decision lightly. As we describe in the enclosed letter, it reflects 10 years of study and prayer, seeking the Spirit's leading. We have come to believe that Scripture not only permits us, but calls us to the decision we have made. It is our fervent prayer that our denomination will find room for congregations to have differing positions on these difficult issues, even as we affirm our unity in Christ and unity of mission.

In the spirit of Ephesians 4:2, please continue to pray for us, to be patient and forebear with us, as we "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." We promise to do the same for you and your ministry. Blessings to all!

In Christ,
Larry Louters, Admin Elder
on behalf of the Council of Neland Avenue CRC

Enclosure: Letter from Council to Neland Congregation (Appendix A)

Appendix G
Classis Zeeland Correspondence to Classis Grand Rapids East

October 1st, 2020

To the delegates of Classis Grand Rapids East,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! We wish to communicate with you as one classis to another our deepest concern about the Neland Avenue congregation.

It has been reported in The Banner and the Calvin University Chimes that Neland has ordained someone to the office of deacon who is living in

a same-sex marriage. The Neland council has concluded that living in a same-sex marriage is compatible with leading in the church of Christ. We believe the decision to ordain someone in a same-sex marriage to be not only against the commands of God in Scripture but a volatile action that impacts the entire denomination. Synod's decisions and declarations of 1973, 2002 and 2016 reflect a denomination that believes marriage to be between one man and one woman. Though Neland Avenue has determined that these synodical decisions are merely pastoral advice, many others in our denominational fellowship believe this move by Neland to be a blatant violation of God's commands. Even if your classis and delegates are divided on what the Bible says regarding same-sex marriage, surely you can understand the concern for denominational unity. For the members and congregations under the "Christian Reformed Church" name who believe the Bible's commands are clear on sexuality, Neland's decision will provoke doubts about the denomination and cynicism about its future. As the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality reports to Synod 2021, the agitation sparked by Neland's move will make the difficult decisions before Synod 2021 even more anxious.

We appeal to you on the basis of our Lord Jesus Christ to respond to Neland Avenue's decision with loving admonition and discipline. At the very least, we urge you to act for the sake of unity and harmony within the church of Christ.

Yours in Christ,
Classis Zeeland of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

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Overture 8: Hold Neland Avenue CRC and Classis Grand Rapids East Accountable to Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

In a letter dated August 2020, the Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church (NACRC) council announced to its congregation two actions that significantly violate the confessions all CRC officebearers have covenanted to uphold. First, they indicated that their council has chosen not to place members living in a same-sex marriage (SSM) under general discipline. Second, they have ordained one of these members—a woman living in a SSM—to the office of deacon.

Classis Grand Rapids East is the appropriate ecclesiastical body to adjudicate and carry out the special discipline Christian Reformed Church Order prescribes for a violation of the Covenant for Officebearers. However, Classis Grand Rapids East has not fulfilled its responsibility.

All Christian Reformed officebearers have signed the Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church by which they promise to "honor this covenant for the well-being of the church." Among other things, entering into this Covenant obligates the signer to

> Affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. *These confessions*

> *continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.*
>
> Grateful for these expressions of faith, *we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.* (emphasis added)[1]

The Covenant for Officebearers also specifies a clear procedure for presenting a confessional difficulty:

> Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.[2]

In August 2020 the NACRC council announced in a letter to its congregation that "for the first time this year one of our newly appointed deacons is a member of a same-sex marriage (SSM)."[3] In addition, their letter indicates that "although some in our council are not in favor of SSM, none would make a motion to put her under discipline."

The omission of the NACRC council to place this member (and others) under discipline contradicts our confessions and therefore is in violation of the Covenant for Officebearers that these officers have signed. The subsequent action of appointing this person to their church council illustrates a flagrant disregard for scriptural and confessional fidelity.

Homosexualism is clearly prohibited in Lord's Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism. There the Catechism's author, Dr. Zacharias Ursinus, in addressing God's will in the seventh commandment, indicated that "God condemns all *unchastity*" (emphasis added).[4] Ursinus used the word *unchastity* (*unkeuschheit*) twice and *chaste* (*keusch*) once in this short Lord's Day, and he left no ambiguity as to how he defined *chastity* in his commentary.[5] "CHASTITY, in general, is a virtue contributing to the purity of body and soul, agreeing with the will of God, and shunning all lusts prohibited by God. . . ."[6]

Ursinus went on to designate three classes of lusts:

> The first class or kind are those which are contrary to nature, and from the devil—such as are even contrary to this our corrupt nature, not only because they corrupt and spoil it of conformity with God, but also because this our corrupt nature shrinks from them and abhors them. The lusts of which the apostle Paul speaks in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, are of this class, as the confounding of sexes, also abuses of the female sex.[7]

---

[1] Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Neland Avenue CRC Letter, August 2020.

[4] Heidelberg Catechism, Q.&A. 108.

[5] German translations taken from Van Den Brink, J.N. Bakhuizen, *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften in Authentieke Teksten met Inleiding en Tekstvergelijkingen Door* (Uitgeverij Ton Bolland: Amsterdam, 1976).

[6] Ursinus, Zacharias; tr. G. W. Williard; *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 590.

[7] Ibid., p. 591.

Ursinus also uses the word *unchaste* (*unkeuscher*) to describe those who continue to live wicked lives in Q.&A. 87. Although he does not explicitly list homosexual activity in the list of vices given in this answer, he does fully include the text of 1 Corinthians 6:9 in his commentary, using the word **effeminate** (in the English translation) to render the original μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται written by Paul. It may be that Ursinus kept this phrase out of the catechism because one of the primary uses of the catechism was to be a pedagogical tool for children, but it is clear from his commentary that he considered homosexual activity *unchaste*.

In that Ursinus was so clear in his commentary about the inclusion of homosexual activity within the meaning of *unchastity* in both Q.&A. 87 and 108-109, it is not necessary to further establish, either theologically or exegetically, that NACRC's teaching and actions regarding SSM members are unconfessional since the *prima facie* teaching of both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Scriptures which it confesses indicate the sinfulness of homosexual behavior. The burden of proof would be on those seeking to show that Scripture and the confessions condone homosexual behavior.

The proper course of action for NACRC to follow in seeking to exempt their SSM member(s) from general discipline and to promote the eligibility of SSM members for church office would have been to follow the Church Order procedures for filing a "confessional-revision gravamen" regarding Q.&A. 87 and 108-109.[8] There is no record of NACRC, or any other laypersons or ecclesiastical bodies having done this with respect to Lord's Day 41.

NACRC's decision to not discipline members actively participating in and promoting an activity which contradicts both Scripture and a confession, and then taking the additional step of installing one of these members as a deacon, necessarily means that this church is also in violation of confessional imperatives to practice church discipline (H.C., Q.&A. 81-85; and Belgic Confession, Art. 29, 32), to which NACRC council members obligated themselves upon their signing of the Covenant for Officebearers. Therefore, the entire NACRC council has violated the Covenant for Officebearers of the Christian Reformed Church.

According to Church Order Article 83, "Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers." Although the Church Order is vague in how special discipline might be applied to an entire council, the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* outlines the procedures to be followed for a church council to be disciplined by a classis:

> 1. The deposition of a council by a classis has been upheld by synod on various occasions.
> 2. Ordinarily, before a classis proceeds to the deposition of a council, or members of a council, the classis must proceed by way of suspension in accord with Article 82 of the Church Order. Before suspension or deposition may take place, the assembly must determine which of the officebearers in the council is/are subject to the discipline imposed. Discipline by its nature must be applied to individuals rather than to groups or assemblies. . . .
> 3. A classis may not depose a council that has appealed to synod. This is an exception to the general rule that appeals do not normally suspend the judgment of an assembly. This exception, no doubt, is because of the seriousness of the issues involved.
> 4. In response to a specific case and its appeal, synod declared that the Church Order concerns itself with normal situations. When a situation is abnormal,

[8] Christian Reformed Church Order, Supplement, Article 5.

the Church Order cannot be applied in a legalistic way (*Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 28-29; *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 55).[9]

Classis Minnkota sent a letter outlining its concerns with NACRC's actions to NACRC, Classis Grand Rapids East, and the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA. NACRC replied back with a response indicating their reception of our letter and gave no indication that they would repent of their violations. Classis Grand Rapids East, which has a clear responsibility to adjudicate special discipline upon the NACRC council, has acknowledged Classis Minnkota's letter but has not taken any public action in fulfilling its responsibility to church discipline.

II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2021 and the Council of Delegates, meeting in lieu of synod, to hold Neland Avenue CRC and Classis Grand Rapids East accountable to Christian Reformed Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers, which specify that the Neland Avenue council be subjected to special discipline pursuant to Church Order Articles 82-84 for their decision to ordain a deacon living openly and unrepentantly in a sinful lifestyle. Ignoring these decisions and actions erodes both the commitment that the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has to Scripture as being the absolute normative authority for both ecclesiastical and individual life, as well as our confidence that our confessions plainly and accurately summarize what Scripture says.

Grounds:

1. NACRC's teachings and positions allowing members and officebearers to live unrepentantly in a SSM are in conflict with the Heidelberg Catechism's prohibition of unchaste living in Q.&A. 87 and Lord's Day 41, and their failure to enact general discipline upon their members violates Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 81-85 and Belgic Confession Articles 29 and 32.
2. The appropriate course of action for NACRC would have been to file a confessional-revision gravamen arguing that living in a SSM does not constitute *unchastity* prior to allowing SSM members to serve on their council, and then abide by the ecclesiastical rulings. They have not pursued this.
3. NACRC's decisions to maintain their unconfessional teachings and actions puts each council member in violation of the Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church.
4. Classis Grand Rapids East has a responsibility to enact special discipline upon the NACRC council for this covenantal violation, but has not taken appropriate action to fulfill their responsibility. Therefore it is incumbent upon Synod 2021 (and now necessarily the Council of Delegates) to uphold the scriptural and confessional teachings of the CRCNA.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

[9] *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (2019 Revision), pp. 270-71.

Appendix

A brief study of the history of synodical decisions shows us that classes and synod have intervened in the decisions of local congregations, even when those decisions did not originate in the consistory itself.

- 1877, Art. 16, p. 177: "Classis stands above a consistory and not only may, but must, concern itself with the smallest congregational matter if it be the cause of congregational difficulties and if the matter be legally brought to classis." (As found in Spaan, *Christian Reformed Church Government,* p. 69.)
- Classis Muskegon deposed the minister and entire consistory of one of its churches in 1919 (with the later approval of the synodical deputies) when the consistory refused to depose its minister. (As presented in *Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 526.)
- Synod 1926 upheld Classis Grand Rapids West in its actions deposing a minister and the majority of his consistory. Synod said that "Article 36 of the Church Order [today's article 27-b] gives the Classis jurisdiction over the consistory" (*Acts of Synod 1926*, p. 142). It also said:

> The authority which such assemblies exercise in the name of Christ is also of a disciplinary nature. They have the right in the name of Christ to demand obedience and, in case of resistance, to use discipline. They exercise this power when a minister becomes delinquent either in doctrine or in life. Moreover, we point to the Formula of Subscription, which among other things, states: We shall be ready at all times to submit cheerfully to the judgment of consistory, classis, or synod under penalty, in case of refusal, to be suspended from our office by that very fact. This proves the right of a major assembly to act in a disciplinary manner in case of resistance or rebellion. The form does not speak of breaking with the denomination when one rebels, but of disciplinary action. This expression (to be suspended) requires an official act on the part of the major assembly whereby such discipline is exercised.
>
> (*Acta der Synode 1926*, p. 324; trans. by Rev. L. Mulder as found in *Acts of Synod 1970*, pp. 91-92)

- In 1960, Classis Eastern Ontario approved a minister for the ministry in the CRC, but the synodical deputies objected due to doctrinal concerns of the candidate, and synod upheld their objection (*Acts of Synod 1960*, p. 46).
- Synod 1980 considered an appeal from the elders of a church in Classis Huron who had been deposed by the classis. They found that classis was not guilty of abusing their God-given authority over the minor assembly by lording it over the consistory on the following grounds:

  a. Classis did not exceed its authority when it engaged itself with the situation at Goderich CRC. Christ gave authority to the church as a whole and thereby entrusted authority to the occasions of its exercise in classis and synod as gatherings of the churches to maintain the unity of the congregations in both doctrine and life.
  b. The gathering of churches and their representatives in Jerusalem set a pattern of authoritative decisions, which pattern is followed in principle in the deliberations and decisions of the major assemblies.
  c. To contend that Classis Huron had no proper jurisdiction over the Goderich Consistory proceeds on a mistaken conception of the relation of the minor assembly to the major assembly. The same authority, constituting the same standards and the same goals, is applied by the several assemblies. Classis Huron adhered to the correct use of the authority delegated to them by Christ.

  (*Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 28-30)

Synod 1982 concurred with Synod 1980's ability to have authority over a consistory:

> The Synod of 1980 declared that it is indeed proper according to Reformed Church polity for either classis or synod to intervene in the affairs of a local congregation, if the welfare of that congregation is at stake.
>
> (*Acts of Synod 1982*, pp. 55, 628-29)

- Synod 1988 upheld an appeal which overturned a decision that Classis Grand Rapids East had made in installing women associate elders (*Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 542-43).
- Synod 1991 upheld the action of Classis Lake Erie in suspending the entire council of a church, and instructed the classis to immediately complete the discipline proceedings and deposition of an elder and a deacon (*Acts of Synod 1991*, p. 771).
- Synod 1993 heard an appeal from a CRC church in Classis Hudson when the classis suspended and deposed their minister. Synod did not sustain their appeal. Some of the grounds were as follows:

  a. The Church Order does not specify that the local council is the only body that may initiate and impose special discipline.
  b. Synodical precedents establish the authority of a classis to suspend and depose a minister without request or appeal from a member of the council or congregation of the church involved under circumstances such as those present in this matter.

  (*Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 529)

- Synod 1994 instructed all councils that had ordained women office-bearers to release them from office (*Acts of Synod 1994*, p. 520). crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/women-ecclesiastical-office
- Synod 2004 instructed Classis Toronto to urge one of its churches to act in accordance with the guidelines of the reports of homosexuality of 1973 and 2002 (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 632). Synod 2005 appointed an In Loco committee, and classis Toronto passed their recommendation, stating that the biblical/ethical guidelines of Synods 1973 and 2002 are considered settled and binding, and their actions constitute a breaking of the denominational covenant (*Agenda for Synod 2006*, p. 459). Synod 2006 approved the work of the In Loco Committee after the church agreed to conform with the denomination's position (*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 653).
- Synod 2019 adopted the following motion:

  > That synod, given the recent history of Kinist teaching in a particular church of the CRCNA, admonish councils and classes to promote confessional fidelity and mutually to pursue special discipline of an officebearer who is found to hold views contrary to our standard.
  >
  > *Grounds:*
  > a. The pastor who was teaching Kinist views was able to do so for several years without special discipline being successful.
  > b. By admonishing councils and classes to encourage confessional fidelity and special discipline when applicable, it sends a strong message from the broadest body of our denomination that Kinist teaching will not be tolerated in our churches.
  >
  > (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 818-19)

Overture 9: Instruct Neland Avenue CRC Concerning a Deacon in Question

I. Background

In 2016 synod commissioned a study committee to "articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 919). This committee was to distribute its final report in November 2020, for consideration at Synod 2021. This committee also presented an interim report to Synod 2019, updating the church on the progress of their work.

On September 14, 2020, *The Banner* reported that Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church (NACRC) installed a member in a same-sex marriage as a deacon earlier in the year. According to the article, this action was taken with the support of Classis Grand Rapids East. The underlying assumption behind NACRC's actions was, as reported in *The Banner*, "We do not believe we have crossed any line of orthodoxy, only pastoral advice" (*The Banner,* Sept. 14, 2020). This describes their understanding to be "that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been pastoral advice given to the churches" (*The Banner,* Sept. 14, 2020).

In addition, NACRC intended to push this issue to the forefront in order to catalyze a change in the denomination's position on human sexuality. A longtime member of the church was quoted as saying, "Somebody had to push it a little [to change the denomination's stance on women in office], and then finally, I think, the denomination changed their stance. I think that's the kind of thing that could happen here" (*The Banner,* Sept. 14, 2020).

Predictably, these actions raised serious concerns among many churches in the CRC, including those in Classis Columbia. In the spirit of Matthew 18, several churches in Classis Columbia communicated their disappointment and concern over the actions of NACRC on this matter. Specifically these communications requested that the council of NACRC publicly acknowledge that their actions are in violation of God's Word, and that NACRC remove the individual from the office of deacon. In response, the NACRC council maintained that "scripture not only permits us, but calls us to the decision we have made" (correspondence from NACRC council, dated Oct. 28, 2020). Since NACRC has, to date, resisted calls to repent from individual churches, the next step is to request the next assembly in order—namely the classis—to take action.

II. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures synod to instruct NACRC to remove the deacon in question from office, and to call on NACRC to acknowledge publicly that their actions were a violation of our covenant and a violation of God's Word.

Grounds:

1. It stretches credulity to believe that synod's position on same-sex marriage and human sexuality may be interpreted merely as "pastoral advice" that a church may freely ignore.
   a. In reference to synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters, Synod 1975 stated, "All officebearers and members are expected to abide by these synodical deliverances" (*Acts of Synod*

1975, p. 603). In describing Reformed church governance, Louis Berkhof says that "no single church has the right to disregard matters of mutual agreement and of common interest. The local group may be even called upon occasionally to deny itself for the far greater good of the Church in general" (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 589-90; quoted in Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, p. 152). In other words, decisions made by synod are considered "settled and binding," and it should be expected that local churches will honor these decisions. For churches to accept or reject synodical decisions (especially such weighty decisions as the reports on homosexuality) as "pastoral guidance" is to open the door for widespread congregationalism, ecclesiastical anarchy, or disunity within the church. Consider again Henry DeMoor's warning: "If member churches of the CRCNA can deny the plain intent of the church's constitution, the denomination quickly breaks into a collection of independent groups that become a law unto themselves" (*Church Order Commentary*, p. 433). So it is expected that synodical decisions, while not holding the same authority as creedal statements, are to be honored by our churches.

b. Furthermore, Church Order Article 69-c specifically states that a same-sex marriage is "considered to be in conflict with the Word of God." When Synod 2016 considered what this meant in relation to same-sex marriage, they stated that a same-sex marriage "represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 915). So, far from being "pastoral guidance," synod has explicitly stated that a same-sex marriage is in conflict with the Word of God. Therefore, such an individual is not only disqualified from serving in church office; they are also subject to church discipline.

2. In their letter responding to the concerns of churches, NACRC stated, "We have come to believe that scripture not only permits us, but calls us to the decision we have made." This conclusion and the course of action that flowed from it are in violation of our covenant together.

   a. Church Order Article 69-c prohibits ministers from solemnizing same-sex marriages "because [they are] in conflict with the Word of God." Simply put, Church Order explicitly states that same-sex marriage is a violation of God's Word.

   b. The CRCNA explicitly stated: "Homosexualism—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture" (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 52).

   c. When an individual, a church, or classis believes that our Church Order is in error, the Church Order spells out a process for change that relies on our corporate wisdom and discernment to determine whether or not change is warranted. In his commentary on the Church Order, Henry DeMoor states, "Minor assemblies may seek to 'prove' that a certain decision of synod 'conflict[s] with the Word of God or the Church Order.' Obviously, the proving must not be done to oneself, or to one's council, or to one's classis, but to synod" (*Church Order Commentary*, p. 169). As a church, we rely on one another to

discern God's will. Discerning truth in community is a corrective to individualism and congregationalism, and for that reason DeMoor also warns that a failure to honor this process can result in "a stifling congregationalism or, even worse, a crippling form of ecclesiastical anarchy that plays havoc on those we are called to serve" (*Church Order Commentary,* p. 433). By installing a deacon in a same-sex marriage, NACRC intentionally disregarded our communal process that is clearly spelled out for us, and in the process has caused a great deal of pain and division within the denomination. This disregard for our process is not only disrespectful to the churches in our denomination; it is also dismissive to previous synodical decisions.

3. Churches within Classis Columbia have approached NACRC, urging them to repent; however, NACRC has maintained their present course of action. Therefore, the next step in church discipline is warranted.
4. According to Matthew 18:15-20, when a person does not listen to the admonishment of one person, others must be brought in to participate in the process. Church Order Article 30 provides for this mutual accountability: "Assemblies and church members may appeal to the assembly next in order if they believe that injustice has been done or that a decision conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order." Since NACRC has, so far, refused to acknowledge calls from individual churches to repent, the next step is to speak to NACRC with multiple but unified voices, asking for them to repent. It should be acknowledged that Church Order is not always clear or consistent in this matter. Only in rare instances has a classis (or synod) stepped in to administer church discipline when the church council fails to act. However, there are occasions in which church discipline, applied by a classis to a local council, was upheld by synod. Synod has further stated that it is appropriate for a classis or synod to be involved in the activity of a local church "when the welfare of the congregation is at stake" (*Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 55). Given the gravity of this situation, and the provocative nature of NACRC's actions, the welfare of the congregation—and indeed our denomination—is in fact at stake, and it would therefore be appropriate for synod to act in this situation.
5. Ordinarily, the next step in the process of special discipline (when lower assemblies will not take action) would be for the classis to act. However, Classis Grand Rapids East has, to date, declined to enact special discipline in this matter. We believe that their lack of action makes this situation "abnormal." Synod has the right to speak in this way because "when a situation is abnormal, the Church Order cannot be applied in a legalistic way" (*Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government,* p. 271).
6. A public acknowledgment of error by the NACRC congregation would serve as a necessary and helpful step toward reconciliation and healing in the denomination. Publicly confessing our sins to one another is a part of what we are called to do as a Christian community, and it will allow those who have been hurt over NACRC's actions the opportunity to extend forgiveness.

Classis Columbia
Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 10: Allow Neland Avenue CRC and Like-minded Churches to Resign Membership from the CRCNA

Classis Iakota overtures synod to give Neland Avenue CRC and all like-minded churches who desire to read, think, and live outside of the confessional nature and bounds of authoritative Scripture the option to be allowed a one-time six-month window to resign their membership from the denomination with their assets including church property at the vote of their individual bodies.

Grounds:

1. It is clear both from the persistent actions of Neland Avenue CRC and of the lack of oversight by Classis Grand Rapids East that there is no longer a way forward in conversation if we cannot read the holy Scriptures in mutual agreement.
2. It is the unfortunate consequence of those affirming same-sex marriage to have broken covenant in this way with the body of the CRC and the living and historical church universal. By its actions Neland Avenue CRC is not only disagreeing with the decisions of synod but also showing disregard for the decisions of synod.
3. In this way a resignation of membership can occur without the need for further church discipline to proceed.
4. This act of mutual separation will allow for healing to take place within both the majority body that remains and those who are now freed to live and minister as they have already deemed fit.

Classis Iakota
Bernard J. Haan, stated clerk

Overture 11: Rescind Action of the Council of Delegates in Sending a Letter to the Council of Neland Avenue CRC

Classis Grand Rapids East overtures synod to rescind the action of the Council of Delegates in sending a letter to the Council of Neland Avenue CRC expressing disappointment and grieving Neland Avenue CRC's decision to ordain a person who is in a same-sex marriage to the office of deacon.

Grounds:

1. The Council of Delegates usurped the authority of the local council and local classis.
2. The proper line of accountability for a situation of concern is through the local council (Neland Avenue CRC) and local classis (Grand Rapids East) to synod, by way of appeal. These assemblies had not received any appeals of the Neland council's decision and did not express concern or request assistance from the Council of Delegates.
3. The Council of Delegates could have reported the concerns it received in correspondence from other classes and churches to Synod 2021, but the COD overstepped its authority by communicating directly to a church council based on correspondence from other churches. The Council of Delegates is not an assembly of the church and therefore

ought not to act as if it has the standing of one assembly speaking to another. Neither is it intended to be the conduit of concerns that churches and classes may have about one another. In this situation, the letters from churches and classes requesting that the Council of Delegates intervene with Neland Avenue CRC should have been answered by encouraging their authors to express their concerns to Neland's council directly. The Council of Delegates has no authority to engage local councils directly regarding their decisions.

4. There was no urgency or benefit in the Council of Delegates' acting on behalf of synod in this manner that could not have waited until Synod 2021.
5. While the Council of Delegates has authority to act on behalf of synod between meetings of synod as its interim committee, that authority is constrained by whether a matter cannot wait for synod to act on it. There is nothing in this situation that could not have waited until Synod 2021.
6. The Council of Delegates' expression of disappointment to the council of Neland Avenue and grieving its decision undermines synod's deliberative responsibility in relationship to the report on human sexuality that will be considered at Synod 2021.
7. The consequence of the Council of Delegates' acting in this manner is that the deliberative process, which properly belongs to synod—not the Council of Delegates—has been undermined. The implicit message to the churches is that the reflective discernment that Synod 2021 is called to engage regarding the human sexuality study committee report has already been determined by the Council of Delegates as sustaining a traditional theological perspective and necessitating a disciplinary response to those who disagree.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Overture 12: Declare Denials of Penal Substitutionary Atonement as Heresy and Instruct Classes to Guard the Reformed Confessional Teaching of the Cross

I. Introduction

Synod 2019 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America took a bold and necessary step toward confessional fidelity when it declared its opposition to the teachings of Kinism, making a clear case from both Scripture and our Reformed confessional standards.

One particular duty was placed on the officebearers in our denomination as a whole with this motion, which was adopted:

> That synod, given the recent history of Kinist teaching in a particular church of the CRCNA, admonish councils and classes to promote confessional fidelity *and mutually to pursue special discipline of an officebearer* [emphasis added] who is found to hold views contrary to our standard.
>
> (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 818)

The cross of Jesus Christ is central and foundational to the Christian gospel. When the biblical and Reformed teaching of the cross is attacked, the very Christian faith is attacked. In the book of Jude, the church is instructed to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

Here, the faith refers not to the subjective act of believing, but the doctrinal content of the message of salvation found in the Scriptures and in biblical proclamation.

Various places in the New Testament warn us of the reality and danger of false teaching and false teachers. Entire letters emerge from the threat of false teaching (e.g., Galatians), while other books regularly intersperse warnings and instruction to renounce and avoid false teaching (e.g., Phil. 3; Titus 1; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; etc.).

Thus the church is to be on guard against threats to "the faith." One common threat to our faith is the challenge to the historic teaching of the cross which states that Jesus bore the wrath of God against the sin of his people. The historic Christian belief that Jesus satisfied God's wrath against our sin at the cross is commonly called *penal substitutionary atonement*. It is the historic view of the creeds and confessions, and of the historic Christian church. It is a central tenet of the work of Christ and essential to the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation.

This threat is most often articulated by denying that Jesus went to the cross as a way to bear God's wrath. Whatever specific form the denial takes, most begin with the foundational claim that the cross was not a way for God to judge sin in and through his Son.

This overture will not discuss every minute detail of the various expressions of teachings that deny penal substitutionary atonement (PSA), but it will address the core truth that we confess and is refuted by all denials of PSA: that Jesus bore God's wrath against sin on the cross at Calvary.

This overture, in a way like Synod 2019 and its consideration of Kinism, deals with the question of heresy. A recent study committee in the CRCNA addressed the question of heresy, and we find their definition helpful and useful for our purposes. The committee broadly defined *heresy* in this way: "Ordinarily, a heresy distorts or rejects central Christian teachings such as those in a creed or confession and threatens to divide the church and compromise the gospel message" (*Agenda for Synod 2020,* p. 75).

The denial of PSA is a fitting example of the above definition of *heresy*. Moreover, we appreciate the committee's consideration of when the term *heresy* ought to be used. They gave nine characteristics that are often present in situations of heresy. The following characteristics from the committee's list are clearly present in a denial of PSA (from *Agenda for Synod 2020,* p. 75):

> 1. Heresy typically involves serious distortion or rejection of basic or core Christian doctrines, including core Christian teachings about God, creation, humanity, or God's dealings with creatures.
>
> 2. Heresy typically contradicts doctrines that have been defined by an official church body (such as a creed or confession).
>
> 3. Heresy typically is embedded in an affirmation of Christianity, claiming to be Christian while at the same time distorting or twisting central teachings of Christianity. . . .
>
> 5. Heresy typically leads its adherents away from genuine faith in the triune God. . . .

6. Heresy typically causes inquirers and other believers to be confused about Christian teaching and thus led astray in their belief or discouraged from believing. In this way, heresy presents a special danger to the church that goes beyond its effect on its adherents.

7. Heresy typically ends up bringing disrepute on the truth of the gospel. Because it confuses people about what the gospel really is, heresy can lead those outside the Christian faith to mistakenly believe that heretical teaching is actually genuine Christianity.

The characteristics not cited here become much more applicable in specific occurrences of denying PSA, but when dealing with the biblical and theological question, we have used the above characteristics to show how even the general issue fits with both the definition of *heresy* and the threshold of when the term may be used.

II. Why should we address denials of PSA?

Some may wonder why such a clear biblical and confessional teaching needs to be dealt with by an overture at our annual synod. Our reasons are clear and simple:

1. We must be diligent in defending the historic Christian faith, especially when denials such as these are within our own walls.
2. All threats against the historic teaching of the cross must be dealt with by any church which claims allegiance to the Scriptures.
3. Currently within the CRCNA there is not universal agreement on this core gospel issue.[1]
4. The continued presence of this teaching in our denomination places a responsibility upon all officebearers to deal with the matter in integrity and faithfulness to the Scriptures and Reformed confessions.

III. A biblical overview of PSA – "In my place condemned he stood"

The Scriptures are very clear: Jesus Christ is the God-man who came to earth to bear the judgment of God upon human sin. He alone is the mediator between God and humanity and our only hope for salvation from our sin.[2]

Here are several examples of New Testament texts, which leave no doubt as to the substitutionary nature of Christ's work on the cross. What we find is that Christ bears God's just punishment for our sin in his life lived as a true human, and in his sacrificial death.

> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:20-26)

[1] See the Appendix to this overture for excerpts of sermons preached from a pulpit in the CRCNA.

[2] Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV), © 2001, Crossway.

God's righteousness is upheld through the cross, for by it the price for sin was paid. God must remain both holy and just in the outpouring of his mercy, thus a satisfactory sacrifice must be given.

> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Rom. 5:8-9)

> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. . . . (Eph. 1:7)

It is the blood of Christ which allows us to be justified, which means to be forgiven of sin and declared righteous in God's sight.

> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. . . . (Col. 1:19-22)

This passage speaks not only of the blood of Christ but also how reconciliation is achieved through the "body of flesh" and "death" of Jesus. Through these means, we are presented "holy and blameless and above reproach" before the living God.

> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:10-14)

Sin brings us under a curse, and the context for this passage is legal standing before God ("justified before God," v. 11). Thus, the curse is the punishment for sin, which is enacted by God himself; he is the One who curses his rebellious creatures, for sin cannot dwell with him.

> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet. 2:24)

Where and when did Christ bear our sins? Ultimately on the cross, that sin might be put to death in us. Where do we find healing? In his wounds. This also makes a clear allusion to Isaiah 53, which is the clearest Old Testament prophecy dealing with PSA.

> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. . . . (1 Pet. 3:18)

What did Christ do for our sins? He suffered for them. What was our standing before God prior to Christ's vicarious work? We were unrighteous and sinful. What is the result of Christ's suffering? We are able to be brought to God, proving that our unrighteousness has been dealt with.

IV. The position of our standards – "He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood"

The CRCNA is a church constituted under the Three Forms of Unity, our confessional standards. It is these we have been tasked to uphold as officers in the church. To fail to do so is to fail at our calling and to break our ordination vows.

As we survey the teaching of our standards, we find that PSA is the clear and consistent position regarding Christ's life on earth and his death on the cross. Emphasis will be added in italics at key points and phrases.

A. The Heidelberg Catechism

First, we begin with the Heidelberg Catechism, which is one of the clearest expositions from all the Reformed confessional documents of our need for satisfaction from sin through a mediator. That Mediator is Jesus Christ alone, who bears God's wrath upon our sin in his human nature and suffers all the way to death as the just punishment for our sin. Here are several questions and answers that make this case.

> Question 9: But doesn't God do us an injustice by requiring in his law what we are unable to do?
>
> Answer: No, God created human beings with the ability to keep the law. They, however, provoked by the devil, in willful disobedience, robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.
>
> Question 10: Does God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?
>
> Answer: Certainly not. God is terribly angry with the sin we are born with as well as the sins we personally commit. As a just judge, God will punish them both now and in eternity, having declared: "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."
>
> Question 12: According to God's righteous judgment we deserve punishment both now and in eternity: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor?
>
> Answer: God requires that his justice be satisfied. *Therefore, the claims of this justice must be paid in full*, either by ourselves or by another.
>
> Question 16: Why must the mediator be a true and righteous human?
>
> Answer: God's justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, *must pay for sin;* but a sinful human could never pay for others.
>
> Question 17: Why must the mediator also be true God?
>
> Answer: So that the mediator, by the power of his divinity, *might bear the weight of God's wrath in his humanity* and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.
>
> Question 18: Then who is this mediator—true God and at the same time a true and righteous human?
>
> Answer: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given to us to *completely deliver us* and make us right with God.
>
> Question 37: What do you understand by the word "suffered"?
>
> Answer: That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, *Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race*. This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, *he might*

deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

Question 38: Why did he suffer "under Pontius Pilate" as judge?

Answer: So that he, though innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge, and so *free us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us*.

Question 39: Is it significant that he was "crucified" instead of dying some other way?

Answer: Yes. By this I am convinced that he *shouldered the curse* which lay on me, since death by crucifixion was cursed by God.

B. The Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession is the oldest of our Reformed confessional standards. It should be noted that Guido De Brès, the author of this confession, wrote it at least partially to show how the Reformed churches affirmed the orthodox doctrines of the gospel.

Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ
We believe that God—who is perfectly merciful and also very just—sent the Son to assume the nature in which the disobedience had been committed, *in order to bear in it the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death. So God made known his justice toward his Son, who was charged with our sin, and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us, who are guilty and worthy of damnation, giving to us his Son to die, by a most perfect love, and raising him to life for our justification*, in order that by him we might have immortality and eternal life.

Article 21: The Atonement
We believe that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek—made such by an oath—and that he presented himself in our name before his Father, to *appease his Father's wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins, as the prophets had predicted*. For it is written that "the punishment that made us whole" was placed on the Son of God and that "by his bruises we are healed." He was "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter"; he was "numbered with the transgressors" and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent. So he paid back what he had not stolen, and he suffered—"the righteous for the unrighteous," in both his body and his soul—in such a way that when he sensed the horrible punishment required by our sins "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground." He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" *And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins.*

Therefore, we rightly say with Paul that we know nothing "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified"; we "regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord." We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever. This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus—that is, "Savior"—because he would save his people from their sins.

C. The Canons of Dort

The Canons of Dort likewise affirm the clear and consistent position of our standards regarding the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice. Following are the first three articles of the Second Main Point of Doctrine:

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires
God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. This justice requires (as God has revealed in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal

punishments, of soul as well as body. *We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.*

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ
Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's wrath, God in boundless mercy *has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.*

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death
This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

D. The teaching of contemporary testimonies: Our World Belongs to God

Contemporary testimonies are "dynamic statements," which can speak to essential matters within a particular situation and context. Our World Belongs to God, though situated within a particular context, nevertheless affirms Christ's work as a timeless truth of the gospel and source of unending comfort and power against evil.

25: *Standing in our place,* Jesus suffered during his years on earth, especially in the tortures of the cross. *He carried God's judgment on our sin—his sacrifice removed our guilt.* God raised him from the dead: he walked out of the grave, conqueror of sin and death—Lord of Life! We are set right with God, given new life, and called to walk with him in freedom from sin's dominion.

The above examples make very clear the position of our confessional standards and other documents:

Jesus Christ is the God-man who was sent to earth to bear in his body the just punishment of God for sin. He bore God's wrath and suffered for us, in order that through faith in his work we might be cleansed, justified, sanctified, and made to be forever with God.

Not only do we find this to be the position of the confessions; it is also the position of the CRCNA. Rather than a relic or icon of the past, this is the very power that we hold out to a world lost in sin and death, and the very power which God has commanded us to use for his glory in the salvation of the lost. Without clear affirmation and protection of this doctrine, we forfeit the power entrusted to us.

V. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2020 to do the following:

A. Declare that it is a grievous deviation from sound doctrine, a heresy, to in any way deny that Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection provide a substitutionary work of bearing God's wrath on our behalf because of the just punishment we deserve for our sin.

Grounds:

1. This is an error that is currently being allowed to exist within the denomination.
2. The Scriptures and confessional standards make clear the substitutionary nature of Jesus Christ's work.
3. To deny penal substitutionary atonement is to take away from the glory of our Savior.

4. To fail to take action against such heresy is to break the Covenant for Officebearers and to commit grievous sin against our Creator and Redeemer.

B. Declare that any officebearer who explicitly denies penal substitutionary atonement or promotes teachings contrary to the penal substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of special discipline in accordance with Church Order Article 83.

Grounds:

1. Church Order Article 83 states, "Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct."
2. A heresy is a serious deviation from sound doctrine, and is a teaching contrary to the Scriptures as interpreted by the Reformed confessions. Therefore, any officebearer who denies penal substitutionary atonement is seriously deviating from sound doctrine and should be subject to discipline.

C. Instruct all classes, councils, and officebearers in the CRCNA that it is our duty to uphold the clear teaching of the Scriptures and confessions on the nature of Christ's substitutionary work. Failure to do so may result in special discipline in any of the courts of the church, and will certainly result in an accounting for such negligence when one day we stand before our holy God.

Grounds:

1. As Christians, we are called to be people of the truth, with integrity and honor, and failure to defend the faith is to break the Covenant of Officebearers.
2. The church must make every effort to correct such a grievous error, that we might not continue to sin in the eyes of God.
3. Local councils are accountable to the classis, and the classes are to "ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom" (Church Order, Art. 42-b).
4. Tolerating denials of foundational gospel truth puts the CRCNA in danger of transgressing its own boundaries for what a true church is, which includes the proper exercise of church discipline (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).
5. Our witness to the world is severely damaged when we abuse the very gift that God has given as his instrument for kingdom advancement, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. Acknowledge, with lament, the distortion of the gospel and the covenant breaking that has gone on within our own denomination and has perpetuated confusion, condemnation, and the displeasure of our God and King.

Grounds:

1. As we remain diligent to uphold our theological heritage, we must name the errors that we have committed, that we might learn from them and never again repeat them.

2. Given the clarity of our Reformed confessional standards on the nature of Christ's substitutionary work, we must lament the extent of our negligence and ignorance that could have allowed for such sin to exist within our denomination.

Classis Illiana
Laryn G. Zoerhof, stated clerk

Note: Classis Illiana submitted an earlier version of this overture to Synod 2020 but decided in March 2021 to withdraw it and to resubmit it with revisions to Synod 2021.

Appendix
Sermon Excerpts Referenced in Section I

(Excerpts transcribed from audio sermons posted on the website of the church where the minister is serving.)

Excerpt 1 (from 2016):

> God sent His Son Jesus to die for my sins. Right? God sent His Son Jesus to die for my sins. So, that's kind of a starting point with faith and especially with life. So why, why would God bother to do that? Why would God bother to go to the cross for my sin? The way I see it and come to see it is that there's two possible answers to that question. Two kinds of answers.
>
> The first possible answer for why God sent Jesus to die for my sins is that God needed to do that. So the story goes something like this. God created the universe and the earth and then humanity. It was all very good. It was all perfect in fact. And then pretty much right away the humans mucked it up. We fell. Sin was introduced into the good world which was a big problem because our new condition couldn't stand up beside God's infinite goodness and justice, so God was put out, and the only way that the situation could be fixed was with a proper payment. But the payment was impossible for us because we're human, and so then the payment had to be infinite because it was an infinite wonder.
>
> So because, so God's idea was to make the payment himself by sending His Son to be sacrificed and as a human, make the payment as a human. So this way God could be satisfied and God could once again look upon humanity with favor. Is that a familiar kind of storyline to a number of, to most of you?
>
> So this option, in this option, the problem that's trying to get solved is the kind of plotline is that God is the offended party, so God's anger needs to be placated or satisfied and then but humans are incapable of doing that and so the solution has to be God's as well. So really, so the problem and the solution are all kind of God's feelings, and humans we really almost have nothing to do with it other than that we're the ones who caused the problem in the first place and now we experience a sort of gratitude that God fixed it for us and we kind of have this sense of remorse that it took such a drastic measure to make it happen.
>
> So that's one option why Jesus had to die.
>
> The other option for why God would bother to send Jesus to die for my sin is love. So I'm saying it's the other option that's love. This other option is love because I do mean to suggest that the first option might not be love. I think the first option has been familiar to me as long as I can remember but it feels more like compulsion, retribution, the story of an insatiable God who has trouble managing his appetite for blood, and Jesus essentially absorbs God's wrath. In the most crass way that I've heard it put is that Jesus takes a cosmic bullet for

us, as if God is like shooting bullets at us and Jesus steps in front of them and saves us.

The best argument I think you can make is just logic like simple logic. The formula works if you want to, and it kind of fits in like this kind of scheme of culture and sacrifice, but it, even if that's the case, even if the formula works it still isn't, I can't see the love in it. Like it seems like God is just kind of working out his own satisfaction. So what I want to talk about is love.

Excerpt 2 (from 2019):

I had taken issue with one of the ways that evangelicals commonly interpret the meaning of the cross and um, the way that people talk about atonement which is the storyline that you've probably encountered in some form, right, that God created the earth, and all humanity. It started out very good, perfect in fact but then Adam and Eve messed it up, and sin was introduced into the good world and that, the storyline goes that that created this really big problem for God because he couldn't look upon us in our kind of sinful condition, um, we couldn't stand up beside God's infinite holiness and justice. So basically God was really angry, which made it so that there was this kind of giant chasm between God's holiness and our sinfulness. And because we are so sinful there's nothing that we can do to fix the problem so the only way to make things right would be for God to send his own Son, Jesus, and then he could take out his anger on Jesus instead of us, and that would make it so that now God is satisfied, and we're kind of back to square one, we're off the hook. Have you guys heard some version of that storyline with respect to the gospel?

And that view that I just told you about, the one about this giant chasm between us and God where God is like taking out his anger. The issue there, I don't think the issue there is that people…are taking the issue too seriously or making too big of a deal out of atonement, it's that they're actually not taking it seriously enough...and I wonder if that's kind of the main reason this other storyline about God appeasing his own wrath in the death of Jesus has gotten so much traction. I wonder if why that is because it's actually kind of an easier way to think about it…if we can pin it all on God, then we can avoid having to face up to the reality of our own place in this process our own participation and our own, kind of reality of the situation of our own anger and fragmentation, and our own wrath. That's what this James Allison guy says, or asks, "Who is actually the angry divinity in the story of atonement?...Who is the angry divinity?" He asks, and then he says, "We are. That is the purpose of atonement. We are the angry divinity, we are the ones inclined to dwell in wrath and think that we need vengeance in order to survive."

This I think is one of the most crucial moves that we need to make in order to really understand the significance of the life and death of Jesus is the question of who the atonement is actually happening to.

It's not God who needs to change. It's not God who needs to be reconciled, it's not God who needs to work out God's stuff. It's us. We are the ones who are disconnected from ourselves, we are disconnected from each other, we are disconnected from the earth, and we are disconnected from God.

And that's what the story of atonement addresses. It's not God resolving his anger and fragmentation, it's God confronting us in the midst of ours. And that, I think, is just really important to let that settle in that there is no vengeance in God. God is not interested in trying to even the score, or settle debts, or fulfill obligations, or exact retribution. God's justice is always only a matter of restoration and reconciliation.

Overture 13: Honor Ordination of a Reformed Church in America Commissioned Pastor if Called to a CRC Congregation

I. Background

A joint resolution (widely known as the "Pella Accord") adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) at the joint synod meeting of 2014 calls for the churches of the two denominations to work together whenever and wherever possible (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 502-504). To do this, we are tasked to make efforts to remove, or reduce, obstacles that stand in the way of this collaborative work. There is a desire in both denominations to plant and grow churches that are union churches, dually affiliated churches, or joint efforts of the two denominations. This desire calls us to raise up leaders who can be delegated to the broader assemblies of the two denominations. Ministers of the Word from both denominations already are eligible to attend broader assemblies when on loan to the other denomination.

However, the role of commissioned pastor is an office in the CRCNA but not in the RCA, where it is a commissioning to a task, thus making commissioned pastors from the RCA, serving in CRCNA churches, currently ineligible to be delegated to our broader assemblies. To facilitate mutuality and hospitality, we overture synod as follows:

II. Overture

Classis Arizona overtures Synod 2021 to declare that persons who serve as a commissioned pastor in the Reformed Church in America (RCA), if called to serve in a Christian Reformed congregation or in a dually affiliated RCA/CRCNA congregation or church plant, receive all the rights and privileges of those who have been ordained to the office of commissioned pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), including the eligibility to be delegated to the broader assemblies.

Grounds:

1. This honors the intentions of the joint Resolution on the Relationship between the RCA and the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 502-504).
2. This allows the churches to benefit from the wisdom and expertise of those outside our denomination.
3. This gives appropriate voice to all commissioned pastors serving in our churches (see Church Order Articles 38-g, -h, and 45).

Classis Arizona
Jose Rayas, stated clerk

Overture 14: Appoint a Licensing Board to Ensure Better-Trained CRCNA Leadership regarding Abuse of Power

I. Background

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has been diligent in developing and implementing ways to prevent, educate, and respond to abuse throughout the denomination since 1994.

The Safe Church Ministry Office specifically has led the CRCNA denomination into increased understanding of abuse prevention, abuse response, and abuse education. We are thankful for this important and excellent service.

II. Scripture support

- 1 Samuel 2:22-25 (Hophni and Phinehas at the tabernacle)
- 2 Samuel 11-12, (David, Bathsheba, and prophet Nathan)
- Jeremiah 5:30-31; 6:13-15; 8:10b-12 ("'Peace, peace' . . . when there is no peace.")
- Ezekiel 34:1-16 (shepherds who serve themselves)
- Matthew 23 (Jesus confronts the Pharisees)
- John 19 (trial and abuse of Jesus Christ)
- Acts 7:54 -60; Acts 8:1-3 (stoning of Stephen, Saul's approval, Saul began to destroy the church)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.)
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25; 3:16 ("All Scripture is God-breathed. . . .")
- Titus 1:6-8 ("An elder must be . . .")

III. Overture

I, Judy De Wit, overture synod to instruct the Council of Delegates to appoint a licensing board composed of clergy, social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists, mental health professionals, and clinicians to ensure better-trained and -equipped leadership in the Christian Reformed Church.

The leadership provided by pastors and commissioned pastors would be strengthened by serving under the authority of a CRCNA pastor-licensing board.

1. This board shall ensure the completion of training requirements for all ordained pastors and commissioned pastors for each reporting year and shall be responsible for issuing license renewals. The licensing board shall be informed of allegations of abuse against any licensed pastors.

2. This board shall have the authority to withhold a license from a pastor if/when there is failure to complete training requirements or should allegations of abuse be pending.

3. This board shall consist of pastors, elders, clinicians, mental health workers, marriage and family therapists, and psychologists.

   Grounds:

   a. When CRC pastors govern themselves, abuse of power increases.
   b. A pastor-licensing board
      - reduces the elder and council protection of pastors and increases accountability.
      - reduces abuse of authority and supports humble servant-like leadership.
      - increases awareness of a willingness to comply with denominational recommendations.

c. The master of divinity degree is a master-level degree and is equal to other master-level degrees and positions that answer to licensing boards, who are required to meet training requirements per renewal year, and, as pastors, serve the public as most other board-licensed master-level positions.

Judy De Wit, member of Hancock (Minn.) CRC

Note: The above overture was processed through the local council of Hancock (Minn.) CRC on February 9, 2021, and through Classis Lake Superior but was not adopted.

Overture 15: Approve Use of Mental Health Professionals to Serve as Abuse Educators, Trainers, and Advocates

I. Background

As churches continue to gain understanding about abuse, it is apparent that some of the abuse training and advocacy work can be diverted to local competent mental health professionals.

II. Scripture support

- 1 Samuel 2:22-25 (Hophni and Phinehas at the tabernacle)
- 2 Samuel 11-12, (David, Bathsheba, and prophet Nathan)
- Jeremiah 5:30-31; 6:13-15; 8:10b-12 ("'Peace, peace' . . . when there is no peace.")
- Ezekiel 34:1-16 (shepherds who serve themselves)
- Matthew 23 (Jesus confronts the Pharisees)
- John 19 (trial and abuse of Jesus Christ)
- Acts 7:54 -60; Acts 8:1-3 (stoning of Stephen, Saul's approval, Saul began to destroy the church)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.)
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25; 3:16 ("All Scripture is God-breathed. . . .")
- Titus 1:6-8 ("An elder must be . . .")

III. Overture

I, Judy De Wit, overture synod regarding the following:

A. That synod approve that competent mental health professionals can be utilized for advocacy services and abuse education and prevention training even if they have not been formally trained by Safe Church Ministry.

Grounds:

1. There is a shortage of trained Safe Church Office ministry advocates.
2. Timely training is more likely to occur when local professionals are asked to lead training for churches, councils, and classis.

Note: Individuals not trained by Safe Church Ministry would not serve on advisory panels.

B. That synod allow competent mental health professionals who are not trained under the Safe Church Ministry Office to utilize CRCNA resources (e.g., *The Banner*) to advertise their training and advocacy services and to be referred and recommended by Safe Church Ministry Office staff.

Ground: Utilizing CRC resources, like *The Banner*, helps victims and churches to know who provides training and advocacy services outside of Safe Church Ministry Office personnel.

Judy De Wit, member of Hancock (Minn.) CRC

Note: This overture was processed through the local council of Hancock (Minn.) CRC and through Classis Lake Superior but was not adopted.

Overture 16: Suspend Duties of Classical, Synodical, and Council of Delegates Members Who Face Allegations of Abuse

I. Background

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has been diligent in developing and implementing ways to prevent, educate, and respond to abuse throughout and within the denomination since 1994.

More recent events regarding work done to address abuse issues are evident in the Abuse Victims Task Force Report of 2010, the abuse report of 2014 (Review of Judicial Code), and Bev Sterk's overture adopted by Synod 2018.

Affirmed by Synod 2018 and by Synod 2019 in the adoption of the Committee Addressing the Abuse of Power report, we are aware that more needs to be done to address the subject of abuse of power by CRCNA pastors and church leaders.

II. Scripture support

- 1 Samuel 2:22-25 (Hophni and Phinehas at the tabernacle)
- 2 Samuel 11-12, (David, Bathsheba, and prophet Nathan)
- Jeremiah 5:30-31; 6:13-15; 8:10b-12 ("'Peace, peace' . . . when there is no peace.")
- Ezekiel 34:1-16 (shepherds who serve themselves)
- Matthew 23 (Jesus confronts the Pharisees)
- John 19 (trial and abuse of Jesus Christ)
- Acts 7:54 -60; Acts 8:1-3 (stoning of Stephen, Saul's approval, Saul began to destroy the church)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.)
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25; 3:16 ("All Scripture is God-breathed. . . .")
- Titus 1:6-8 ("An elder must be . . .")

III. Overture

I, Judy De Wit, overture synod to declare that persons who serve in classical, synodical, and Council of Delegate positions who have pending allegations of abuse, including abuse of power allegations, shall be suspended from their positions of leadership until the Church Order process is resolved and the ministry of reconciliation is complete.

Ground: To allow persons accused of abuse to continue in leadership roles places complainants at a disadvantage by maintaining power differentials that favor alleged abusers.

Judy De Wit, member of Hancock (Minn.) CRC

Note: This overture was processed through the local council of Hancock (Minn.) CRC and through Classis Lake Superior but was not adopted.

Overture 17: Discern a Process to Combine Previous Synodical Decisions for Challenging Conversations

The council of Lantern Community CRC, Calgary, Alberta, overtures Synod 2021 to empower a delegate (COD or other) to discern a process so that the CRCNA can follow, and fuse together whenever possible, two previous synodical decisions for all challenging conversations, including the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (HSR). As a good process is discerned, the COD/synod should recommend this process or other "'best practices" to congregations and classes for local and regional use.

A. Synod 2016 decision: "That synod advise the classes and congregations to invite, as much as possible, the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members when dealing with matters that affect the lives and discipleship of same-sex attracted members within the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 929).

B. Synod 2019 decision:

That synod be intentional about providing opportunity for purposeful dialogue during synod, including the following considerations:

1) Schedule time in plenary sessions and/or advisory committee meetings, and/or elsewhere in the schedule of synod to encourage space for dialogue.
2) Provide time for dialogue in connection with significant and challenging topics and/or recommendations to be voted on, to encourage learning and listening.
3) Develop processes for learning from and listening to each other and the Holy Spirit.
4) Offer discussion guidelines for being genuinely curious and for learning from each other.
5) Use the process of an Indigenous talking circle (found to be effective by this task force) or other methods so that everyone has an opportunity to be heard in a group discussion.
6) In group discussions, account for diversity and different learning and discussion styles.
7) Provide tools for committee and group leaders to use.

Grounds:

a) Difficult issues need deep, well-facilitated discussions that promote a deliberative process to help ensure listening and learning.
b) The current model offers space for only a few speakers to voice opinions for or against motions.
c) Shepherding committees have had significant success using listening and learning dialogue methods, as have other bodies such as the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

d) Workshop/learning times scheduled in recent synods have provided some helpful examples of dialoguing.
e) Agenda items related to study committee reports have helped determine when dialogue is needed.

(Synod Review Task Force recommendation, *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 808-809)

Grounds:

1. As we are processing the human sexuality report in our church, people are saying something like this: "The 2016 and 2019 decisions above say that we want to include same-sex attracted members in this denominational conversation. Will we permit God to speak through same-sex people and couples who are doing their best to live as disciples of Jesus?"
2. There is much good to discuss in the report, yet in relation to gay marriage, this report is exasperating some of the young people and adults connected to our church, as well as surfacing some pain from our past.[1] Some want to leave, and others wonder if they are being pushed out, as they try to love God and the real LGBTQ+ people in their lives whose stories are not represented in the report. Specifically the report does not leave room to discuss any hermeneutic that tries to humbly leave room to follow Jesus within a lifelong, monogamous, same-sex marriage. Teaching that does not agree with the conclusions of this report is abeled as revisionist false teaching that does not reflect the true church. We are telling our people that this report does not represent all of who we are as a denomination, and that we have made these two good decisions that can be fused together and help enter some hard conversations that will help us all learn, grow, repent where needed, and try to humbly follow Jesus in our lives.
3. We recognize that Synod 2016 decided not to create a recurring panel of same-sex attracted advisers. But Synod 2016 did wisely advise congregations and classes to invite the meaningful involvement of same-sex attracted members when those gatherings are discussing matters that affect the lives of those members. It would seem reasonable that synod, too, would follow its own advice in this matter. This meaningful involvement is made more possible as synod discerns new ways for conversation (as per Synod 2019), ways where non-delegates could participate in meaningful ways. So we suggest there is wisdom in synod inviting the meaningful involvement of same-sex attracted members to synodical dialogues and deliberations that affect the lives of those members.
4. Synodical meetings have not yet utilized the wisdom of Synod 2019 in its adoption of the recommendations of the Synod Review Task Force. As such, and given the significance of this deliberation around the human sexuality report, there is much discernment needed in how to shape a purposeful dialogical process. The COD is in the position, both

[1] We are a small church that has always welcomed LBGTQ+ people. Over the years, we have grieved over many who have left our church: some people have found us too welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community, and some LGBTQ+ have left because we're not welcoming enough. To help process the human sexuality report, one of our leaders recently participated in the Challenging Conversations Toolkit Facilitator Training recommended by Pastor-Church Relations—we love the CRC and are discerning next steps. It is also important to note that our church is also very concerned about exasperated youth and young adults who love Jesus but are having a hard time accepting this report.

in terms of representation and authority, to imagine how best to have this deliberation on how to help the CRCNA follow its own adopted recommendation, and to implement it with the appropriate partnerships as we approach this synodical deliberation. Having this process in place, in advance of synodical deliberation, will prepare the way for healthier spirit-led deliberation at synod.

5. The decisions of 2016 and 2019, coupled with a thoughtful process of how to implement them, can be recommended to churches and classes, also preparing the way for healthier spirit-led deliberation at synod.

Council of Lantern Community CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Layne Kilbreath, clerk

Note: This overture was presented to Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan but was not adopted, so the council of Lantern Community CRC, Calgary, Alberta, has forwarded it to synod.

Overture 18: Adopt the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality[1]

I. Background

Synod 2016 appointed

> a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task [was] to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.
> (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 919-20)

II. Overture

Classis Holland overtures synod to adopt the report and recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. The study committee report is timely and needed as our congregations struggle to minister with grace and truth in a society where sexual norms are constantly changing.
2. The report fulfills the mandate of Synod 2016 by providing clear interpretation and explanation that faithfully honors God's will as revealed in Scripture and offers avenues of ministry for and with each other in our common struggle with sexual sin.
3. The recommendations of the report provide a biblical and confessional foundation on which our churches and our members can be united to

[1] The Human Sexuality report is accessible online at crcna.org/SynodResources and will be printed in the *Agenda for Synod 2022*. References to page numbers in that report, as noted in the following overtures, reflect the pagination of the report posted online.

extend the love of Christ to one another and the world into which we are called to go and make disciples.

Classis Holland
Calvin Hoogstra, stated clerk

Overture 19: Adopt the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation–laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2021 to adopt the synodical report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation–laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Ground: The findings and conclusions of the report regarding human sexuality are consistent with the Bible, our confessions, and our Covenant for Officebearers in the following ways:

1. Consistent with the Bible

   The report to the churches offers much biblical teaching regarding human sexuality, as well as sound pastoral advice concerning this area of our lives. The verses below are a sampling of numerous Scripture passages throughout the report that have been expounded, applied, and used even to correct the revisionist arguments to affirm sexual immorality (i.e., pp. 97-113, where revisionist claims are refuted from the clear teaching of the Bible).

   Matthew 19:1-10; Genesis 1; Genesis 2; Acts 15:20; Galatians 3:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 1:10; Romans 1:24-27; Romans 1:32; Matthew 5:28; James 1:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11; Galatians 5:19-22; Ephesians 5:5-7; Jude 1-4; 2 Timothy 4:3; Ezekiel 33:8

   Note: The committee presents a much-needed warning of how important it is to rightly understand and teach the Bible lest we confuse following the Holy Spirit with following another spirit (p. 111):

   > It is one thing to reexamine Scripture, but it is quite another thing to ignore the clear and consistent teaching of Scripture in order to reach an alternative reading of the key texts and then claim that this all happened through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Is it not equally possible that all this happened through the guidance of another "spirit"—the "spirit" of our secular age and contemporary culture (1 John 4:1-3)? Is it not equally possible that what the Holy Spirit is leading the church to do today is not to change its interpretation of Scripture (after all, it is the same Holy Spirit speaking to the church today as to the church of Paul's day) but to challenge contemporary Christians to love better and minister more effectively to those who are attracted to the same sex?

2. Consistent with the confessions

   The report is in agreement with Lord's Day 41, Q.&A. 108, of the Heidelberg Catechism; Lord's Day 32, Q.&A. 87; and Belgic Confession, Article 29, especially where this confession describes the marks of a true Christian: "namely, faith, and when, having received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turning aside to the right or left, and

crucify the flesh with the works thereof. . . . they fight against [great infirmities], through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in Him."

The committee stated that our current teaching on homosexual sex already has confessional status and should be recognized as such:

> *D.* That synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status. (p. 149)

3. Consistent with the Covenant for Officebearers

The purpose of requiring church leaders to sign the Covenant for Officebearers is accountability to God and to the church in which they make their promises to be faithful to the Bible and to our confessions. Because the report is in agreement with the Bible and our confessions, adopting the report would not unbiblically violate anyone's conscience and would help to ensure that our church leaders are faithfully leading God's people in his Word and gospel.

Note 1: See Church Order Supplement, Article 5 for the text of the Covenant for Officebearers and Guidelines and Regulations re Gravamina.

Note 2: See also Church Order Article 20, noting especially that Article 20 requires ministers who are appointed as professors of theology to train seminary students are required also to "vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors."

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 20: Amend Recommendations of the Human Sexuality Report; Continue Deliberation re Human Sexuality; Delegate the Issue of Same-Sex Marriage as a Decision of Local Conscience

I. Overture submitted by three assemblies

As The Road CRC (Calgary, Alta.) council, First CRC (Toronto, Ont.) council, and delegates to Classis Toronto, we have received this overture from a group of post-secondary students. As the only avenue available to them to have their voices heard at synod is to follow the flow from congregation to classis to synod, the two councils have adopted the full overture and Classis Toronto has adopted the first two recommendations. The following content was written by these students in their own voices. (Several of the students involved in writing this overture are members of either The Road CRC or First CRC, Toronto.) The council of The Road CRC presented the overture to Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, but the overture was not adopted; thus the council is presenting this overture to synod because the council believes it is important for the voices of the authors to be heard. Because Classis Toronto adopted only the first two recommendations of the overture presented by the council of First CRC, Toronto, the council of First CRC is submitting

the full overture, and Classis Toronto is submitting the first two recommendations only.

The councils of The Road CRC and First CRC, Toronto, overture synod to act on the following three recommendations; Classis Toronto overtures synod to act on only the first two recommendations:

A. Make amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

B. Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues.

C. Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue).

II. Introduction to student authors

This overture is a collaborative effort by over twenty-five students across ten post-secondary campuses. Our team includes student representatives from six post-secondary institutions who have ties to the CRCNA (Calvin University, The King's University, Redeemer University, Trinity Christian College, the Institute for Christian Studies, and Calvin Theological Seminary) as well as students from several other post-secondary institutions[1] who heard of the efforts and asked to join the cause. The school with the most representation is Calvin University, with seven students. Our passion for both the church and LGBTQIA+ concerns inspired us to collaborate, blessing us with new connections and an enriching experience. We are diverse in

- gender: Male, female and nonbinary people were represented
- sexual identity: Both straight and queer sexual identities were represented
- ethnicity: White American, White Canadian, Dutch American, Jewish, Chinese Canadian, Japanese American, Hispanic, Latino
- geographical location: Alberta, British Columbia, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Ontario, South Dakota
- age: 19 to 45 years with 20 members of the group under age 25 years

Several churches offered to bring this overture to their councils. In the end, this overture was adopted by several church councils and forwarded to the classical level for consideration.

Why did we choose to write this collaborative overture in addition to involvement in our local congregations? We wanted to follow the intended flow of Church Order from local congregation to classis to synod, and, as a result, many of us were also involved in overture efforts within our local congregations. However, it seemed important also to submit an overture entirely written and signed by post-secondary students, because we have unique concerns, a unique voice, and may be underrepresented in these conversations. Although we were approached with requests from youth, alumni, chaplains, and

[1] Augustana University (Sioux Falls), Seattle Pacific University, University of Western Ontario, Wycliffe College (Toronto School of Theology, U of T), Knox College (Toronto School of Theology, U of T), University of Toronto.

faculty members to join the efforts, we limited involvement in this overture to post-secondary students only. We advised the other contacts to engage via their own congregations. While assembling our team, we discovered three categories of post-secondary students who wanted to be involved.

1. Current and active CRCNA members who have serious concerns with the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (nineteen students from ten CRCNA classes who represent the majority of the team and primary authors of this overture[2])
2. Students who were CRCNA members at one time but no longer consider themselves CRCNA members and no longer attend a CRCNA local congregation because of the pain and harm experienced around CRCNA's posture toward human sexuality issues (one student)
3. Students who are not CRCNA members but are attending schools with ties to the CRCNA and/or care deeply about the flourishing of the denomination (seven students[3])

As such, in the Personal Impact Statements section below, students are identified by name, post-secondary institution, and CRCNA membership if applicable.

We write to you because we care deeply about the health and unity of the CRCNA. Some of us may even be future ministers or leaders (or current lay leaders) within the CRCNA. We take God's Word very seriously as well as the ongoing flourishing of the church now and into the future. First and foremost, our hearts cry out for unity, forbearance, and a commitment to Christian communion. The mystery of God's will has been revealed to us in Christ, and its goal is the unity of all things in Christ. "With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Eph. 1:8-10, NIV).

We acknowledge a charitable posture toward the committee and gratitude for their many efforts so far. We strongly agree with Synod 2016's grounds for

[2] CRCNA members who signed this overture: Andrews, Jessica (The Road CRC in Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan); Beck, Renya (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Bouman, Abigail (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Bouma, Emily (River Park CRC in Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan); Bonsma, Ben (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Bonsma-Fisher, Madeleine (First CRC, Toronto, in Classis Toronto); de Boer, Shayanne (Redeemer CRC in Classis Chatham); Clemens, Jonathan (First CRC, Toronto, in Classis Toronto); DeJager, Catherine (Washington, D.C., CRC in Classis Hackensack); Elgersma, Kat (First CRC, Denver, in Classis Rocky Mountain); Klompmaker, Kirsten (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Krale, Lauren (CrossPoint CRC in Classis Toronto); Lise, Nathan (Holland Marsh CRC in Classis Toronto); Overbeek, Nicholas (Calvin CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Roseboom, Michelle (Terrace CRC in Classis B.C. North-West); Schat, Kyra (First Hamilton CRC in Classis Hamilton); Tuit, Samuel (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Jodi VanWingerden (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Tolsma, Theoren (Fleetwood CRC in Classis B.C. South-East).

[3] Non-CRCNA members (or no longer members) who signed this overture: De Martinez, Brandon (Calvin University); Ford, Maggie (Redeemer University); Murashima, Claire (Calvin University); Newton, Jo (Calvin University); Barz, Ross (Trinity Christian College); Salamun, Sean (Calvin University); Van Arragon, Emma (The King's University); Young, Justus (Calvin University).

the human sexuality committee in that "the consideration of *status confessionis* is a **weighty matter** that requires **extended and careful deliberation**" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 3). We lament that from its very inception, both in committee makeup and synod-assigned mandate, this committee fell short of the deep vulnerability and humility required of "careful deliberation" which, in our understanding of the term, would have required a posture of balanced openness to conflicting biblical and theological viewpoints and extensive listening, particularly to harmed and marginalized voices among us. We are saddened that the restricted synodical mandate from the outset put the committee members in a tricky and contentious position, and our hearts go out to them as our family members in the body of Christ. We experience this as a flawed process with the resulting report falling short of our Reformed heritage and values of fairness, perspicacity, and thorough biblical scholarship as well as being deeply hurtful for its exclusion of the godly voices and perspectives of LGBTQIA+ family members and allies among us.

III. Background

In response to multiple overtures, Synod 2016 created the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (henceforth referred to as the human sexuality committee) with a mandate to

> articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin. . . .
>
> (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 919-20)

At the end of October 2020, the report of the human sexuality committee was published in preparation for deliberation at Synod 2021. We commend the committee for their five years of hard work in addressing a multitude of concepts related to human sexuality, including pornography, gender identity, homosexuality, singleness, premarital sex and cohabitation, polyamory, divorce, and sexual desire. The report highlights the challenges of our current contemporary cultural context around issues of human sexuality, and it seems as though its recommendations are based on a genuine desire by its members to demonstrate loyalty and submission to the authority of Scripture (even though we disagree with some of their conclusions). However, the report is lacking in the following key areas:

- It insufficiently meets the goal of "extended and careful deliberation" of these "weighty matters" of human sexuality.
- It insufficiently reflects and represents the membership of the CRCNA.
- It lacks constructive suggestions or guidance for how our denomination might move forward in unity to continue to fulfill our Christian mission while respecting the lack of consensus on human sexuality issues.

A note regarding timing: We acknowledge that this response is limited by the timeline and will lack the level of in-depth study and analysis we would have preferred to include. As such, major areas of concern will be noted, but analysis will be brief or absent. Although "prior opportunity" (according to Church Order Article 47) was met since the final report was published Oct. 29, 2020, the report is much longer than typical committee reports, and therefore the timeline provided between October 29, 2020, to March 15, 2021, was insufficient to thoughtfully and thoroughly engage with all aspects of the 175 pages. To meet the Church Order requirements for submitting an overture through both church council and classis, overtures needed to be completed by the turn of the year. After taking into account student responsibilities with midterms and finals, this left very little time in November and December to organize as a group and respond well to this report. We believe that the "how" of being God's people is as important as "what" we believe and that we are not called to be frantic or rushed, especially in grappling with such important matters. It seems to us that we and many of our contacts within the CRCNA, out of polite respect and good faith in the human sexuality committee, have waited for the final outcome of this report only to be seriously disappointed in the lack of balance therein. We grieve that the result of this will likely be further delay in providing clear, ethical guidance or any prompt resolution to these issues.

*A. The human sexuality report insufficiently meets the goal of "extended and careful deliberation" of these "weighty matters" of human sexuality as referred to in the report's mandate (*Acts of Synod 2016, *pp. 926-27; Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 3)*

Article 29 of the Church Order states that "decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon **due consideration**." In light of the clearly lacking denominational consensus regarding credible, sincerely held biblical interpretations around LGBTQIA+ issues, the human sexuality report does not meet an acceptable standard of careful deliberation or due consideration. The human sexuality report can be received as a hearty effort into exploring a traditional view of biblical and theological scholarship, but it remains a partial effort toward due diligence in adequately examining these issues—certainly not meeting the standard of due consideration required for either *status confessionis*, confessional status, or any change to Church Order. Additional study and listening to supplement the work of the current human sexuality committee is needed.

1. The report insufficiently presents vigorous discussion or exploration of biblical and theological support in favor of same-sex marriage and full inclusion and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people.

2. The report insufficiently engaged in robust listening. For example, only four LGBTQIA+ people were interviewed for this report (p. 4). In the range of personal stories included in the report, there were no stories that depicted faithful, married same-sex couples. Theoretical research was given precedence over listening to the voices of real people. In-depth local conversations have also not yet been fostered. There is work yet to do, and we cannot consider these teachings settled and binding without generous, extensive listening to our CRCNA members.

3. There is much contested about the report's claim that "the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status" (p. 149). According to CRCNA Church Order expert Dr. Henry DeMoor, the report claims confessional status around same-sex relationships where none exists.[4] (There is also confusion around the use of the terms *status confessionis* and confessional status, which seem to be used interchangeably but may have two different definitions.[5])

4. The report insufficiently addresses the potential for a new movement of the Holy Spirit or the abundant evidence of the fruit of the Spirit present in the lives of faithful LGBTQIA+ Christians.

5. The report does not engage in the level of balanced study or formal listening that we have seen modeled by fellow Reformed denominations.

   For example, the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC) is currently grappling with the issue of same-sex marriage. Part of its methodology was for its Committee on Church Doctrine to appoint two teams of learned and gifted people. One team thoroughly articulated the biblical foundations and theological arguments for a traditional view of marriage as only between one man and one woman, and the second team thoroughly articulated the biblical foundations and theological arguments for a view affirming same-sex marriage. They also attended to the growing evidence of harm done to LGBTQIA+ people and its pastoral implications within Christian communities. In this way they presented a balanced resource to their general assembly (synod) and membership for listening and learning regarding this issue. After this document was shared and widely considered within the PCC, the general assembly decided to draw up legislation that allows for same-sex marriage and ordination of married LGBTQI clergy while it also allows for freedom of conscience on the matter. This legislation was voted on by each local presbytery (classis), and about 70 percent of these voted in favor of the new legislation. In 2021 this legislation is going back to the general assembly for a final vote.[6] [7] In regard to listening to marginalized people, the 2019 General Assembly declared it "a matter of urgency . . . [to] provide a means for those affected by this decision to express their concerns, views, and pain in a safe environment, and that these concerns be reported back to the 2020 General Assembly"; and the 2017 General Assembly had already "established a listening committee, the Rainbow Communion, to create safe space for LGTBQ+ persons to tell of their experiences in the church."[8]

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[4] DeMoor, Henry. *Status Confessionis,* The Network, Nov. 11, 2020. Retrieved Dec. 31, 2020, from network.crcna.org/church-order/status-confessionis.

[5] Please refer to Overture 28 from Classis Toronto and its discussion of *status confessionis*.

[6] Email communication with Dr. Charles Fensham (Knox College professor), Dec. 31, 2020.

[7] Kendall, Stephen and Muir, Don; *2019 General Assembly: Summary of decisions regarding human sexuality,* June 2019, the Presbyterian Church in Canada; retrieved Dec. 31, 2020, from file:///media/fuse/drivefs-6d44a3bacf91b5e895d80cab61e3d569/root/PCC/2019-General-Assembly-Decisions-re-Sexuality.pdf.

[8] Currie, Amanda; Letter from the Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly, Sept. 3, 2019, the Presbyterian Church in Canada; retrieved Dec. 31, 2020, from file:///media/fuse/drivefs-6d44a3bacf91b5e895d80cab61e3d569/root/PCC/Pastoral-Letter-from-the-Moderator-2019.pdf.

6. The report insufficiently engages with the potential that changing our minds to increased acceptance and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people may be a deeply devout response, particularly in relationship to the harm being caused by nonaffirming theology.

7. The matter of current and historical harm done toward LGBTQIA+ people at the hands of the church is insufficiently addressed in this report.

   a. As we continue in careful deliberation around these human sexuality issues and a Christian pastoral response, it is essential that we highlight and grapple with the issue of harm toward LGBTQIA+ people at the hands of the church. Theology that does harm calls into question the validity of the theology and biblical interpretation itself.

   b. The human sexuality report has the potential to do harm by assuming that those with developmental sexual disorders or those who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a "disordered sexuality" (p. 19) and that this is a result of the fall. There is no clear teaching in Scripture on this. This is an exceedingly important distinction due to the close connection between one's gender and sexual identity and one's identity as God's imagebearer.

   c. We have several pastoral care concerns with the report. For example, in the gender identity section, the report says that using correct names and pronouns decreases suicide risk, but the report immediately follows this by suggesting that congregations need not use correct names and pronouns if they do not want to (p. 86).

   d. Length of process—Although delay is required for careful deliberation, we acknowledge that further delay in providing resolution to many of these issues of human sexuality is painful to individuals, families, and congregations.

Continued careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues is still required. Practical suggestions to this end are offered in the overture section that follows.

B. The human sexuality report insufficiently reflects and represents the membership of the CRCNA

The report was written by a committee that was restricted in both its make-up and mandate. This restriction does not reflect the broad lack of consensus on these issues within the CRCNA and therefore provides imbalanced biblical and theological interpretations and recommendations.

1. In the 2014 survey by the Calvin College Center for Social Research, 21 percent of church members, 31 percent of CRCNA students, and 14 percent of ministers agreed with same-sex marriage.[9] Furthermore, 17 percent of church members, 34 percent of CRCNA students, and 16 percent of pastors surveyed said that gay Christians should celebrate the sexual

[9] Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (majority report) 2016, Appendix A, p. 49; retrieved Dec. 31, 2020, from crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf.

identity God has given them.[10] The human sexuality report misrepresents a singular biblical interpretation as an already settled matter. There are clearly a spectrum of beliefs on this issue within the CRCNA, and therefore it is unwise and injurious to promote a one-sided report to confessional status in light of this reality.

2. Committee make-up was restricted to adherence to the CRC's 1973 teaching regarding homosexuality. Restricting the allowed viewpoints on a study committee is discriminatory, reflects poor governance, and is inconsistent with the CRCNA's historical methods and its ethos of valuing thoughtful, multifaceted scholarship and engagement.

3. Synod 2016 requested that a chaplain or campus minister be on this committee as a way to represent the diversity of pastoral vocations in the CRCNA. When the committee member that was a campus minister, and perhaps most closely in touch with students such as ourselves, had to resign in 2017 because of his move to Korea, he was not replaced even though there were still three years remaining before the due date for the report's publication (Nov. 1, 2020).

4. Synod 2016 specifically articulated its desire that a person who identifies as "gender dysphoric" serve on the committee. As far as we can tell, no one who identified as gender dysphoric was ever on the committee, and the committee consultation with one "FtM (female to male) transgender person and his father" (p. 4) was very late in their process (May 28, 2020). Given the clarity of this representation desired by Synod 2016, this minimal interaction from the committee is insufficient.

5. Even if the compositional mandate of the committee as desired by Synod 2016 had been met, the representation of gender minorities and sexual minorities on the committee and in the consultative process is markedly insufficient, especially noting the perspectival requirement around adherence to 1973.

6. Representation of young adults was missing on the human sexuality committee. Nobody who signed the report was under the age of 40 years. As post-secondary students, most of whom are young adults, we recognize that young adults may navigate these questions differently than other age groups. In our experience, the younger generation is generally more accepting of unity amid diversity and remaining in the tension of uncertainty. We tend to be more sensitive to power dynamics that exist because of the influences of patriarchy, colonization, and racism. These are valued parts of our worldview that we feel will serve us well as we faithfully navigate our present and future cultural contexts. We, as the younger generation, are deeply interested in the content of this report because we will carry the long-term burden of its ramifications. We also lament the increasing loss of our age group among church membership. For example, in reaching out to post-secondary institutions, numerous students told us that they could not, with integrity, be involved with this overture because they had "already left the CRC far behind" because of its posture toward

[10] Ibid., p. 53.

LGBTQIA+ people. We ask that you "listen to the voices of every generation,"[11] as the CRCNA has made this a denominational priority in *Our Journey 2025*.

7. There is a lack of collective congregational leadership experience among the human sexuality committee members.[12] Pastors may become experts on fostering unity among nonunified congregations to continue worshiping together despite disagreement. We can imagine that the wisdom gained through navigating "worship wars," differences of conviction regarding women in church office, and even the recent COVID-19 crisis around worship in person versus worshiping online would be helpful wisdom to guide a denomination toward unity, even when there is not a consensus around the issues of human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage). This type of wisdom does not seem to be accentuated in this report.

C. The human sexuality report lacks constructive suggestions and guidance for how our denomination might move forward in unity to continue to fulfill our Christian mission while respecting the lack of consensus on human sexuality issues

1. The human sexuality report implies that holding a view that affirms same-sex marriage is biblically heretical, condemning such as false teaching with severe words of warning (pp. 146-48). Yet there are faithful and respected individuals, leaders and scholars within the CRCNA who hold this view in their best conscience.[13] We are concerned that some of the teaching in the report will increase divisiveness within the church by unduly burdening those with traditional biblical perspectives with a fear to remain in communion with those acting upon affirming views (pp. 146-48). Generally speaking, it seems that those with LGBTQIA+ affirming views are asking their more traditional church family members to be willing to remain in communion despite disagreement. However, the report encourages those with traditional/nonaffirming views to require agreement with a singular biblical interpretation at the risk of breaching unity.

2. The report is inconsistent with precedent in CRCNA church history for addressing controversial issues. In previous cases of faithful disagreement around biblical interpretation (i.e., female ordination and divorce), the CRCNA has recognized that differing interpretations may "arise from

[11] crcna.org/news-and-events/news/announcing-our-journey-2025

[12] The best we could do to research this data was to use the CRCNA's *Yearbook* website (crcna.org/yearbook). These are the results we found for the six committee members who are ordained ministers or commissioned pastors in the CRCNA, noting only their years as pastors of congregations (not total years of ordained service): Jeff Weima, 0 years; Mary Vanden Berg, 0 years; Paula Seales, 4 years, starting in 2016; Jose Rayas, 6 years, starting in 2014; Charles Kim, 20 years, starting in 2000; Mary Lee Bouma, 23 years, starting in 1997). Matt Tuininga, who supported the report's creation until nearly the end, adds 0 years of congregational pastoring. Total congregational pastoring years by the report's signers is 53 years (including 16 years from 2016-2020). This total would be close to the amount of years served by many of our retiring ministers all on their own.

[13] To name a few: Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Dr. Duane Kelderman, and Rev. Leonard Vander Zee.

credible and sincerely held interpretations of Scripture."[14] Historically, the CRCNA has favored the option of exception at the local level as a way to uphold church unity and allow congregations freedom for careful and deliberate discernment on complex issues. Local discernment can bear healthier fruit on some vulnerable, contentious matters because it is harmful to remove the "particulars" of an individual's story to create a "universal rule" in our quest for the false idol of certainty.

3. The practical ramifications of this report claiming confessional status and a singular "right" way of interpreting Scripture are numerous and devastating, yet they are not considered or discussed in this report. Taking a moment to consider the potential fruit of this report, were it to be assigned confessional status, demonstrates its own insufficiency. For example, would all current officebearers who agree with same-sex marriage be required to relinquish their positions? Would ordination candidates who consider gender diversity to be a reflection of God's goodness in creation (and not a result of the fall) lose their candidacy status and be blocked from potential ordination? Would this proposed confessional status apply retroactively to remove church membership for those in disagreement with the report or only apply to new members? Would LGBTQIA+ members who do not feel called to celibacy have to leave the denomination? Would noncelibate LGBTQIA+ people or those who affirm same-sex marriage employed at organizations associated with the CRCNA lose their jobs?

4. Corpus linguistics analysis indicates room to grow in the human sexuality report.[15]

   a. For example, more use of "we" in the sections on singleness and pornography indicates that the report writers identify more with these groups of people than the sections on gender identity or homosexuality. In particular, frequent use of "you" with less frequent use of "we" in the report's section on homosexuality may indicate that people who are not heterosexual may be seen as outsiders.

   b. Only one case study in the report uses the first person "I" language (p. 41). Direct quotations allow people to tell their story in their own words and prevent paraphrasing toward any particular (intended or unintended) bias.

   c. It was good to see the recommendation to listen in the sections on gender (7x) and homosexuality (4x), but vocabulary about listening was low in the report in general and absent in the remaining sections.

[14] Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 82.

[15] Catherine DeJager is a fifth-year senior at Calvin University majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Mathematics, Data Science, and Linguistics. She learned corpus linguistics at Calvin in 2018 and has been using it ever since. As a lifelong CRC member and an advocate for LGBTQIA+ issues, Catherine decided to use her corpus linguistics skills to investigate and respond to this report. Her full analysis can be found here: gitlab.com/cmd16/crc-sexuality-reports/-/blob/master/results.ipynb.

d. Scriptural arguments made by negation are higher in the gender identity Scripture section while absent in the pornography Scripture section. Providing more positive arguments prevents straw-man arguments.

e. The current human sexuality report uses a more passive voice than the 1973 report on homosexuality. This is concerning because it suggests to readers that the report content is from a neutral, objective source rather than reflective of the views/interpretations of its authors.

In the introduction of the CRCNA's *Church Order and Its Supplements 2020*, John Calvin is quoted: "Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe" (Institutes, IV.X.30). Let us rebuild mutual trust and follow careful and due process while letting the Word, love, and the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit be our guide as we continue to navigate these complex issues of human sexuality together.

IV. Personal impact statements

We offer the following personal impact statements written by the students who contributed to this overture as additional background information. We do not ever want policy decisions or scholarly discussions to be disconnected from the lived realities of our Christian family.

I have long been proud of the CRC for its commitment to love of neighbor, activism, and thorough, well-rounded biblical scholarship. This report flies in the face of all that. I am devastated. I want a church where I know people will love me and respect me as I am, and where I can love and respect other people in turn. I want a church where I can bring LGBT+ friends and know they will be loved and welcomed just like anyone else. I want a denomination where I don't have to caveat with "Well, I agree with them except for the LGBT+ stuff." I want to know that no matter what someone's sex, gender identity, gender expression, and interaction of all those factors is, that their chosen name and pronouns will be used by everyone in the congregation (or at the very least the leaders will set an example), because that's what it means to love our neighbor. I want full membership in a church that doesn't see me as sinful or broken just for who I love. I am bisexual, and I want a church that doesn't force me to choose between a man and celibacy. I look forward to when I move this summer and get to find a new church that is affirming, because I don't want to stay in the CRC given its treatment of LGBT+ issues.

Catherine DeJager, she/her pronouns, student at Calvin University, member of Washington, D.C., CRC

I am a senior at Calvin University. Four and a half years ago, I spent countless hours searching for a college where I could live authentically as a nonbinary queer person and worship God inside the classroom as well as outside. Calvin was the only place I felt that met both requirements to my satisfaction, and I was amazed to find out it was the flagship institution of the CRC. While the CRC may hold an unaffirming stance, plenty of faculty and staff, and almost three-quarters of the students I've met are affirming. I love that Calvin is a space for diverse opinions and mutual respect, and I hope to see the CRC as a whole move in that

direction. Yet this report has made me incredibly anxious, both for LGBTQIA+ members of the denomination and for myself. I fear that, if adopted, this report will force Calvin and the other CRC-affiliated institutions to reprimand their LGBTQIA+ students for living authentically as they feel called to. I'm afraid that, as I pursue transitioning (something I have discussed with two of the three chaplains at Calvin University, as well as my therapist, psychiatrist, and doctor), Calvin will be forced by the CRC to take action against me.

Jo Newton, student at Calvin University, they/them pronouns

Having grown up in a CRC church and being a current member, I find the CRC an almost impossible thing to talk about with my non-Christian friends. Since my faith is an important part of my identity, I would like to be able to share why it is important to my many non-Christian friends. However, I find it impossible to tell others about a loving God when the church I am part of is actively causing harm. When I do share with others, it is full of caveats stating that the current church I attend, Jubilee CRC, is relatively accepting and that I myself am not "one of those conservative Christians." Without these caveats my statement of faith would have little bearing with others who can see the harm the church has done, and being kind and loving people themselves, want nothing to do with the CRC or Christianity as a whole. It is tragic that the part of me that most motivates me to love others is the part of me that I have to both hide and caveat to actually show others that I love.

Ben Bonsma, he/him, student at Redeemer University, member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC

I am currently an M.Div. student who is candidating for ordination within the CRCNA. I experienced a strong vocational call toward pastoral ministry later in life, when my three kids were grade-school age. I love my church and the people that I am blessed to be in relationship with through the church. Supportive Christian community has and continues to be one of the most formative aspects of my lifelong faith journey. Three years ago I had an uninspected, inherited theology that was nonaffirming. After two years of praying, studying, and researching these issues, as well as listening to stories of faithful LGBTQIA+ Christians, I felt compelled by my faith in Jesus to change my theology to become fully affirming. The resulting peace of God around this issue in my life has brought my spirit much consolation. One of the biggest factors for me in this journey was hearing about the harm LGBTQIA+ people had experienced from the very body of Christ that had always been so supportive of me. This human sexuality report has hit me like a ton of bricks. I have felt incredulous, grieved, angry, suffered insomnia, and shed many tears. My love of Jesus compels me to fully accept and celebrate my LGBTQIA+ family members, and I know that the church's future is in God's hands. However, because I am in favor of same-sex marriage, I am scared that when I am examined for ordination, I will be rejected.

Jessica Andrews, she/her, student at Knox College (University of Toronto), member of The Road CRC

For several generations, my family has been involved with the CRC as active members, teachers at CRC affiliated schools, and preachers. I was raised in the

church and attended Fellowship CRC in Edmonton, Alberta, for most of my life. However, I no longer feel at home in the CRC and cannot foresee a future where I return to the denomination. While there were many factors leading to this decision, the biggest one was that I could not be a part of a denomination that does not recognize LGBTQIA+ identities as biblically legitimate. This was not a doctrinal concern but a personal one, as I am a lesbian. Despite the support of many in my congregation, being a part of a denomination that views LGBTQIA+ identity as incompatible with Christianity made it impossible to stay. How can we say we want to emulate Christ while preaching an exclusive, conditional understanding of what it looks like to love our neighbor? How can we claim to represent the love of God when we fail to adequately love each other? I attend a CRC-affiliated university, where I have been working to establish support for LGBTQIA+ students. Despite significant progress, our connection to the CRC has caused many problems. The CRC's position on human sexuality limits the ability of LGBTQIA+ students to integrate within the community and limits the ability of the administration to support students without fear of repercussions. If there is a future for the CRC, it is embodied in the grace of LGBTQIA+ people who remain in a church that does not fully accept them. However, for myself and many other LGBTQIA+ people who were raised in the CRC, staying within the denomination is no longer possible.

Emma Van Arragon, she/her pronouns, student at The King's University, former/inactive member of Fellowship CRC

I personally do not identify as a member of the CRC. Yet I am a student at Calvin University, which predominantly consists of students who are of the CRC faith. I was raised in the Roman Catholic church my entire life. My own faith, like for many in the CRC, is very important to my well-being and plays a vital role in my life everyday. Here at Calvin University, I am honored with the incredible opportunity to have an intimate look into many of the views and beliefs that CRC Christians follow. It allows me to use my own faith upbringing and filter it through this lens while trying to better understand that even though we are of different faiths, we are still branches of the same Divine Tree.

At Calvin University, we follow the mission statement of "to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly." As Christians and non-Christians alike, we must believe that the LGBTQIA+ community is loved; they too are just as Christian and vital as any one of us, and they must be validated with that same Christian spirit as well. Many friends that I have made while attending Calvin University, who also identify as Christian and affirm the LGBTQIA+ community, are personally affected by this report. Their voices and their views absolutely matter because they too are "Christ's agents of renewal in the world." So, I plead with the readers of this report that you carefully, thoughtfully, listen and follow the recommendations these important voices in this response have outlined. It's so imperative to make considerations and edits for a true, equal, and equitable future.

Sean Salamun, he/him, Student Senate Team Leader at Calvin University

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I have attended a CRC church and CRC-affiliated schools all my life and have been thoughtfully discipled and cared for by these communities. As most of the

institutions within which I have been discipled have held what the report refers to as a "traditionalist" perspective on issues of gender and sexuality, I also held this perspective without a great deal of consideration for much of my life. However, in recent years, I have felt called upon to engage with a greater variety of perspectives in this conversation. As I have allowed space for tension, made note of areas of dissonance, and wrestled prayerfully with my theological convictions, my relationships, both with God and with my neighbors, have been enriched and deepened. I am grateful for the report insofar as it thoroughly and thoughtfully provides one perspective on issues of gender and sexuality held by members of the CRC and serves as a much-needed catalyst for dialogue within our denomination. That said, I lament the significant reality that my LGBTQIA+ family members and friends have experienced fear, anger, and grief in reading this report. I am concerned about its implications for myself and others considering, pursuing, or participating in vocational ministry within the CRC who do not support all of its conclusions. While this report is helpful in some respects, I believe that it ultimately falls short of adequately including the voices of our denomination's LGBTQIA+ members, thoughtfully representing the variety of perspectives held by members of the CRC, and engaging fully with its pastoral and missional implications. Ultimately, I worry that the adoption of this report will further inhibit the fostering of unity (already so rare in the context of this conversation) and create a confessional barrier to full participation for many who currently call this denomination home.

Kyra Schat, she/her, student at Redeemer University, member of First Hamilton CRC

I have grown up in the CRC denomination, and it has been something that I have found great comfort in. When I left for university, the CRC was something that I strongly identified with and was a community that I longed to extend in a new city. I especially connected with new friends over our shared CRC background. As I have developed more relationships with people who are not part of the CRC denomination or do not consider themselves Christian, I have become increasingly aware of how the CRC's statement demonstrates an exclusive stance. While the congregation that I grew up in nurtured my faith and encouraged my exploration of my faith – especially through my youth group – I felt an underlying tension about how the church viewed and (un)welcomed the LGBTQIA+ community and how we are called to be in relationship with others. Although I am blessed to have several CRC mentors, friends, and people of other perspectives with whom I can discuss LGBTQIA+ inclusion, I am more hesitant to share my CRC affiliation with others because of its position on the LGBTQIA+ community. Despite personally identifying as a cisgender female, I cannot – and I believe that we as a church cannot – simply ignore, forget, or, even worse, punish our fellow believers who identify differently than I do; I am not called to judge my neighbor but to love them. Being part of and growing up in the CRC is something that I treasure and am grateful for, but it is also something that brings discomfort in identifying with because I know the harm that the CRC has brought and will continue to bring until we amend our perspective to be inclusive of our LGBTQIA+ neighbors.

Emily Bouma, she/her, student at The King's University, member of River Park CRC

I have been a member of the CRC all my life, and as a child I always thought that it was the best denomination of all. In recent years, and especially upon reading this report, that is no longer my opinion. Church is meant to be a community of people who love and care for each other no matter what. This report does not reflect that love. If I did not feel that I could safely bring my LGBTQIA+ friends into the church before, now I know that I could not. Many of my closest friends have already faced religious harm from other churches, and I have always had hope that mine would be different. It hurts to know that my church is still stuck in a place that calls for judgment on LGBTQIA+ members of the community. I cannot comfortably say that I trust in the CRC and its decisions any longer. Our choice should be one of never-failing love, like that of Christ, not judgment and harm that could last a lifetime.

Shayanne de Boer, she/her, student at University of Western Ontario, member of Redeemer CRC

The CRC, in unique fashion, has found a way that allows me (a woman) to serve in every possible leadership position. While the denomination's decision to make allowances for differing scriptural interpretations on this matter has not been embraced by every single individual or congregation within the denomination, I firmly believe that gracious decision has been a witness to the unity of all believers that is possible in Christ—the unity that Jesus himself desired for us—"that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . . . that they may be brought to complete unity [so that] . . . the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:21-23). Jesus knew that the church would never have uniformity—but yet he tells us that unity is possible through him.

I have had so many opportunities to love and be loved by the church in ways I never would have imagined—Sunday school teacher, committee member, youth elder, classis delegate, chair of council, seminary student. Through those experiences I have received the love and the Word of God. I have learned about God, about grace and forgiveness extended and received, about the beautiful complexity of the body of believers. I have learned that a life of faith is a life of learning how to hold tension—light and darkness, justice and mercy, truth and human fallibility, strength in weakness, power in humility. These opportunities have been a means of grace.

It pains me that the church has become known more for excluding rather than embracing—particularly among younger generations. Who are we to deny these means of grace to others, especially when thoughtful, educated Christians have arrived at different interpretations with strong scriptural support? In cases like this, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to extend more grace, rather than place more limits on it. And in so doing, we also have an opportunity and a responsibility to be a witness to the world that in Christ "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).

Jodi VanWingerden, she/her, M.Div. student at Calvin Theological Seminary, member of Neland Avenue CRC (and previously Calvin CRC, Sheboygan, Wisconsin)

I have grown up within the CRC church and have attended CRC-affiliated schools my entire life. Throughout my time at The King's University in Edmonton I have often connected with others who attend CRC churches, and this has been a way for me to create many new friendships. However, I have also developed my beliefs and understandings in this time, and have met and formed relationships with many people who do not identify with Christianity or the CRC denomination. I have witnessed people in my life experience exclusion from the CRC due to the views of the CRC regarding LGBTQIA+. I have struggled with seeing this occur and have at times felt embarrassed that the church as a whole has been so exclusive. Upon reading the statement put out by the CRC, I was shocked to see just how exclusive it was, and I see that a statement such as this one would be harmful for many people. I am concerned that the CRC is issuing a statement such as this which excludes many from the church and is not loving and accepting of all people equally.

Michelle Roseboom, she/her, student at The King's University, member of Terrace CRC, B.C.

Growing up in the church has had its impact on my day-to-day life. My faith has always intersected with my race, ethnicity, sexuality, and educational opportunities. Because of this, I have always felt that in some way the church has excluded me because of one of my identities. Although I did not grow up as CRC, I did grow up as Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. Because of this, I often did not have a specific church I could go to as my parents did not feel comfortable staying in one church or another because of their immigrant status or because of how they would discuss topics regarding homosexuality. I ultimately felt that there was no place for me in the church, and because of this I decided to leave. With that being said, I felt that oftentimes my sexuality intersected with my cultural aspects growing up. Growing up in a Hispanic household, there was not much said on my sexuality. Because of the conservative culture at home on top of the culture outside of the home, I felt the double pressure of conforming to the societal structures of being "straight" or having to be "straight passing" in order to be loved. In other words, growing up in the United States while growing up within a Hispanic house has had its challenges of accepting my LGBTQ+ identity, and because of that I felt pressured to leave the church as a result.

However, coming to Calvin University has opened up the possibility of being gay and also being religious. Although some aspects of Calvin are fairly conservative and although Calvin is progressing as a University, there is still much work to be done for LGBTQ+ students on campus. Growing up as gay and first generation in the United States has presented its unique challenges within the education system as well. As a gay first-generation college student, I grew up attending mostly private academies, Christian school, and public high school, and now I am attending Calvin, a private Christian liberal arts university. Being able to see several perspectives of higher education has given me the privilege to see how my sexuality has intersected with higher education. For example, at Calvin, I have noticed that in the classroom it is not very inclusive with LGBTQ+ acronyms or simply mentioning the existence of LGBTQ+ students. Because of my experiences at Calvin, I have often felt excluded within the classroom because of the religious component. Because of being at Calvin, I noticed the recent CRC report on Human Sexuality summarizing how being "homosexual" is not tolerated and

is a sin. Because of the exclusive nature of this statement, it can affect the lives of LGBTQ+ students on campus, whether that be socially, politically, or even in a feeling of safety in the classroom. As a first-generation, Latinx/Hispanic, multiracial, gay person of color I felt the need to add my personal opinion on this as the LGBTQ+ community is so expansive and often times queer people of color are overlooked. That is why I see it as my duty to ensure that LGBTQ+ student voices are amplified when marginalized.

Brandon De Martinez, he/him/él, Student Senator at Calvin University

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I spent the first 20 years of my life in the closet. When I came out publicly in a Calvin Chimes *op-ed, I had to rely on my resilience, my support systems, and my already strong relationship with Jesus when I faced criticism. Every single piece of criticism was from someone who called themselves a Christian—and almost everyone who called themselves a Christian or used Scripture did so in a way that made me feel excluded. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ people who aren't believers will not be motivated to join our churches if they see how poorly we treat LGBTQIA+ individuals who are already in our faith communities.*

Upon reading this report, the first thing I noticed was how quick we were to judge LGBTQIA+ individuals. Right away, I felt excluded by the use of "we" to describe straight people in the church and "them" as queer individuals who may or may not be in the church. As I read it from the perspective of a bisexual woman, I noticed that it was lacking the nuance that queer voices would have provided.

However, I saw a glimmer of hope when Jess Andrews and I were able to mobilize a team of over 20 students from 10 different universities across the U.S. and Canada to write and edit a 15-page overture in the course of a month. This is the type of inclusion that I love about the CRC and Calvin; there are people who are quick to volunteer their time and talents to pave a way for marginalized populations. I'm proud of my institutions and am sharing my opinion because I want us to see the negative impact that taking a confessional, nonaffirming stance will have on already-excluded people in our communities.

Claire Murashima, she/her, Student Body President at Calvin University

V. Overture

Given the background above as provided by students from across North America, the councils of The Road CRC and First CRC, Toronto, overture synod to act on the following three recommendations (A, B, C), and Classis Toronto overtures synod to act on only the first two recommendations (A, B):

A. Make the following amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality:

1. Recommendation B: Amend recommendation B that this report be received for information, but note that it insufficiently addresses the following:

a. A careful, in-depth exploration of biblical and theological foundations for alternate viewpoints that favor the celebration of gender/sexual minorities and same-sex marriage.

b. The diversity of credible and sincerely held interpretations of Scripture within the CRCNA denomination and that 21 percent of CRCNA church members, 31 percent of CRCNA students, and 14 percent of pastors agreed with same-sex marriage in 2014, a number likely to be higher at present.[16]

c. Practical guidance for moving forward at the level of everyday ministry and for unity in the denomination as a whole.

Grounds:

1) While some of the scholarship is sound in this report, some is contentious or requires additional analysis or supporting references, while alternate credible biblical and theological perspectives have been underemphasized or neglected.
2) Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the close connection between one's gender and sexual identity and one's identity as God's imagebearer, the teachings in this report may therefore be at risk for leading to harm in peoples' lives.

2. Recommendation C: We offer an amendment for recommendation C. While we believe this report may be worth considering at the local level as per recommendation C, we have offered a more robust suggestion for engagement in our second recommendation below (that is, recommendation B—and particularly B, 1, c) regarding a committee that would take this report into account as it curates or creates a collection of resources for engagement of human-sexuality content from a balanced perspective, giving voice to both a traditional and fully affirming outlook.

Grounds:

a. We strongly support the use of listening circles and restorative-practice theory (as per the Challenging Conversations toolkit) and heartily commend Pastor Church Resources for choosing a direction that fosters openness, vulnerability, humility, and forbearance.
b. We recommend that this Challenging Conversations curriculum be seen as an insightful and helpful way to engage with <u>parts of the needed dialogue, but since a limited perspective is offered, we caution the risk of harm</u>. People may mistakenly interpret this curriculum as addressing the full spectrum of biblical and theological scholarship around human sexuality, and people may experience active exclusion because of its limitations.

3. Recommendation D: That synod not accede to recommendation D: "that synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status."

[16] Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (majority report) 2016, Appendix A, p. 49; retrieved Dec. 31, 2020, from crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf.

Grounds:

a. Confessional status is a "weighty matter," and deeming this teaching as confessional status would cause widespread devastation in our denomination, including mandatory removal of many current officebearers and harm to LGBTQIA+ people and their loved ones.
b. Proposing that the teaching of this report already has confessional status is both erroneous and an overreach.

4. Recommendation E: That synod not accede to recommendation E: "that synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report," due to the aforementioned serious limitations of this report. We suggest that Church Order Article 69-c remain unchanged and not be bound by the teachings of this report.

   Ground: This report may be one of several useful resources to consult in challenging pastoral decisions, but it would be harmful and an overreach of this report to deem it as the primary lens for interpreting this Church Order article.

B. Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues.

1. We request that synod create a second human sexuality committee to shepherd the CRCNA through continued careful deliberation and deep listening around these issues. This committee make-up should be devoted to scriptural authority and pay careful attention to diversity in gender identity (including nonbinary gender identities), ethnicity, binationality, ministry location (including lay leaders and/or post-secondary students), age, and sexual identity and not be restricted to adherence to the Synod 1973 report on homosexuality. It should contain people holding both traditional/nonaffirming and fully affirming views. If possible, we also recommend that this committee have at minimum one member from the human sexuality committee reporting to Synod 2021 and one member that signed the majority report to Synod 2016 to aid in continuity. We ask Synod 2021 to assign the following tasks to this committee[17]:

   a. As an initial task, create a safe listening space for LGBTQIA+ people associated with the CRCNA to submit their concerns and stories of experiences in the church without fear of repercussion.

   b. As another initial task, survey the congregations and classes of the CRCNA to learn how they have (or have not) meaningfully included LGBTQIA+ people in response to the advice of Synod 2016: "That synod advise the classes and congregations to invite, as much as possible, the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members when dealing with matters that affect the lives and discipleship of same-sex attracted members within the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2016*,

[17] If Synod 2021 does not decide to adopt the recommendation of creating a second human sexuality committee for ongoing deliberation, we request that these tasks still be adopted by Synod 2021 and delegated to appropriate channels.

p. 929). Information gathered may inform best practices for listening to LGBTQIA+ people and for local engagement around LGBTQIA+ issues. It may also demonstrate the distance we have yet to go in terms of meaningfully including LGBTQIA+ people in our midst.

c. As another initial task, curate or create a collection of resources (listening circle curricula, restorative practices, readings, podcasts, videos, etc.) for engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues as individuals, congregations, and classes, perhaps through a collaboration with Pastor Church Resources. This collection should include a balance of both traditional and affirming biblical and theological articulations around gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage and engage a Reformed worldview. This collection should also include many first-person stories from LGBTQIA+ people without editing them to fit conclusions, but intended to help our members hear of the complexities of Christian discernment about how to faithfully follow Jesus as sexual beings. It should also include stories of how LGBTQIA+ people have been harmed by the church.

d. After a, b, and c above, ongoing shepherding of CRCNA communities will be needed to foster the faithful, ongoing work of listening well to both Scripture and stories, of promoting unity amid diversity, and of continually gathering feedback for future equipping. These may be tasks for this committee, or they may come under the proposed role described in item B, 2 below. (It may also be helpful to consider ways to foster conversations at the classical level, or even between congregations from different classes, so that we can experience the diversity of deep convictions within the CRCNA as we engage with this complex conversation.)

e. Commission a follow-up survey to the 2014 survey done by the Calvin College Centre for Social Research to gather updated denominational data regarding perspectives on human sexuality issues, including same-sex orientation, same-sex marriage, and gender identity. If possible, include those who have left the CRCNA because of our denomination's posture toward LGBTQIA+ concerns, especially those who seek to be reconciled with a denomination whose decisions brought them pain or harm.

f. After reviewing previous applicable reports regarding human sexuality (i.e., at least 1973, 2016, 2020), discern whether additional work is worthwhile regarding the articulation of an affirming biblical theology of human sexuality to provide information alongside the traditional biblical theology espoused in the 2020 human sexuality report.

g. Consider if synod would be well served by a new group of gender/sexual minority synodical advisors (parallel to ethnic and women advisors and young adult representatives). Since a similar overture was submitted but not accepted at Synod 2016, this committee could review the grounds of the 2016 decision, discern if there are new grounds for this request, and clarify any specifics related to who might fit on this advisory group.

h. For a final task, help the CRCNA discern what level of agreement is needed around beliefs related to human sexuality going forward (especially same-sex orientation, same-sex marriage, and gender identity). We believe that this "level of agreement" is at the heart of the questions around confessional status. After ongoing careful deliberation and a renewed posture of deep listening with mutual trust, we hope this committee will be prepared to make prayerful recommendations to clarify our denominational level of agreement related to beliefs around human sexuality. If it is foreseen that some congregations, officebearers, and members will not be satisfied with the level of agreement recommended, it may also be wise for this committee to discern and recommend ways to kindly and generously part ways with those whose convictions mean they must depart from the communion of the CRCNA.

2. We request that synod instruct the COD to create a new role at a senior denominational level (like the senior leader for antiracism) for promoting church dialogue, education, and listening around LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. The COD would be responsible for further clarification of this role once synod has adopted it, and it would seem wise for the one holding this role to serve ex officio on the committee named above. There is an acute need for raising awareness of the harm that we, the church, have caused to our LGBTQIA+ family in order to foster lament, repentance, restoration, and reconciliation with LGBTQIA+ people and each other.

3. We request that synod task Pastor Church Resources with creating a curriculum resource and training for LGBTQIA+ support groups that can be hosted at the local level.

Grounds:

a. Issues around human sexuality and any dialogue around changing confessional status amount to a "weighty matter that requires extended and careful deliberation" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 3). Additional study and listening to supplement the work of the current human sexuality committee is needed.
b. We suggest it is time for renewed listening and rebuilding of mutual trust within the denomination—to recognize the sincerity of the CRCNA community of believers and the deep engagement with Scripture of so many, even when we end up with different conclusions and convictions.
c. As per the *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, which indicate that for "young adult representatives, the pool of selection will, at least in part, depend on recommendations received from the churches and classes" (p. 5; *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 537; *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 673). Our cross-campus student response team would be happy to assist synod in finding LGBTQIA+ young adult representatives who hold a variety of biblical perspectives (traditional and affirming).

d. Our history since 1973 has shown our difficulty in loving our LGBTQIA+ family well. If we want to truly include them and actively listen to them, we need to take formal actions to support their voices while we continue to engage deeply with these issues. Pastoral guidance has not been enough.

C. Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue).

Grounds:

1. In order to continue careful deliberation of the full breadth and complexity of the issues of human sexuality, including the multiple biblical perspectives, there will necessarily be a delay in providing ethical and clear pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance. During this delay, local congregations should be trusted to make decisions around LGBTQIA+ participation and same-sex marriage. Individuals ought not to bear the brunt of institutional delay.
2. The option of local conscience is in keeping with historical CRCNA precedent in addressing issues in which more than one credible and sincere interpretation of Scripture is possible (as exemplified by female ordination).
3. Gathering additional information on the fruit of local interactions with the LGBTQIA+ community will aid our continued careful deliberation on human sexuality issues at the denominational level.

Council of The Road CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Luise Kinsman, clerk

* Council of First CRC, Toronto, Ontario
Margaret J. Nott, clerk

** Classis Toronto
Richard Bodini, stated clerk

Note 1: This overture was submitted by The Road Church to Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan at its meeting in March 2021, but classis voted to table the overture. The Road CRC is therefore submitting the overture to synod.

**Note 2:* The council of First CRC, Toronto, Ontario, after adopting the overture, presented it to Classis Toronto for consideration and adoption. The final decision of Classis Toronto on March 11, 2021, was to adopt recommendations A and B of the overture, but not recommendation C. Therefore, the council of First CRC, Toronto, submits the full overture (all three recommendations) to synod for adoption.

***Note 3:* Classis Toronto, after deliberating on the full overture, adopted recommendations A and B and decided not to adopt recommendation C of the above overture.

Overture 21: Clarify What Already Has Confessional Status in the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, and Consider Concerns about Recommendation D

The Council of West End Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta, overtures synod as follows:

A. That synod not process Recommendation D until it has been clarified, and sent to the churches for consideration, precisely which part of the 175 pages of the report is already considered to have confessional status.

Grounds:

1. It is not clear what exactly within the report would be considered confessional, assuming it is not every phrase in the report's 175 pages. This would be important to determine for numerous reasons, not the least of which concerns the signing of the Covenant for Officebearers, which identifies agreement with and defense of the confessions.
2. With all the turmoil already in discussions about these matters, it would be helpful not to spend significant time in churches or classis speculating as to what is considered to already have confessional status.
3. Once clarified, it would be important for the churches to have adequate time to review Recommendation D in order to both understand and consider responses.

B. That synod consider the following concerns and implications that have been a part of discussions regarding Recommendation D:

1. Synodical decisions do not ordinarily have confessional status; examples of those that have not been given confessional status are synod's decisions regarding the reports of the Committee to Study Homosexuality (1973) and the Creation Stewardship Task Force (2012).

2. Synod 2016 accepted the minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage but did not assume that this already had confessional status.

3. Confessional status for the report will be difficult for those who are wrestling with Scripture, especially with respect to committed same-sex relationships. This may make it difficult for officebearers, including pastors, to sign the Covenant for Officebearers.

4. This recommendation by itself has the potential of causing severe division within the denomination.

Council of West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta
David van Berkel, clerk of council

Note: The preceding overture was submitted to Classis Alberta North prior to its agenda deadline for receiving overtures to synod, following the Rules for Synodical Procedure. Classis Alberta North decided not to address the overture due to the cancellation of Synod 2021.

Overture 22: Do Not accede to the Report and Recommendations from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

Classis Grand Rapids East overtures synod not to accede to the report and recommendations from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. The study committee did not fulfill its mandate.

   The committee's assigned mandate states:

   > The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.
   >
   > (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 919)

   The committee's report does not "serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional" advice. Rather, the report raises significantly more questions regarding how councils, pastors, classes, and synods ought to respond to those who diverge from the committee's proposed theological standard regarding the church's teachings on sexuality if they are given confessional status and deemed a salvific issue. While some pastoral advice is provided, almost no attention is given to the ecclesial implications or to the missional circumstances that are frequently encountered in the church. Simply recommending that churches be proactive with how they will respond to various requests (pp. 118-19) does not equip the church sufficiently to navigate our present circumstances. In the same way, raising ecclesial questions without providing any response to those questions (p. 145) does not provide churches with the mandated guidance. In this regard, the proposed theological standard combined with the absence of substantive pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance creates more confusion and tension among the churches and marks a glaring failure of the committee to fulfill its mandate.

2. The report does not address examples of people who are legally married in same-sex marriages, and, particularly, for those who have kids that are participating in church ministries.

   The failure of this study committee to directly engage same-sex marriage in the report is particularly noticeable for several reasons. Synod 2016 formed the current study committee in response to the report from the previous synodical study committee: Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance regarding Same-sex Marriage. Additionally, the primary circumstances regarding human sexuality faced by churches today certainly include legally married same-sex couples who are seeking to follow Jesus Christ within the Reformed tradition. While acknowledging that both Canada and the United States have legalized same-sex marriage, the report does not include any examples of legally married same-sex couples seeking to participate in and contribute to

the life of a local congregation. Churches need guidance as to what extent those in same-sex marriages can participate in the life and ministry of the local church.

More particularly, how does the church respond when the Spirit's ongoing work of conversion leads people in legal, same-sex marriages to Christ? Ought the church recognize their marriage? Does the church advise them to live a sexless marriage? Does the church expect them to get divorced? What happens when their same-sex marriage was officiated and approved by another denomination with whom the CRC has an established ecclesial relationship?

Additionally, churches encounter circumstances where professing members who are in same-sex relationships, whether legally married or not, desire to have their children baptized and have them involved in the ministry of the local church. How do local congregations respond? The report raises this question but simply advises churches to have their answers prepared ahead of time (pp. 118-19).

The committee's failure to include prominent examples like these—and to address the questions associated with these situations—is a serious deficiency in the committee's report that undermines the benefit of this report to the churches.

3. The report's conclusion that synod's previous teaching related to sexuality is already confessional contradicts previous synodical decisions regarding sexuality as pastoral advice.

   While certainly including biblical and theological teaching on sexuality, previous synods have clearly indicated that synod's discernment on topics related to human sexuality is pastoral advice to the churches. For this report to indicate that these teachings already have confessional status misrepresents the synodical record.

   Furthermore, the mandate provided by Synod 2016 states that this committee is to provide advice as to whether future synods ought to "declare a *status confessionis*" with regard to aspects of human sexuality. That element of their mandate clearly indicates that Synod 2016 did not consider the teachings of previous synods to already have confessional status. Thus, for the committee to state that the church's teachings on sexuality already have confessional status is a serious misrepresentation of the synodical record and the directions provided by Synod 2016.

4. The report's conclusion that sexuality is a salvific issue, accompanied by the significant lack of pastoral advice noted already in this overture, has the potential to create significant spiritual harm by elevating sexuality to be on par with the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

   While Scripture does provide warnings regarding sexual immorality, Scripture also clearly includes many examples of people entangled in distorted and sinful sexuality within the kingdom. Abraham, Jacob, Rahab, David, Solomon, the woman caught in adultery (John 8), and others are all recipients of God's grace—and some are even upheld as exemplars of the faith and righteousness. To tell one part of the biblical account regarding sexuality without the other part of the story borders on a manipulative use of Scripture.

   Moreover, if our faith and salvation are truly secured in Christ alone—and not our own behavior—how can our sexuality become a

salvific issue? Does the committee's proposed teaching of what qualifies as sexual sin somehow place those who commit those sins beyond the reaches of Jesus Christ's atoning grace? Labeling sexual sins, as distinguished from any other sin, as a salvific issue produces confusion regarding the church's teaching about salvation in Christ alone. In so doing, even in merely proposing this understanding, this report has the potential to create spiritual harm both for those whose sexuality diverges from the report's perspective and also for those who care deeply about people whose sexuality is different from the report's perspective.

5. The report makes technical scientific claims regarding human sexuality, particularly in the area of human biology, without having a member on the committee who is academically qualified to provide such assessments or applications of the scientific literature.

   While this is not an oversight of the committee per se, it is an overreach of the committee to speak so declaratively into areas that are beyond their expertise.

6. The cumulative effect of grounds 1-5 is that this report and its recommendations create the potential for spiritual harm to many people, threaten to divide the church rather than unite the body of Christ, and fail to provide the church with the necessary resources to respond pastorally, ecclesiastically, and missionally to the real and present questions on human sexuality facing the church today.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Overture 23: Do Not Adopt the Report and Recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

Members of First CRC of Denver, Colorado, overture synod not to adopt the report and recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

We have been in contact with various other groups within our denomination working on overtures that ask for more time to consider the human sexuality report, or ask that synod choose not to accede to the report, and many of them have lengthy and well-researched statements about the theological implications, biological groundings, and historical contexts. We do not claim expertise in these matters, and we wish to address synod largely from the context of our relationships with you as our faith leaders, in a community that prioritizes authentic relationships and communication, and so our wish is to let you know how we believe this report's adoption would impact our experience of the church, of our God, and of each other.

We acknowledge the time and effort that was spent preparing this report, but we do not believe it is beneficial to adopt it, on the grounds delineated below.

We further ask that in local conversations around this topic, LGBTQ+ voices as well as those whose experience includes divorce, premarital sex, or cohabitation, are centered and valued as their witness is vital to this

conversation. In order to center conversations on these voices, our council and community needs to make a commitment to fostering a culture that acknowledges harm that doctrines have made to the LGBTQ+ community and individuals whose experience includes divorce, premarital sex, or cohabitation. Our prayer is that these conversations and voices be a compass for a reexamination of the way sexual ethics are taught in the church. Our doctrine should not harm others and should guide us in celebrating the image of God in all of God's children.

Grounds:

1. Our identity is that of "a family of God, living our faith and growing by joyfully surrendering to Jesus, freely sharing our lives and humbly embracing the hurting" (vision statement, firstcrcdenver.org). We are a body that warmly welcomes each other and those who choose to join us, for a service or as new members. There's much to say in this respect about diversity—racial, socioeconomic, family status, political—and our capacity to acknowledge and address biases surrounding these topics, especially considering the national events of this past year. With respect to our capacity to welcome others, our understanding of those whose gender identity, sexuality, sexual history, marital history, and family structure differs from what is traditionally expected will be sharply framed by a confessional statement defining who Jesus saves, and further inhibit our hospitable identity.
2. The call for confessional status limits our leadership and is divisive to our denomination. The report does not provide answers about the impact on leaders in the church, but rather only poses questions: "If a teaching is declared to have confessional status, questions arise about what that means for those who sign the Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) in the CRCNA. Will those who have already signed it need to accept this new item as having confessional status? What happens if they don't? Will those who subsequently sign the CFO need to accept this new item?" (p. 145).

   With confessional status, how are churches to interpret who can and who cannot lead on council? There is insufficient information and advice from the report regarding leadership on council and the Covenant for Officebearers, where we would see the most impact on our congregation.
3. The contents of this report are contrary to the Doctrine of Salvation. Section XVI, B of the report states: "As a committee, we conclude, therefore, that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status. . . . We also conclude that this status is warranted because these sins threaten a person's salvation. The Scriptures call the church to warn people to flee sexual immorality for the sake of their souls and to encourage them with God's presence and power to equip them for holy living. A church that fails to call people to repentance and offer them the hope of God's loving deliverance is acting like a false church" (p. 148). This goes against the very basic gospel message our denomination affirms, that salvation in Christ is not contingent on works but rests entirely in the saving death of Jesus Christ.

4. The report does not encourage us to wrestle with Scripture as a community but assumes biblical clarity. We were struck by the thoughtful and extensive theological work that was done by those who prepared the report. However, the report relies on a singular interpretation of passages that have been alternatively interpreted by godly and wise theologians; it thereby takes away the opportunity to wrestle together with Scripture as one source of divine revelation. Scripture is complex, contextual, and requires faithful wrestling with difficult passages. In the adoption of this report, a decision has been made as to how some of Scripture's most difficult and culturally contextual passages ought to be interpreted, which denies the average churchgoer the opportunity to engage with Scripture fully.
5. The scope of the report was limited by members whose participation was limited to their agreement with the 1973 report (crcna.org/sites/default/files/1973_report_homosexuality.pdf). For this reason, the human sexuality report does not meet the goal of "extended and careful deliberation" of these "weighty matters" of human sexuality as referred to in the report's mandate (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 3). Because the issues discussed in the report are multisided, with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives that play into how these issues are perceived, it adds little value if everyone who works to create a workable resource starts off with similar views and beliefs. In addition, this stipulation limits the group's ability to represent the wide range of perspectives within the denomination as a whole. Therefore, those whose views differ from the 1973 report are limited to consulting roles and do not have a voice in the report itself.
6. Members of our community will be harmed by the adoption of this report, as demonstrated by the personal impact statements that follow. The personal statements are included without personal identification to protect those who prefer to remain anonymous.

I grew up in First Church, which prides itself on being a welcoming community, and I believe that is true, but it is a community that can also be unintentionally exclusive to those who don't quite fit the mold of a traditional member of First CRC. I began feeling separate from the church community as I grew older and learned more about myself, specifically the fact that I am bisexual. As it is right now, the CRC is not a place where I am safe to be open about this part of my identity, a part that I cannot see as anything but the way that God made me. I am no theologian, and my point is not to debate the meaning of the language of Scripture on homosexuality. It is simply to say that First Church is a place where the minority voice often goes unheard. I don't believe this is due to any malicious intent on the part of church leadership or the rest of the congregation; on the contrary, I believe that many members of this church don't know that the minority voice exists in our community because for years we have remained silent. Even now, I write this anonymously because there isn't a safe place for me to talk about these issues without being judged or ostracized. I love this community, but I can't be fully myself within it. I hope that this congregation can come together

with the intention of understanding, rather than condemning, and that we create a safe place where we can discuss these issues without risk of being pushed to the margins of this community. The report on human sexuality and expectations for the LGBTQ+ members of the church further separates me from the community.

I was raised in the Christian Reformed Church. I am deeply saddened by this report and the push to make the 1973 report confessional, because I have been harmed by the Christian Reformed Church's teachings on human sexuality. I was raised to believe that God intended sex to be within marriage between a man and a woman. When I went to college, I met openly LGBTQ+ people for the first time. I was not equipped to extend hospitality to those whom my church taught me were "living in sin." Instead of treating marginalized people with love and respect, I openly debated their lives. I had no framework for seeing openly LGBTQ+ people as faithful Christians, and I lament the harm I have caused as a result of my upbringing. I was also raised to believe that my body was a gift from God, and the best way to honor my body and God was by keeping it pure. When I was in a position where my consent was violated, I viewed my body as damaged before God because I was no longer pure, and sinned by not saying "no" loudly enough. I have yet to feel safe enough to talk about this experience with my church or family, because my church has prioritized purity over consent and safety. I understand that in teaching me those things, my church did not intend harm, and even had my best interests in mind. However, this sexual ethic was not adequate for addressing my lived experience, and it provided no space for care or questioning when life was not as straightforward as I was taught. I pray that this report will not be made confessional and that the CRC will find a way to fully embrace a sexual ethic that provides care, love, and faithfulness to its members.

I urge you to carefully consider the implications of this report on the current and future church climate. I personally have dear family and friends including close family members who identify as nonbinary and who are not comfortable attending the CRC church because of the current climate of judgment regarding sexuality and marriage mores. I became a Christian and joined the church body when I was 25 years old after I learned how Jesus modeled deep love, acceptance, and protection of marginalized people in his life and ministry. I sincerely hope our church body and the church universal will place a high priority on embracing all people into the church body and value differences so that we can all feel welcome to worship, serve, and love God together. Please consider this carefully in prayer and humility.

As a lifelong member of the CRC, the church has been a primary context for growing up, for beliefs about identity and belonging and behavioral expectations. Over time, my work in particular has taken me places that aren't always compatible with my faith community's beliefs and values, and I've wondered whether a line, between what my community believes, and what I believe and practice, is tolerable and convenient.

I had an inside connection, so to speak, in terms of the Human Sexuality report's publication, a family connection whose commitment to the CRC and whose work and presence in the world diverge from the report's potential adoption by synod; undoubtedly for me, the report has a symbolic meaning that hooks into my history with the church and with belonging to it. In reaching out about it within my church, I found companions who also have found a home at First and who are deeply invested in our community, and who also find the impact of the report threatening to their belief in the power of our local body of Christ to be Christ in the world and the capacity of our body to address human sexuality as it relates to sexual minorities. As stated in many words above, we believe that our presence and work in the world is diminished if we tie ourselves to beliefs that condemn our LGBTQ+ friends, family, and allies; pigeonhole our beliefs about salvation; and qualify God's love for us. In finding these allies, I find renewed belonging to and investment in our First community even as I realize there are new limits to them.

As we enter into dialogue about human sexuality and belonging within our community, I can see possibilities that my own ties to this church, that encompasses more diversity than I'd known, may become, in ways I hadn't predicted, a place of growth for me around who God's people are and why we are.

I haven't addressed my family's needs, as a mother whose children attend schools where inclusion is presumed and allyship is not suspect. (I am certain that my identity as an adoptive mother also has impacted my understanding of what it means to belong, although that won't find more expression here, beyond that acknowledgment.) My prediction is that church will become increasingly less relevant to them if we do not struggle to learn and understand more about the depth of God's love and the nature of his created love-objects, and the breadth of the ways God-love and human-love find expression. That line I referenced above, between beliefs and behavior that offer belonging in our church, and the experiences that God gives to me and to them outside the church for which the church may have little interest in understanding because they imply sexual differences about which we have already made judgments, may become a reality for them too, unconscious and then conscious. That is my fear, and I don't think that my own experience and acknowledging of that line will address it in my children's lives. So even as I want the church to be a place that helps my children with their experiences, I want the church to be a place that holds my LGBTQ+ siblings as in the arms of our creator.

Thank you for your time, for the work that you do, for serving in the roles that you have chosen to do, for investment in the deliberation you are called to with respect to all of Christ followers' belongingness within the Christian Reformed Church.

As a member of the CRC community for over two decades, and a highly active one, I have found the CRC community to be a welcoming and supportive place for me and my family in all but one area. The report on human sexuality that is being put before Synod 2021 hits the mark on a few topics, but misses the mark on several. If adopted, I fear I will no longer have a place in the CRC community. I want to address one that I uniquely can speak to.

Growing up in the Christian faith, I adhered to the church's beliefs around sex and marriage. I believed that marriage was a sacred and forever commitment. It was this deep belief and my holding myself to this doctrine that kept me in an emotionally and verbally abusive marriage for twelve years. I was stuck and had no options, so I silently suffered for six of those years. When I finally had the courage to come forward and seek the support of my pastor, there was not much that could be done.

There were no broken bones, blackened eyes, or a confirmed mistress. *It would have been easier to call out the sinful state of my marriage and get the support I needed if there were. Instead, my marriage was saturated with emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and pornography—all hidden from the view of our church community and family. I knew, and one of my pastors knew. I kept it hidden from friends and family members. I did not have a safe place to get the support and care I needed because as much as our church community strives to be a body of Christ that is there to serve the broken, there are certain topics (issues of human sexuality as an example) that they are not prepared or equipped for. Humanity is not tidy; it is messy, and we have to be ready to handle sensitive topics with love and grace as God would have us do. When I finally reached my breaking point and decided to accept the sin of breaking up my marriage and leaving my abuser, I was left to wear a scarlet letter D. We as a CRC community do not support our members that go through divorce well. I have had to forge my own path to healing mostly outside the CRC community because we do not have the resources to support those going through divorce. The overwhelming message I received was that unless there has been sexual immorality, reconciliation to your partner is the only righteous path. However, it is a path that fails to acknowledge the nuance in cases of abuse, especially emotional and verbal. I believe that there is room in our communities to come alongside fellow Christians and offer them love and support instead of the sting of shame and judgment.*

I am also concerned about how this report calls for the CRCNA to emphasize the biblical principle that divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery. If I were to find love again and want to remarry, then I would have to trade in my scarlet "D" for Hester Prynne's scarlet "A," only furthering the shame that I have already felt. This is not a community that I want to be a part of, this is not the community and belief that I want to shape in my children. If adopted, this report calls me an adulterer, and I will not remain in a church community that places that shame on me and my family. As I stated in the beginning, I am addressing one of several topics in this report that misses the mark. There are several other parts of this report that would hurt family members and friends deeply, and for this reason I choose not to sit silently by. We as a CRC community are better than this; we need to strive to do better than this.

I have many friends and colleagues who would not identify as Christians but who are members of, or support, the LGBTQ community. I have often struggled with the fact that while I can talk to these friends about Jesus welcoming them with open arms, I can't invite them to my church because I know they will not be fully embraced. This is hard, because I consider the people at First CRC to be my family, and I love our church. It hurts to know that my friends would not be loved equally by them.

As a parent, I also struggle with raising my children in the environment outlined in the report. As my children grow older, I have concerns regarding the messages they will be receiving, especially if this report is adopted. My heart breaks for the children—members of our church family!—in our congregation who are dealing with these issues currently. Our church is not a safe place for them.

Adoption of the report as confessional draws a line, forcing dualistic thinking and not allowing for the healthy dialogue we so desperately need in our congregation. My prayer is that we can have these discussions and keep them centered in love, justice, and wisdom. However, if the report is adopted as confessional, my family will leave our church, as we would not be allowed to serve without agreeing with the report. I grieve this possibility, and I hope instead we can move toward being a place of grace, safety, and love for all.

Members of First CRC, Denver, Colorado
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Jessica Benson
Cristin Buys
Katherine Elgersma
Chloe Hansum
Emily Hansum
Pamela Lindal-Hansum
Amanda Lighthiser
Chris Lighthiser
Ann Rajewski
Kevin Roberts
Lynn Roberts
Jenna Van Donselaar

Note: This overture was deliberated by the council of First CRC, Denver, Colorado, on January 20, 2021, and was tabled by the council. It was then submitted to Classis Rocky Mountain, which deliberated regarding the overture on March 2, 2021, and decided to table it.

Overture 24: Do Not Accede to Recommendations D and E of the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

Classis Grand Rapids East overtures synod not to accede to Recommendations D and E of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

I. Background

Recommendations D and E of the report concern the status of various teachings and practices concerning human sexuality (p. 149).

> D. That synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.

E. That synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report.

Confessional status means elevating teachings on sexuality to the level of doctrines of God and salvation. The report deems that unrepentant contravention of the report's biblical interpretation of several areas of human sexuality—whether by teaching or action—endangers a person's salvation and requires church discipline up to and including excommunication. These are deeply serious matters for the church.

In this overture, we address concerns under the headings of Pastoral Concerns, Theological Concerns, CRCNA Polity, and Lack of Clarity. We refer to the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality simply as "the Committee." Our recommendation and summary grounds follow the more comprehensive discussion of our four areas of concern.

A. Pastoral concerns

1. The negative impact of declaring *status confessionis* would disproportionately fall on LGBT+ persons in our churches, especially LGBT+ youth, who already experience high levels of bullying, internalized shame and self-loathing, self-harm, and suicidal ideation and attempt. The report cites the Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020 (thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/) in relation to transgender youth but fails to discuss or take into account the well-documented harms experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth. The same Trevor Project survey finds that

   – 40 percent of LGBTQ respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth having seriously considered suicide.
   – 68 percent of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in the past two weeks, including more than 3 in 4 transgender and nonbinary youth.
   – 48 percent of LGBTQ youth reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including over 60 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth.
   – 46 percent of LGBTQ youth report they wanted psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional but were unable to receive it in the past 12 months.
   – 10 percent of LGBTQ youth reported undergoing conversion therapy, with 78 percent reporting it occurred when they were under age 18.
   – 29 percent of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away.
   – 1 in 3 LGBTQ youth reported that they had been physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their LGBTQ identity.

   Another study finds LGBT+ youth to be four times as likely to self-harm or attempt suicide than straight cisgender (i.e., nontransgender)

peers (Marshal et al., 2011).[1] In another, LGB students from more conservative families were found to be over eight times as likely to attempt suicide as LGB peers from supportive families (Ryan et al., 2009).[2] These are literally matters of life and death for our sexual- and gender-minority youth, yet the report glosses over this reality.

2. Not only does the report fail to adequately acknowledge the harms and injustices experienced by sexual and gender minorities, it actually adds to the harm by continuing to pathologize those who fall outside what is deemed normal and pleasing to God. The words "disorder" or "disordered" appear 54 times in the report, sending a message to LGBT+ persons that is likely to increase shame, self-hatred, and internalized homophobia/transphobia. While this is not the report's intent, it is its probable impact.

3. The report exchanges the false hope of reparative therapy (in the 1973 and 2002 reports) for the unrealized vision of a church that prioritizes communal living, is closer than biological family, discusses sexual struggles openly, and is a safe place for LGBT+ persons. The report itself recognizes in several places that the denomination has failed to respond to all previous calls to be a more loving and inclusive community for sexual minorities. Declaring a *status confessionis* before the church has anything approaching a reasonable track record on this score is irresponsible and offers only illusory hope to vulnerable minorities.

4. Pastoral discernment on these matters rightly belongs at the consistory level and not at the level of the assemblies of the church. The report itself nods to this when it mentions that some churches allow members not to baptize their children as infants, despite infant baptism being a clear confessional matter for the CRCNA (p. 145). Concerning divorce and remarriage, Synod 1980 refers discernment to the church consistory: "the church must apply these biblical principles to concrete situations in the light of its best understanding of what happened in the divorce and what is being planned for the remarriage. The major part of the burden in making this application necessarily rests on the local consistory, for it has the most intimate and accurate knowledge of the situation of divorce and contemplated remarriage" (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 484). The current report, however, appears to undercut local discernment and situational pastoral decision making by appealing to judgment: "the church must warn its members that those who refuse to repent of these sins . . . will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). It must discipline those who refuse to repent of such sins for the sake of their souls (1 Cor. 5-6)" (p. 146).

[1] Marshal, M.P.; Dietz, L.J.; Friedman, M.S.; Stall, R.; Smith, H.; McGinley, J.; . . . Brent, D.A. (2011), "Suicidality and depression disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth: A meta-analytic review," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 49(2): pp. 115-23.

[2] Ryan, C.; Huebner, D.; Diaz, R.M.; and Sanchez, J. (2009), "Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults," *Pediatrics* 123(1): pp. 346-52.

5. Drawing a confessional line in the sand has the potential to split families, churches, and the denomination, involving serious spiritual, missional, psychological, and financial consequences.

6. Far from being comprehensive, the report fails to discuss several important issues in human sexuality—most glaringly, consent. The report's blindness to questions of power in sexual relations is particularly egregious given the ubiquity and normalization of sexual violence in society. The report, for instance, presumes the woman at the well (John 4) to be promiscuous rather than the victim of a series of men who alone had the power to divorce and abandon her (p. 133). Contraception, oral and anal sex, and asexuality are also unaddressed. The report's one reference to queer as an identity label gives a definition that is misleading and bizarre: "'queer'—that is, rejecting not just dichotomies such as gay/straight but even the trichotomy of gay/straight/bisexual, and asserting instead complete randomness and/or arbitrary choice in human sexual attraction" (footnote, p. 160). This is a far cry from its common usage as an umbrella term to describe "a sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms" (apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexualitydefinitions.pdf).

B. Theological concerns

1. The report's assertion that male/female sexual difference is a core component of the image of God in humans is unorthodox and unbiblical. The report states:

> The poetic structure of Genesis 1:27 indicates that humanity's creation as male and female is inextricably linked with humanity's creation in God's image. We image God not simply as generic human beings, who happen to be male and female, but as male and female human beings.
>
> (p. 17)

> In addition, the male/female binary is grammatically connected with the image of God, that is, with what is a central identifying biblical feature of being human (v. 27), something that is reaffirmed in Genesis 5:2. Paul Niskanen writes, "The statement 'male and female he created them,' far from being dissociated from the concept of the image of God, stands at the very crux of its interpretation."
>
> (p. 75)

> Since the Bible teaches that being created male or female is part of how humans reflect the image of God. . . .
>
> (p. 88)

This claim is made without reference to the long and varied history of interpretation and conjecture about the meaning of the *imago dei*. Astonishingly, in the report's section about Genesis 1-2 (p. 75), the only theologian quoted is Paul Niskanen, a Catholic author. Linking our very humanity to genital sexual difference, as the report does, threatens to oversexualize human beings—including children, the elderly, and the unmarried.

This problematic interpretation may be used to infer that LGBT+ people are willfully rejecting their God-given image/sexuality and are

therefore less than human in a way that cisgender heterosexuals will never be, no matter how much they may sin sexually. Although the report recommends compassion for transgender and intersex people, it insists that they are suffering from post-fall "disorders and diseases" (p. 75). This focus actually undermines the plea for compassion by highlighting that transgender and intersex people do not fall within the report's understanding of the creational image of God. If the report's theology were declared to be confessional and used to interpret Church Order Article 69-c, persons who identify as transgender or nonbinary, intersex persons who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth, and perhaps any person experiencing gender dysphoria, may thus be cast as disobediently rejecting God's image. Since the image of God is what sets humans apart from animals, this would imply that gender variant persons are choosing to be subhuman—a terrifying claim. The report's attempt to make the image of God about binary sexual difference threatens to dehumanize vulnerable people experiencing the disorientation of gender dysphoria or an intersex condition. It communicates shame and exclusion and potentially empowers further abuse of already marginalized and at-risk minorities.

The report nowhere addresses how Jesus can be the preeminent image of God (Col. 1:15) if the image is primarily linked to male/female sexual difference. The fact that Jesus is the image of God par excellence negates the report's focus on the image as sexual difference.

Ironically, viewing sexual difference as core to the *imago dei* is not a theologically conservative or traditional position. John Calvin, for example, rules out the view "that the image of God is in the body of man" as "by no means consonant with Scripture" (Calvin, 1979; p. 94).[3] Jesus speaks positively of intersex eunuchs in Matthew 19, and Isaiah 56 and Acts 8 both describe the inclusion of eunuchs among God's people. Ancient Jewish commentary on the Law discusses the place of intersex persons in the community without suggesting that their sexual ambiguity negates their status as imagebearers of God (DeFranza, 2015).[4]

In Genesis 1, not only humans but also the fish and the birds are commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:22). Hence, we understand that they too (along with the livestock) were created male and female. But despite possessing male and female sexual difference appropriate to their kind, these creatures are not in the image of God. Why then would sexual difference constitute the image in humans but not in animals?

Genesis 1:27 is better understood as stressing that both men and women reflect who God is in the world. The created equality of women suggested by the text stands in stark contrast to the foundational beliefs of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, which viewed men as more godlike, with women ranking sometimes below male slaves in the social hierarchy. God's people are to be different from the surrounding cultures by valuing women as fully equal to men in personhood and worth.

[3] Calvin, J. *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (1979), reprinted from the Calvin Translation Society edition of 1847 (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust).

[4] DeFranza, M.K. *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015).

While the report's scriptural sections tie the *imago dei* to sexual difference, in other places the report states that all persons bear the image of God (pp. 64, 72). This confusion within the report itself is particularly troubling, given the centrality of the image of God to theological anthropology.

2. The report overstates the ability of sexual sin to threaten salvation. The Belgic Confession Articles 16 and 23 teach that salvation is by God's grace alone and by God's initiative. The Bible includes many fathers and mothers of the faith who sinned sexually, yet the narrative does not warrant the view that they thereby lost their salvation (e.g., Abraham and other patriarchs who practiced polygamy).
3. It is problematic that the report misrepresents the gracious tone of the 1980 report on divorce and remarriage and takes a harsher stance on divorce. The current report emphasizes from 1980 "the general biblical principle that divorce and remarriage constitute adultery" (quoted twice on p. 139) while downplaying the plea for compassion and pastoral humility that runs through the same report. The 1980 report roundly rejects a legalistic approach: "Although the Scripture speaks clearly in terms of principles regarding divorce and remarriage, it is neither possible nor wise for the church to attempt to construct a legal code which would cover all cases or all the circumstances that would apply" (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 480). The 1980 report also exhorts that, "recognizing the limits of human ability to discern the subtlety and intricacy of human motivation, the church must recognize the limits of its ability to assess guilt and blame in the intimate and private turmoil of marital distress" (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 483).
4. The report fails to adequately grapple with arguments in favor of covenanted, monogamous, same-sex unions between believers in Christ. Straw-man arguments are put forth without nuance. There is little respectful, sustained engagement with the reasoning of authors such as James Brownson and the Classis Grand Rapids East study committee (classisgreast.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ssmRevised.pdf), as the synodical study committee's mandate required. The 1973 report shows more willingness to listen to alternative interpretations and recognize hermeneutical problems with its own position than does the current report. In this respect, the current report goes beyond 1973 in advancing a hardline approach.

C. CRCNA polity

1. The synodical study committee's mandate asks the committee to reflect on and evaluate "whether or not, with respect to same-sex behavior and other issues identified in the study, it will be advisable for future synods to consider . . . changing the main text of Church Order Article 69" and "declaring a *status confessionis*" (p. 3). In crafting this mandate, Synod 2016 asked the committee to advise whether future synods should declare confessional status because it does not already exist. However, the committee went beyond its mandate by (1) not reflecting on and evaluating whether it would be advisable for a future synod to declare a *status confessionis*, and (2) wrongly claiming on its own authority that a *status confessionis* already exists.

2. It is factually incorrect to claim that a *status confessionis* already exists on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Previous synodical reports dealing with homosexuality and same-sex sexual relationships (1973, 2002, 2016) have been careful to frame their recommendations as pastoral guidance, not as an interpretation of the confessions.

3. The report's claim that a *status confessionis* already exists in relation to pornography, premarital and extramarital sex, and polyamory is similarly not borne out by previous decisions of synod. For example, the CRCNA states that using pornography is a sin (crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/pornography) but the statement does not make a confessional claim.

4. The report correctly notes that Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, understood same-sex sex to be included in "unchastity/ *Unkeuschheit*" (H.C., Q&A 108) in his commentary on the catechism (p. 146). However, in CRCNA church polity "a signatory [to the Covenant for Officebearers] is bound only to those doctrines that are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines" (Church Order Supplement, Article 5, A, 3, "Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant for Officebearers," current Church Order, p. 15; see also network.crcna.org/elders/form-subscription). Ursinus' commentary is not part of our confessions and should not be given undue weight.

   This is especially important, given that the assumption in Ursinus' day was that people engaging in same-sex sexual behavior did so against their true nature, rather than in keeping with an enduring and unchosen sexual orientation. In this regard, Ursinus' likely view contradicts the teaching of the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 1973*, also referenced several times in the current report) that same-sex orientation is not chosen and not sinful. Furthermore, historians suggest that in the 16th century, unchastity (*Unkeuschheit*) also included intentionally nonprocreative sex, masturbation, and divorce except in cases of adultery or abandonment. Any consistent argument for confessional status on the matter of same-sex marriage from H.C. Q&A 108 and Ursinus' commentary ought, therefore, to also seek confessional status to prohibit contraception, masturbation, and divorce in cases of domestic violence or emotional abuse. The committee fails to address this problem.

D. Lack of clarity

1. The argument for *status confessionis* is not sufficiently grounded or clear for synod to take such a serious step. The report fails to provide the "concise and clear" guidance required by the committee's mandate. The points that follow describe some of the report's deficiencies in this area.

2. The report suggests a false equivalency between premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex. Including these diverse topics in one sweeping claim of confessional status does not do justice to the complexity or nuance of any one of them. The report is silent on what *status confessionis* would mean in practical pastoral terms for churches dealing with situations involving these areas.

3. The report seems to contradict itself on whether teaching or practice or both would set a person outside the bounds of confessional orthodoxy. Page 146 of the report states:

> It is important to remember that the question is not whether a particular action violates the confession but whether a particular teaching violates the confession. To put it another way, is it a violation of any of our current confessions to teach that it is acceptable for Christians to use pornography?

On the same page, however, the report goes on to say that action is proscribed:

> According to our confessions, the church may never approve or even tolerate any form of sexual immorality, including pornography, polyamory, premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, or homosexual sex. On the contrary, the church must warn its members that those who refuse to repent of these sins—as well as of idolatry, greed, and other such sins—will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). It must discipline those who refuse to repent of such sins for the sake of their souls (1 Cor. 5-6).

4. To take the example of pornography, the report does not explain on what grounds the use of pornography is deemed to be a confessional—indeed, a salvation—issue. Pornography is a devastating and rampant evil in our culture, as the report describes. However, it is wholly unclear on what basis confessional status is being applied to pornography. The committee writes:

> The biblical portion of our report is clear. Marriage between one man and one woman is the only appropriate place for sex. Anything that deviates from that teaching is contrary to Scripture. Thus premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, the use of pornography, and homosexual sex all fall under the heading of sexual immorality and are therefore morally impermissible.
>
> (p. 147)

Is the use of pornography condemned because it typically does not depict healthy married sex? Or because the actors involved are not married? If so, the report ought logically to also warn against all depiction of sex in film and image, unless perhaps the actors involved are married to each other in the film and in real life. Or is the condemnation of porn based on the coerced, violent, degrading nature of the sex portrayed? This would be an argument based on consent, a vitally important aspect of healthy sexuality which the report does not discuss at all. The report rightly notes that many in our churches are addicted to pornography, having been introduced to its powerful erotic stimuli as young children or teens, through the marketing strategies of a multibillion-dollar industry. Those addicted to pornography may continue to struggle—with relapses and periods of sobriety—for the rest of their lives. The report makes no attempt to describe how declaring pornography to be a confessional issue would help the thousands of people in our churches who are caught up in its use, or how churches are to assess repentance or apply confessional status where pornography is an addiction.

5. It is unclear whether the committee believes that the theological sections of its own report already have confessional status. Recommendation E seems to imply this belief, since it proposes "that Church Order Article

69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report." However, it is unwise—if not outright dangerous—for a committee to suggest that its own writing has the same authority as the historic confessions of the church. This is especially so given the serious theological problems with the report's theology, discussed above.

6. Recommendation E, which states, "That synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report" (p. 149), is vague and unhelpful. Several overtures to Synod 2016 asked for a change to the wording of Article 69-c to state that marriage is a "monogamous, lifelong, covenant relationship between one man and one woman," but rather than proposing such a change, the committee makes a more nebulous recommendation. Are we to understand this recommendation as referring to same-sex marriage being in conflict with the Word of God? Or remarriages after divorce? Or marriages that came after premarital sex? Or marriages where one or both spouses are or have been addicted to porn? The report simply does not discuss questions relating to Article 69-c and the implications and consequences of the proposed interpretive lens. The only mentions of Article 69-c in the report are in the mandate on page 3 and in Recommendation E on page 149. It would be irresponsible for synod to accede to a recommendation that has potentially far-reaching implications that are not even discussed in the report.

7. It is not clear to what extent dissenting views are permissible should a *status confessionis* be declared. Historically, Reformed churches only declare a *status confessionis* when they believe the integrity of the gospel is at stake and are willing to accept a schism over the issue. This report seems uncomfortable with that posture, since it states there is still room for disagreement:

> Even if a teaching has confessional status, that does not mean there is no room for disagreement within the bounds of that teaching. In addition, the church sometimes allows for pastoral accommodations. For example, our confessions say that the children of believers should be baptized. Yet some congregations are willing to allow members not to baptize their children.
>
> (p. 145)

Yet the report's contradictory statements about the permissibility of differing views promotes confusion. For example, just two pages after the above quote, the report states:

> To teach that any of these behaviors is permissible undermines the teaching and authority of Scripture. Whenever the church teaches that a form of behavior forbidden in Scripture is morally permissible, it is guilty of false teaching.
>
> (p. 147)

Lack of clarity on this matter leaves open urgent questions regarding the salvation, membership, and status of same-sex married believers in our congregations, divorced and remarried persons, those who are cohabiting, those who have had premarital or extramarital sex, and those involved in pornography use, as well as the large number of CRCNA members who believe the CRCNA should affirm same-sex marriages.

8. The report recognizes in passing that *status confessionis* involves pressing and difficult questions regarding officebearers as well as faculty at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary who sign the Covenant for Officebearers (p. 145). However, it fails to give any guidance on a matter that concerns the employment and ministry of many brothers and sisters in the CRCNA, its churches, and its institutions. It is irresponsible to declare that a *status confessionis* already exists without consulting with the institutions that will be impacted or acknowledging the implications for people's employment and families' livelihoods.

9. The report contradicts itself in several key respects. For example . . .

   – On whether the concept of gender is valid and useful (e.g., pp. 62, 80, and 82 acknowledge that gender expression and roles are socially constructed) or an assault on biblical values (e.g., p. 66, where the very concept of gender is seen as a strategy "to undermine the traditional ethics of Western civilization").
   – On whether science and social science are important in understanding sexuality (compare the negative view on p. 39 with the committee's own liberal—though sometimes inaccurate and misleading—use of scientific and social scientific data).
   – On whether people are choosing to be transgender (e.g., transgender identity is described in terms of radical autonomous choice on pp. 65-66, while in other places the report acknowledges that people are not choosing to experience the distress of gender dysphoria: pp. 62, 76).
   – On whether use of preferred pronouns and names is recommended. The committee urges readers to "decide what welcome and hospitality look like in regard to people's names and pronouns" and "strive to avoid giving offense as much as possible" (p. 86), noting that using preferred names and pronouns helps prevent suicides. Yet, the report itself misgenders transgender persons, shows disrespect by using birth names and pronouns, and stokes fears of trans persons as sexual predators.
   – In its tone, the report veers dizzyingly between harsh condemnation and pity. The negative emotional and psychological impacts of this strategy on vulnerable minorities cannot be overstated.

II. Overture

Classis Grand Rapids East overtures synod not to accede to Recommendations D and E of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. LGBT+ youth who are already at alarmingly high risk will be further negatively impacted by a declaration of *status confessionis*. LGBT+ youth experience high levels of bullying, internalized shame and self-loathing, self-harm, and suicidal ideation and attempt. The church is far from being the kind of community where LGBT+ youth can flourish. It is irresponsible and unloving to declare *status confessionis*, given the likelihood of increased harm to vulnerable minorities.

2. The report's assertion that male/female sexual difference constitutes the image of God in humans is unwarranted and unsubstantiated. This claim is made without reference to the range of historic and current interpretations of the *imago dei* and without recognition of the harm such an assumption permits to transgender and intersex persons, who thus fall outside of God's special human creation. The report's theology of sexuality, on which the appeal to *status confessionis* is made, appears to permit future challenges to CRCNA decisions on women in church office, the use of contraception, and the 1980 report's gracious treatment of divorce and remarriage.
3. By its insistence on sexual sin as a salvation matter, the report threatens to undermine the precious doctrine of salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ alone.
4. The report fails to adequately grapple with arguments in favor of covenanted, monogamous same-sex unions between believers in Christ, as its mandate requested. Straw-man arguments are offered instead of sustained respectful engagement with the reasoning of revisionist scholars.
5. It is factually incorrect to claim that a *status confessionis* already exists in the CRCNA on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Previous reports dealing with homosexuality and same-sex sexual relationships (1973, 2002, 2016) have been careful to frame their guidance as pastoral advice, not as an interpretation of the confessions. In the committee's mandate, Synod 2016 asked the committee to advise whether future synods should declare confessional status because it does not already exist.
6. It is also factually incorrect to claim that a *status confessionis* already exists in the CRCNA on pornography, premarital and extramarital sex, and polyamory.
7. A subscriber to the Covenant for Officebearers is "bound only to those doctrines that are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines" (Church Order Supplement, Article 5). Ursinus' commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism should not be given undue weight, especially as doing so would also involve accepting 16th-century assumptions about contraception, masturbation, and divorce.
8. The report fails to provide the "concise and clear" guidance required by its mandate. The argument for *status confessionis* is not sufficiently grounded or clear for synod to take such an important step. The report is unclear on a number of key issues, including whether teaching or practice or both set a person outside the bounds of confessional orthodoxy, whether the committee believes the theological section of its own report already has confessional status, and the extent to which dissenting views may be permissible should a *status confessionis* be declared.
9. Combining the topics of premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex creates a false equivalency. The report fails to consider what *status confessionis* would mean in practical pastoral terms in any of these areas. There is no discussion of how *status confessionis* would affect the salvation, membership,

and status of same-sex married believers, divorced and remarried persons, those who are cohabiting, those who have had premarital or extramarital sex, those involved in pornography use, and those who support the full inclusion of LGBT+ persons in the church. Interpretation of *status confessionis* could end or prevent the employment and ministry of many in CRCNA churches and institutions.

10. The report fails to discuss questions relating to Church Order Article 69-c and the implications of the proposed interpretive lens. It would be irresponsible for synod to accede to a recommendation with potentially far-reaching implications for which the current report offers no grounds or discussion.
11. Pastoral discernment of situations involving sexuality rightly belongs with the local consistory. Declaring a *status confessionis* across wide areas of human sexuality is likely to hinder wise discernment of complex and sensitive pastoral situations.
12. Drawing a confessional line in the sand has the potential to split families, churches, and the denomination, involving serious spiritual, missional, psychological, and financial consequences.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Overture 25: Do Not Accede to Recommendations D and E of the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

I. Background

Recommendations D and E of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality report read as follows (p. 149):

> *D.* That synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.
>
> *E.* That synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c[1] is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report.

What does *confessional status* mean? The CRC has three confessions (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort), which are "subordinate to Scripture" and accepted as "a true interpretation" of the Word of God. When a CRC member becomes an elder, deacon, commissioned pastor, or minister, they are considered "officebearers" and bound to agreement with the confessions.[2]

What are the implications of these recommendations? If recommendation D is accepted, anyone who disagrees with the report's conclusions (in part or as a whole, whether "progressive" or "traditional") could not be members in good standing in the CRC and would not be eligible to hold church office. If recommendation E is accepted, the report's conclusions on what constitutes

[1] Article 69-c says, "Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God."

[2] See "Position Statements," crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements.

a marriage (or remarriage) that is "in conflict with the Word of God" would be as authoritative as the Word of God itself.

Grounds:

1. Declaring that the church's teaching on sexuality "already has confessional status" ignores previous synodical decisions and processes and sidesteps the committee's mandate.
2. By declaring the matter "already . . . confessional," the report subverts the normative and historic process for considering matters confessional.[3]
3. Synod 1975 adopted recommendations specifically articulating the "measure of agreement expected" regarding synodical decisions. These recommendations make clear that report 42 from 1973 does not have confessional status but rather was framed as "pastoral advice." And all following related reports (2002 and 2016) also were framed as "pastoral advice," not requiring confessional agreement. None of these decisions made by Synod 1975, which contradict this conclusion of the report to Synod 2021 on human sexuality, are addressed.[4]
4. Synod 2016 mandated the committee to explore questions concerning confessional status and human sexuality for "future synods" with reference to a future "team" to draft a new "statement of faith." The report disregards this prescribed process by declaring the matter "already . . . confessional."[5]

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[3] The Belhar Confession and Our World Belongs to God are two examples of statements that are celebrated as contemporary testimonies and yet were intentionally *not* adopted as having confessional status precisely because declaring something confessional would compel full agreement on *all* points from *all* officebearers in the CRCNA. Synod 2017 named the Belhar Confession "a dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRCNA . . . an important statement that speaks to essential matters in a given time period . . . useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship," while intentionally refraining from compelling agreement on all points by officebearers (*Acts of Synod 2017,* p. 699). The study report on human sexuality suggests that its conclusions be deemed confessional, which would, effectively, make the report a fourth confession of the CRCNA by "the back door" (i.e., without due process or consideration).

[4] See *Acts of Synod 1975* (adoption of Report 47, pp. 44-45; full Report 47, pp. 595-604). From the full report, under the heading "The Measure of Agreement Expected," we find this: "Full agreement with the *confessions* is expected from all members of the church, and subscription to the confessions is required of all officebearers by signing the Form of Subscription. While *synodical decisions* are 'settled and binding,' subscription to synodical decisions is not required" (pp. 601-602). Reflecting on levels of expected agreement around synodical decisions in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (2020), Dr. Henry DeMoor writes, "It is significant, for example, that Synod 1973 twice framed all of its 'statements' on homosexuality, including its 'ethical stance,' as 'pastoral advice' (*Acts of Synod 1973,* p. 51). It intentionally avoided referring to them as an "interpretation" of the Heidelberg Catechism's use of the term "unchastity" in Lord's Day 41" (p. 168).

[5] *Acts of Synod 2016,* pp. 919-20, sets forth a mandate for the committee, including the following: "Reflection and evaluation of whether or not, with respect to same-sex behavior and other issues identified in the study, it will be advisable for future synods to consider . . . changing the main text of Church Order Article 69 . . . declaring a *status confessionis* . . . appointing a team of individuals to draft a statement of faith, perhaps in the style of the Contemporary Testimony, on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the teachings and conclusions of the report. . . ." The report's recommendation effectually cuts off the process set forth by Synod 2016 with the declaration that their findings are "already . . . confessional."

II. Overture

River Park CRC, Emmanuel CRC, Lantern Community CRC, and The Road CRC overture synod not to accede to recommendations D and E of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality ("the report").

A. The report ignores, simplifies, or dismisses voices and perspectives that do not fit with its conclusions.

1. The report's presentation of real, personal testimonies surrounding sexuality is touching but not balanced and overlooks many marginalized voices that don't fit the report's conclusions. For example, there are no testimonies of faithfully married same-sex couples in the report.[6]

2. The report does not adequately engage views that differ from their conclusions in academia, the public square, or even among very significant constituents and stakeholders such as Calvin University.[7]

3. The structure and process of the committee tasked with creating the report inhibited the inclusion of marginalized voices. For the first time in CRCNA history a committee was formed requiring members to adhere to a singular view (Synod 1973) concerning the very topic they were tasked to study.

B. Declaring the conclusions of the report as "confessional" would harm the unity of the Christian Reformed Church.

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[6] Perhaps those not involved in local ministry contexts don't realize same-sex married CRC Christians actually exist! Also absent from the report are CRC members who are gay but celibate who nevertheless don't believe celibacy to be their only option; members whose gender self-identification has changed; members who attribute the church's positions and church's culture as contributing to their gender dysphoria, confused sense of sexual identity, self-loathing, depression, etc.; suicide survivors and families of suicide victims who took their lives because of real or perceived rejection from their churches or families. Also absent from the report are former members of the CRC who have left the CRC because of positions around human sexuality. Also missing from the report are the voices of friends, parents, and family members of LGBTQ persons whose perspectives on human sexuality have changed. These omissions further serve to render recommendations D and E "top down" and fail to appreciate the nuance, tension, and struggle of real people.

[7] For example, four pages of signatures graced a public letter (see appendix) sent on December 10, 2020, to President Michael LeRoy from staff and faculty of Calvin University, arguing, "The report insufficiently engages with relevant scholarship from our disciplines, leading to a biased view of the theological, scriptural, and scientific basis for the report. The discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation lack the scientific and hermeneutic rigor and accuracy of prevailing peer-reviewed scholarship and thereby have the potential to compromise Calvin's academic reputation." Also, the report tells us they "consulted" persons widely known and read by CRC constituents such as Wendy VanderWal-Gritter, but the content of such consultations was not reported. The report references well-known speakers such as Matthew Vines and David Gushee but seems to engage on an "I watched the YouTube video but didn't read the book" level. The report is similarly nonthorough with respect to scientific engagement, most notably dismissing the biological basis for same-sex attraction by quoting Melinda Mills in *Science* stating, "The claim that attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research," while apparently unaware that Mills herself warns against this very conclusion in the study being cited (Melinda Mills, "How Do Genes Affect Same-Sex Behavior?" *Science,* Vol. 365, Iss. 6456 (Aug. 30, 2019), pp. 869-870). Again, this is an example of differing voices being marginalized and misrepresented.

1. The conclusions of the report represent one view among many concerning human sexuality. It is not as simple as "the traditional position" versus "the progressive position." There are many articulations, for example, of a "traditional" view of marriage that differ from the report's particular analysis and conclusions. If recommendation D were adopted, both "traditional" *and* "progressive" positions that differ from the conclusions of the report would disqualify CRC members from eligibility to bear office.[8]

2. The report does not adequately address the implications for officebearers who are not in agreement with the conclusions of the report.[9]

3. The report's conclusions demonstrate little interest in moving forward in unity, undercutting the many local conversations led by local leaders advocating for respectful dialogue in an age of heightened polarity.[10]

C. Adopting recommendation E would essentially raise the report to confessional status by binding all ministers to its conclusions in terms of which marriages they can officiate, erasing the personal discernment of which current Church Order and previous synods have afforded.

Emmanuel CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Judy Heim, clerk

River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Dan Visser, clerk

Lantern Community CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Layne Kilbreath, clerk

The Road CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Luise Kinsman, clerk

Note: This overture to classis was cowritten by four churches within Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan and was approved by the various councils of each church on the following dates:

[8] *The Agenda for Synod 2016* details the 2014 survey of 700 ordained ministers in the CRCNA in which 98 of 700 ministers reported they would be in favor of same-sex marriage in the church (p. 409), while 100 of the same 700 ministers think same-sex attraction is sinful (p. 412). Both positions (and many more besides) would disqualify a person from holding office in the CRC (i.e., 28% of ordained ministers surveyed would not be eligible to hold office in the CRCNA).

[9] For example, all four of the churches writing this overture would have officebearers that need to step down (or conceal their disagreement). As referenced above, professors at Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University are also required to be in agreement with anything named as "confessional" in the CRCNA (and have grave concerns with the report's potential implications on Calvin University as expressed in the public letter [see appendix]).

[10] The human sexuality report endorses the use of the Pastor Church Resources "Challenging Conversations Toolkit" which, like the Colossian Forum, encourages honesty and growth with brothers and sisters in Christ amid deep differences in opinion. At the same time, the report undercuts the efficacy of these local conversations and the process of restorative circles by declaring that one point of view "already has confessional status" and employing language about the "true church" and "false church" (pp. 146-48).

The Road CRC: January 13, 2021
Lantern Community CRC: January 20, 2021
River Park CRC: January 21, 2021
Emmanuel CRC: January 25, 2021

Consequently, the overture was sent to Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, which met on March 12, 2020, but the overture was tabled. Therefore it is being forwarded to synod by the four councils.

Appendix 1: Introducing the Reader to our Congregations

In a season of mistrust and heightened polarity, we understand that it can be easy to dismiss one another quickly. This is harder to do face-to-face after years of connecting, which is one reason this overture is oriented to asking for local conversations. But given that most readers of this overture will not know who we are, it seemed good for us to provide brief introductions to each of our four congregations, and to introduce ourselves in a way that shows why this conversation about human sexuality and same-sex marriage matters to our local congregations as we live into the mission of God in our local contexts. We hope this small act of "embodiment" will help the reader to hear us with generosity of spirit.

Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church - Calgary, Alberta

Established in 1956, Emmanuel is a long-established part of the CRC presence in Alberta. Emmanuel members have encouraged, initiated, and invested in Christian day schools, Christian universities, the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), and Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), and we heavily support denominational ministries as well as local neighborhood efforts seeking justice, mercy, and the knowledge of the love of God in Christ.

Our current membership consists of not only newer Christians and folks in the surrounding blocks but is blessed with many families who have attended Emmanuel for generations, with great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and children side by side in the same pew. That particular mix of new community and legacy has become an integral part of our identity, part of the strength of who we are and how we hope to model Christ's kingdom here on earth.

But this identity has not come without struggle or cost. Emmanuel, in its 64-year history, has journeyed together as a faith community through some difficult and potentially divisive issues. The changing worship landscape, women in ecclesiastical office (the fact that it's entirely expected and natural for women to preach, chair council, and, indeed, serve on the very synod committee that produced the current report, should not blind us to a time when these issues split churches and families apart), the literal seven-day creation narrative, and the Pentecostal/charismatic movement were key issues that shaped the Emmanuel church community. We remember the painful conflict in our membership. We remember family and friends leaving for other communities or leaving the church permanently. Those scars and the legacy of that division remain with us.

Because of our identity and history, Emmanuel is dedicated to having the difficult conversations of the day with each other led by the Holy Spirit.

Preaching, leadership training, congregational conversations, small group discussions, book studies, and two different Colossian Forums concerning sexuality are only part of Emmanuel's continuing effort to grapple with having difficult conversations about this topic in a spirit of love and unity. Our goal is to understand that our primary identity is in Christ, and that being able to disagree in love and respect on issues like gay marriage, gender identity, and homosexuality can only strengthen our witness for Christ and his kingdom. And it is not simply that our congregation, our membership, our leadership, and our council have differing, strongly held views on sexuality; it is that we ourselves are sexually diverse. For Emmanuel, it is anything but a theological or academic discussion alone.

A decision to adopt the recommendations of the committee, sweeping away as invalid any other position, would be devastating to Emmanuel—likely more so than any previous controversy. It would undermine the years of effort and growth spent trying to understand this issue and learning to disagree with compassion. It would undermine the notion that our unity and identity in Christ are primary and paramount by singling out sexual identity as having heightened importance within the CRC. There is no doubt that members of council would step down from office and perhaps leave Emmanuel, and some members and families would do the same. There is no doubt that many of our members could not or would not hold positions of leadership. It is possible that this could even extend to our pastors. But most damaging, our church family would be put in opposition to itself—one side feeling wronged, rejected and ignored; the other side feeling justified and emboldened. And this schism would reverberate throughout the community, the schools, and institutions Emmanuel supports, the neighborhoods we live in, right down to our individual witness of Christ.

The Lantern Church - Calgary, Alberta

The Lantern got fueled and lit in the spring of 2002 with high hopes of reaching the communities of Inglewood and Ramsay in the heart of Calgary's heritage beginnings. From the beginning, the congregation regularly repeated the belief that anyone living in the community was a member of the Lantern, whether they knew it or not.

The congregants encouraged each other to provide the whole kit and caboodle to its neighbors, from music and art schools to theatre shows, from concerts to worship services, from dance exhibitions to gymnastics and special events.

Genuine partnerships were built. Everyone was welcomed to be part of it, Monday to Monday. Everyone.

And so, trusting the Holy Spirit, the Lantern received and celebrated folks from all walks of life. Rich and poor . . . crazy and normal . . . weird and wonderful. Straight and not-so-straight.

Original congregants quickly had to admit that "those" people were not so different from the very people starting the church. "Those" people became friends.

The story of the Lantern and her long walk with the gay community isn't so much about legal statements of right and wrong, verses and rules. It's pretty much all about the heart. Those not cut of the same cloth as the heterosexual norm gave The Lantern many gifts.

They became us.

For many years now, these folks are not "those folks." They are just "simply folks."

Through the years, the Lantern has learned to recognize the concerns of the heart and not judge the nature of attractions. That is, the Lantern realized that arguing about the traditional rules of sexuality played a secondary role to expressing the depths of one's genuine soul.

We learned to love those different from us as they learned to accept and forgive us.

They are us.

We are heartbroken that the denomination is considering segregating us and putting the Lantern in its correct theological place. We could no sooner abandon our friends in such a manner as we could sever parts of our arm or leg.

We pursue this not in an arrogant/confrontational manner but rely on the mercy of Christ.

The Road Church - Calgary, Alberta

The Road Church launched in October 2015, as a merger between two 15-or-so-year-old Calgary church plants (Hillside Community and New Hope). Allowing for our shared identity in Christ to define us over and against the diversity we embody (on a myriad of registers) has been a huge part of our journey, joy, and struggle.

For the most part, our theological diversity, the diversity of thought around any number of issues, and the diversity of Christian traditions, experiences, and backgrounds has been incredibly life-giving and strengthening. We have learned a great deal from one another, living into the apostle Paul's metaphor of being members of Christ's one body whose attitude and posture toward one another should be that of curiosity, learning, and mutual encouragement.

Nevertheless, while our tolerance and acceptance of one another is a great thing, how we've lived it might also be a contributing factor to why our community has at some times refrained from engaging in really tough conversations (like politics, like human sexuality). Perhaps "fear of division" has kept us from really getting into the messiness of relationship and community founded on Christ's love that transcends disagreement—even emotional, theological, tough disagreements.

Both the interim report and, more recently, the final report from this Human Sexuality Committee have been catalytic in moving The Road Church to delve into hard conversations around human sexuality. The report has prompted some of our staff and leadership to speak up and "own" their positions, which differ from the conclusions of the report. We have launched and finished a Colossian Way forum, with more planned for 2021, and we are also launching "listening circles" on the topic of human sexuality in 2021.

Engaging in these conversations, (a) we have found that we regret not having done so earlier, especially for the sake of those LGBTQ+ and allies among us; and (b) we have learned that we do, indeed, have a great diversity of opinions on this topic—so much so that we cannot fairly articulate a "church position" that represents our whole community at this time; but (c) we've learned that BOTH the traditionalists and progressives in our

community see our identity as brothers and sisters in Christ as far, far, far more important than where we land intellectually, theologically, and spiritually on the issues regarding human sexuality.

For this reason, the idea in the report that officebearers (present and future) would be compelled to agree that the conclusions of the human sexuality report already have confessional status if they wish to serve the church would constitute a huge denominational/synodical overreach concerning the authority and autonomy of the local church and council. In the same way, the suggestion that not agreeing with the opinions argued for in the report can undermine a person's salvation in Christ is contrary to the lived experiences of Christian unity amid diversity of many churches including The Road.

River Park Church - Calgary, Alberta

Until recently, we were named First Christian Reformed Church of Calgary. By God's grace, we have been witnessing to the death and resurrection of Jesus since we were established in 1952 as a part of the post-World War II immigration boom in the Canadian CRC. If you've read Rev. Tymen E. Hofman's *The Canadian Story of the CRC: Its First Century*, then you've read a book by one of our earliest pastors. We are glad to be a part of the Canadian CRC he depicts, including the work to develop deeply Reformed Christian organizations in Canada, to bring our best gifts to the larger CRCNA and continue to work to embody our God-given unity within diversity.

Also in Hofman's book you will hear about the charismatic movement within the CRC, noting specifically the work of Rev. Henry Wildeboer during his time as pastor at our church. If you've read Henry's book, *When God Shows Up: A Pastor's Journey*, then you've heard about a significant shaping part of our history as Henry spends five of his twelve chapters to tell the story of his ministry with us at First CRC in Calgary. That time imparted to us a strong commitment to remain open to the transformative power of the Spirit. Subsequently, under the leadership of Rev. Mike Reitsma, our church became increasingly outward focused and open to the broader community. This culminated in our church launching two church plants in the city of Calgary and being one of the key communities to catalyze with our classis the campus ministry at the University of Calgary.

This outward posture continued as our church created the annual Marda Loop Justice Film Festival, which has become a staple for good conversations about justice citywide. But this outward posture was always bolstered by spiritual practices and faith formation. One notable example of this is the work of Rev. Phil Reinders, our pastor for many years, who published *Seeking God's Face*. His book points to another way that First CRC (which changed to River Park Church during his tenure) has been shaped by the Spirit—soaking in the richness of Scripture and prayer.

Like many of our individual church histories, we've had ups and downs, times of grieving and times of growth, jubilant celebrations and soul-wrenching laments. But at the center of our story has always been the same thing: Jesus and his grace-filled invitation to join him in the mission of God by the power of the Spirit. Our current vision reminds us to continually be "reaching out, drawing in, and creating community." One senses in that

language the centeredness of it all—we reach out, draw in, and create community, all with Jesus at the center.

One recent part of our history has been to move intentionally in the direction of being a multicultural church. While we have a long way to go, we rejoice in whom God has brought into our community. And once again, as the ethnic and cultural diversity in our community increases, we've renewed our commitment to ask the Spirit to center us on Jesus, to sit at the foot of the cross, to be transformed by his death and resurrection.

But one of the pieces of work needed to retain a strong central focus is to identify what is not at the center. Given our history, it is likely no surprise that our community is diverse in terms of experiencing the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. Our community holds deeply diverse cultural norms around things like deference to authority. Like many other churches, our community is diverse around political affiliation. And, to the point of this overture, our community is diverse around how it considers same-sex marriage. But we have decided that all of this diversity is welcome, that Christians can disagree about these things, and we trust the Spirit to make us stronger because of our unity amid this diversity. But none of these topics or conversations are what define our center. What unifies us is our belief that all Christians confess with their mouths "Jesus is Lord" and wholeheartedly believe that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9).

We confess that Jesus is our center. Please do not ask us to confess the conclusions of this committee; their conclusions are not central to the gospel.

Appendix 2: Letter from members of faculty and staff at Calvin University – December 10, 2020

Dear President LeRoy and members of the Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom (CCAF) Committee,

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of Calvin University, write to you in response to the report that was recently released by the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. We have a number of grave concerns about the report, if ultimately adopted by synod, and its potential impact on Calvin as a Christian liberal arts university as described by our Vision 2030.

Of primary concern are the report's conclusions stating that prohibitions of "homosexual sex already have confessional status," that homosexual sex "threaten[s] a person's salvation," and that the failure to call people in same-sex relationships "to repentance is . . . acting like a false church" (p. 148). The report's central claim appears to be at odds with Calvin's own Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom document, according to which "it is problematic to assert that a topic like homosexuality is either confessional or not" (p. 21). The report insufficiently engages with relevant scholarship from our disciplines, leading to a biased view of the theological, scriptural, and scientific basis for the report. The discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation lack the scientific and hermeneutic rigor and accuracy of prevailing peer-reviewed scholarship and thereby have the potential to compromise Calvin's academic reputation. In sum, the report and its potential adoption

by synod could undermine the academic freedom of faculty and our standing as a reputable academic institution in the Reformed tradition.

Also of significant concern is the matter of faculty compliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members. Faculty members who have assented to the Covenant have done so when there was no claim that views on same-sex marriage and gender identity were confessional in nature. We would not want our assent to the Covenant to suggest, retroactively, that we support such a claim. Adoption of the report's claims by synod could place many of us in noncompliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members and the Handbook for Teaching Faculty.

Adoption of the report's claims regarding confessional status would cause harm to our Reformed community by severely impairing staff and faculty's ability to care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that our conscience dictates and the scholarship supports. While staff are not required to sign the Covenant for Faculty Members, some would consider working for an institution for whom the report was afforded confessional status a violation of conscience. Thus, it would become harder to attract and retain faculty, staff, and students.

Finally, the report's adoption and its declaration that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are confessional and matters of salvation would be playing into the narrow culture wars' conception of orthodoxy and detract from our larger Christian mission at a time when we want to lead, not just nationally, but globally as agents of renewal.

While we understand that the potential impact of the report, if adopted by synod, will be discussed by the CCAF subcommittee of PSC, we urge you to also communicate with the Council of Delegates (COD) of the CRCNA that

- adoption of this report by synod has the potential to negatively impact Calvin University's status as an academic institution;
- adoption of the report by synod has the potential to harm Calvin University's Vision 2030 goals;
- Calvin University plans to continue to support its LGBTQ+ students by fully including them in the life of the University, and plans to continue to support staff and faculty as they care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that their conscience dictates;
- Calvin plans to continue to protect its faculty and staff on these issues especially in their scholarship, teaching, and service.

Believing strongly in Calvin University and its mission, we offer our continued service and scholarly expertise as the discussion of this report progresses.

Sincerely,
[signed by 147 faculty and staff]

Overture 26: Appoint a New Study Committee on Human Sexuality Not Limited by the 1973 Report; or Do Not Adopt Recommendations D and E of the Current Report

The council of Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, overtures synod to receive the synodical report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for information, thank the committee for its work, and take the following action:

A. That synod appoint a new study committee that is not limited in the scope of its theological inquiry by adherence to the 1973 report. This committee will actively and appreciatively engage all perspectives on human sexuality and will seek input from the wide range of experiences in the CRC in order to help give direction to churches in ways that honor diverse perspectives and maintain the unity of the church. This committee will undertake a three-step process, with each step dependent upon and accountable to the previous step.

1. First, the committee will design and coordinate a denominational listening tour to create safe spaces in which to hear the lived experiences of sexual minorities and their families within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The committee should take seriously the confessions of our church's shortcomings and failures as outlined in the 2021 report on the biblical foundations of human sexuality, all of which conclude, "It is a sad truth that the Christian community, including our Christian Reformed denomination, has failed in its calling to empathize with, love, and bear the burdens of persons who are attracted to the same sex" (p. 95). The committee must seek to navigate this tour with wisdom and grace, creating as safe a setting as possible (in line with p. 118 of report).

2. Second, in conversation with the findings from the listening tour, and perhaps as part of it, the committee will critically examine the processes, policies, and practices of the CRC, as well as the assumptions and biases, that have led to the previous study committee's overwhelming confession that since the adoption of the 1973 report the CRC has failed to care for members who are attracted to the same sex:

   > The church has also harmed people who are attracted to the same sex by promoting the false expectation of orientation change, as if believers who are attracted to the same sex can expect to become attracted to the opposite sex as they are sanctified. . . . Indeed, the church has not been the supportive, grace-saturated community it is supposed to be (p. 95).
   >
   > Despite repeated and strong exhortations of past study committee reports to love and care for brothers and sisters who are attracted to the same sex as equal members of the body of Christ, the church has all too often ostracized, shunned, or ignored such Jesus-followers (p. 114).

   These admissions, while remarkable in their honesty, beg for a collective self-examination about why the CRC has found it so difficult to fulfill the mandates and pastoral advice given to it by synod.

3. Third, in dialogue with, and accountable to, the findings of the first two steps, and with no responsibility to adhere to the conclusions of the 1973 synodical report on pastoral care to LGBT members, the committee will

produce a new report on the biblical foundations for human sexuality with a particular focus on the question of inclusion for sexual minorities. The purpose of the new report will be threefold:

a. To dialogue with and offer constructive criticism of the 2021 report. This critique will include examination and clarification of the report's hermeneutical starting point as well as a sympathetic and appreciative engagement with alternate and thoughtful biblical interpretations.

b. To engage more seriously and report more accurately the findings of new scientific research in the area of human sexuality.

c. To offer pastoral care recommendations that

   – promote nonshaming expressions of loving acceptance with a desire for individual and communal flourishing.
   – foster continued unity in the church as we work through an issue that threatens to be very divisive.
   – focus on caring for congregations whose perspectives and experiences lead them to ministry practices that include full participation.

Grounds:

1. A true desire to understand viewpoints of a diverse community requires authentic and open-hearted listening. The committee struck in 2016 was not free to listen well, having been constrained by the requirement that its members agree with the 1973 report. Voices that struggle with or disagree with the 1973 stance could not be heard. This fact is relevant not only to the credibility with which the final report is received but also to pastoral care and justice concerns, where the commonly held aphorism, "nothing about us without us," is good practice.
2. The requirement of adherence to the 1973 conclusions meant that although the committee was equipped to articulate the historical position of the CRC, it could not honestly engage alternative readings of Scripture. It was also ill-equipped to objectively perform one of its primary tasks: to engage in a "discussion outlining how a Reformed hermeneutic does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse what are, for the historic church, ground-breaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification" (p. 3).
3. The lived experience of congregations within the Christian Reformed Church requires an unencumbered examination of the best biblical, theological, and pastoral arguments for all perspectives regarding the inclusion of LGBT Christians in full membership before making decisions at a denominational level.
4. We in the CRC have long considered our denomination to be thoughtful, deliberative, and biblically based. Honest denominational care of all Christians on a topic regarding inclusion/exclusion of brothers and sisters requires a report capable of taking seriously all biblical and theological arguments before making recommendations. The very existence of a variety of robust biblical and theological arguments for the inclusion of celibate and married LGBT Christians

in the church signals that there is not theological consensus on this topic. An unencumbered report would display our denominational trust in God's ability to reveal truth through Scripture and the Holy Spirit, and it would prevent us from engaging and making decisions from a place of fear.

5. The pastoral guidance offered for the care of sexual minorities is confusing and potentially harmful, and better guidance is needed, particularly for churches for whom caring for LGBT brothers and sisters is more than a hypothetical reality. For example, the report acknowledges the harm done in the past when same-sex attracted Christians were encouraged to change their orientation (p. 95). The acknowledgment that a change in orientation is not a realistic expectation implies that same-sex attraction is not a choice. Yet the report also raises the point that "no 'gay gene' has yet been identified," and that "the claim that attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research" (p. 93). The mixed messages are bewildering and call for a more thorough examination of the scientific research regarding gender dysphoria and same-sex attraction, with due consideration of the view that these may be core elements of one's being.

   There is a dissonance in the report that leads to confusing and potentially harmful pastoral care. How can we as a church be inviting, loving, and accepting—as the report rightly calls us to be—up until the point a person or couple desires to join our congregation, when we have to tell them that they are not in fact welcome as they are but need to make changes before they can join? How could this not be devastating to both these people who have developed relationships within the church and to the elders or ministers who eventually have to have this conversation? If we are going to land where this new report lands, would it not be wiser and more kind to just be up front at the beginning of a new relationship with gender dysphoric and same-sex attracted people, and tell them as kindly and clearly as we can that they are not welcome unless they agree not to act on their natural impulses? Though the pastoral care section of the report expresses a desire to be compassionate and welcoming, in the end this desire will seem by many to be incompatible with the committee's conclusion that LGBT people who are not celibate may not participate fully in the life of the church.

6. Honest pastoral care takes into account the experiences, fears, hopes, and struggles of the individuals it is seeking to offer care to. By not taking seriously the voices of Christians who disagree with the traditional position, or feel devalued by it, the care that we offer is at risk of being more about caring for our leadership as we uphold the church's stance than it is for caring for the individuals among us who think and feel differently. It is at this point that we also risk making our churches culturally irrelevant by not engaging in the very conversations in which our young people are immersed, both within and outside the church. This is why more sincere listening, without an agenda or foregone conclusion, needs to be done at every level of the church. This is an opportunity for us to model trust in God as we engage in difficult conversations that we cannot control.

7. If we as a denomination are serious about confessing the systemic harms perpetrated against and suffered by LGBT members in our community (which the previous study rightly names), then it is our responsibility to engage in a humble and thoughtful assessment of our ecclesiastical culture, including the procedures, policies, and practices that have allowed this harm to continue. We thank the committee for naming these weighty confessions, but we disagree with their assessment that we can simply choose to be better without an honest critique of the systems that have allowed for our ongoing patterns of harm.

B. In the event that synod does not accede to the overture to embark on a new and more open process and chooses to consider the recommendations of the current report, we communicate to synod our objection to Recommendations D and E and overture synod not to adopt these two recommendations.

Grounds:

1. These recommendations close the door on further theological study and reflection and assume that there is consensus on this matter when that is clearly not the case. Many faithful Christians interpret Scripture differently and come to different conclusions. To break communion with them would be an affront to the Lord of the church, who prayed for our unity.
2. To declare that beliefs about human sexuality have confessional status when that same status was denied the Belhar Confession, which addresses core biblical themes of justice, unity, and reconciliation, is to say that those are of less importance than a contested view of human sexuality.
3. The scientific study of human sexuality is a relatively recent field of inquiry, and new discoveries are bound to deepen our understanding of same-sex attraction. We believe that the church should remain open to ongoing exploration and learning, and indeed is obliged to, as it cares for its diverse members and reaches out to others living in an ever-evolving culture. To declare confessional status would cause stagnation, irrelevance, and a disregard for the gift of science.
4. To declare that the report's beliefs about human sexuality have confessional status will have consequences for denominational agencies engaged in ecumenical partnerships as well as for officebearers engaged in ecumenical and interfaith work (e.g., campus ministers and hospital chaplains). These consequences should be considered.
5. To declare that this committee's interpretations are so thorough and reliable as to warrant confessional status is reckless and unnecessarily provocative, an attempt to draw a line in the sand foreclosing all further discussion. It is extremely divisive and will do irreparable harm to the church and its witness.

Fellowship CRC, Edmonton, Alberta
Jim Visser, chair of the pastoral committee

Note: The above overture was presented to Classis Alberta North at its winter meeting; however, the classis decided to postpone discussion of the human sexuality report and related overtures because the report is being deferred to Synod 2022.

Overture 27: Do Not Accede to Recommendations B, D, and E of the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

I. Overture

Classis Toronto overtures synod not to accede to recommendations B, D, and E of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, because the report includes neither the voices of the LGBTQ+ community who are living in committed monogamous relationships nor those of cisgender members who hold differing biblical views regarding human sexuality. We disagree that the "heart of the gospel is the call to repentance and faith" (p. 147) but rather that love and grace are centered as the heart of the gospel.

Grounds:

1. The report, rather than offering relevant, life-affirming discourse on sexuality, further alienates, disregards, and condemns LGBTQ+ persons in its continued refusal to center the voices of those who are not called to celibacy and are seeking, or are committedly living in, monogamous relationships.
2. The report is lacking in the grace and inclusivity of a creator God from whom we have never been separated.
3. The pastoral advice given is at times ill-advised, condemnatory rather than inclusive, and contains echoes of the ex-gay mindset.
4. The report causes lament for those of us in our local church who have grown in our understanding of inclusivity, as it will result in further painful division within the CRC.

II. Foreword

Synod 2016 appointed a committee to define a biblical theology pertaining specifically to conceptions of gender and sexuality. This report has now been presented to the denomination for evaluation and response. While we recognize the great amount of work put into the writing of the report, we feel that the conclusions presented do not represent the calling that has been placed upon our local church to be a welcoming, healing, inclusive extension of Christ's work within our community and city. We are not comfortable with the assertions therein that this is the path to the "radical new way of living" to which the apostles called the early church and to which the church is called today. We will specifically address the Preamble (Current context and Mission, pp. 6, 14), section III (Creation and the Fall, p. 15,) and section XIII (Homosexuality: Pastoral care, p. 114).

III. Dissent

While we agree that God created sex to be good and to be enjoyed between two people that love each other deeply, we challenge the insistence that this only exists between a man and a woman. Our spirits are open to hearing from those who love deeply outside these strict, binary confines. In terms of "current context," we fully agree that sex has been "tainted" by sin and can be "brutally destructive" today. However, the flow of this section implies that the changing sexual mores are *all* a result of sin, consigning

numerous mores into one category. For example, "the use of pornography by younger people is assumed" and the laws to "prohibit discrimination based on gender expression or identity" are both listed as examples. We would support the latter movement.

Regarding the church's response as confusing and dividing, we would agree. The church has not always been silent on this subject, as many people, in decades past, were forced to publicly confess their sin, such as seeking divorce from an abusive partner, which resulted in shunning from the community that forced this repentance. Silence has felt more loving in comparison to that practice, but it has also created silence in any who needed direction and support as they wrestled with questions regarding their own sexuality, identity, or practices. As per mission, we challenge the assertion that the Christian Reformed Church "has a living tradition of deep love for the Scriptures coupled with a willingness to engage courageously with the ideas of our time" (p. 14), as this is simply not true. For many, there is a history of pain, grief, judgment, and humiliation.

In addition, when the failures of the church are listed, we believe the first failure is not our inability to help each other refrain from sinning, but that the emphasis should be on the third point: recognizing the pain we, as a church, have caused in those whom we have judged and driven from the church. Our lack of love for all, and our practice of making the church a place of privilege for the heterosexual norm, is our biggest failure.

A. Section III, B – Creation: Genesis 1-2 (p. 16)

The report's summation of Genesis 1:28 is as follows: "Here the humans are blessed with fertility and instructed to multiply, fill, and subdue. The humans are created in the image of God for the purpose of ruling the earth. The blessing of God will enable the realization of that rule." This analysis is not surprising as it is traditional, but it falls short of having contextual relevance for the issues all of God's people are facing today, and for which the committee was convened.

One can continue to read Genesis 1 and 2 as they have traditionally been interpreted. However, Adam's first exclamation upon seeing Eve was a joyful recognition of commonality: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This established her as a helpmate, a partner suitable for Adam. Commonality, mutuality is what is celebrated and of primary import in Genesis. They would be the same but different in a myriad of ways, as in every committed relationship. The report acknowledges that we have grossly mistreated the LGBTQ+ persons among us. Continuing to uphold a binary differentiation with the emphasis on genital difference as the only meaningful, legitimate difference, perpetuates the harm and prevents any further and fuller interpretations in a biblical text that is a living document. We believe that all are created in God's image, as Genesis 1:27 states, regardless of how one identifies, and we desire to welcome, know, and value each individual.

Second, we believe that the continued emphasis upon marriage being ordained for the purpose of procreation is an archaic and harmful interpretation. The report states, "The point is that to be male is to possess male sexuality and to be female is to possess female sexuality, and that to exercise one or the other through procreation is essential to fulfilling God's creation mandate." We refute the assertion that procreation is essential in a marriage

to fulfill God's purposes for that relationship. Other biblical passages do not define marriage by procreation but by faithfulness to each other, as in Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:8). In addition, is there no imagination or vision for those who are single and how they fulfill God's creation mandate? Or do they not?

Third, in section III, B we find problematic the continued use of biblical versions of Genesis that emphasize the calling of humanity to reflect God's image by ruling and subduing the earth. Other versions, like E. Peterson's *The Message*, translate this verse as "have responsibility for" the earth. The continued use of a ruling, subduing verbiage is related to the mindset that has allowed the gift of sexuality to become destructive and weaponized, and the gift of creation, which has revelatory value, to be destroyed; it is also related to how we view the Creator and anyone who identifies as different from us. Connotation is of great import.

Thus, section III, B is problematic for us in its narrow interpretation of marriage, which alienates, disregards, and excludes many of God's children; its focus on procreation rather than faithful, covenanted love being the call of marriage; and its domineering language used.

B. Section III, C – Fall: Genesis 3 (p. 19)

We find the language in this section on the "Fall" to come from a viewpoint of a punitive God as a judge whose primary focus is to punish the disobedience of man and woman. The focus is then on legal transactions. We prefer to begin from a different viewpoint: that of a loving God whose focus is first and foremost, and never changing in this focus, that of being *relational*.

When we read the Fall through the lens of a God who is passionate and deeply caring for those God has made in their (plural as God is trinitarian) own image, we see the Fall as something that caused a deep alienation from our very selves, and a veil over our eyes so that we can no longer see God as God is.

We would argue that the very first sign that creation has fallen from its first purpose is not a corruption of sexuality, but rather the sign that things have gone askew: Adam and Eve are afraid and anxious to be with God. No longer do they "know" God, themselves, or each other in the way they did. There is a loss of the deep intimacy that was known to them before, resulting in feeling naked for the first time. Created to be in communion, they are now fraught with being alone and disconnected.

The way paragraph three is written carries implications of the nature of God. We would offer a different viewpoint. What if God comes searching for Adam and Eve, much as a parent would, with much love and concern? Thus, God is seeking and asking, all for the sake of relationship with them. We have difficulty with the conclusion, "The connection between disordered sexuality and the curse of disobedience runs like a thread throughout this passage." Again, we contest that if you begin with "disordered sexuality" as the premise, you will indeed see it everywhere. We would offer that the trust and intimacy they had known with God and each other is broken; Adam and Eve cannot see God as God is anymore. God, committed to his children, will do everything to make sure the relationship remains and grows.

In paragraph 7 (p. 20) we find it very problematic that within the created list of various "immoralities," premarital sex or divorce or cohabitation is

somehow equated with sexual assault. Sexual assault is a form of abuse, and we would ask that you differentiate these, to respect and honor those who have suffered sexual assault. It is troubling to read that Christians are called to "flee *all such* sexual immorality" after the list is given. For example, couples that we know who have wrestled with divorce, while seeking God and trying to find their way with the mind of Christ, are categorized into walking according to the mind of the world and not the mind of Christ.

To summarize, we take issue with the views in this section on the "Fall" as it begins with the premise that God is punitive. Our understanding is that in turning from God in the garden, humanity began to lose its knowledge of communion and intimacy with God, thereby creating and suffering the effects of a different and untrue narrative of separation. In addition, the categorizing of immoralities is unacceptable.

C. Section XIII – Homosexuality: Pastoral care (p. 114)

This section begins with two personal stories. Again, for each story that may point to the good work being done in a CRC, this report could easily be including stories about those who have been hurt and have walked away from the church and/or God as a result of how they have been treated in the church. Where are those voices, and why are they not included here?

1. A word to congregations (p. 114)

   We agree that the word *repentance* will need to be oft repeated and that the promotion of change from homosexual to heterosexual is erroneous and has perpetuated overwhelming harm. Under "Teaching" (p. 115), what is not written but implied is that for homosexual persons to act upon their sexual desire will always be considered wrong in the CRC as the church continues to reject LGBTQ+ monogamous relationships, thus limiting the full expression of their love. The "practical advice" encourages all members to accept one another, yet ends with the personal story of "Han," in which it is evident that full acceptance is nowhere on the horizon.

2. A word to church leaders (p. 117)

   First, we would caution instructing "healing prayer teams" to deal with the hurt and shame of sexual abuse, but would rather healing prayer would be seen as part of a treatment plan originating with professionals trained in healing the trauma. We would also suggest that the over-preponderance of stories in this report of same-sex couples living together in celibacy may be representationally inaccurate, and this in itself adds to the "weariness" of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.

   Second, our local church is learning to be proactive, both in seeking to develop relationships with same-sex believers and in determining our response to potential scenarios. However, we would also advocate that we desperately need leadership to develop relationships with LGBTQ+ persons who are not called to celibacy and who desire a same-sex marriage.

   Further, we cannot begin to explain how inappropriate it would be, in terms of inclusion, to hold a special service as suggested on page 119, in order to confess the "hypocrisy in singling out <u>same-sex sexual practice as sinful</u> while remaining silent about <u>other</u> sexual sins" such as <u>pornography</u>. Again, it is the combining of these acts—one possibly desiring a

consensual, monogamous, love-affirming relationship and the other built upon, as this report acknowledges, masculine domination and violence—that is inappropriate. We strongly believe that such a service would offer neither inclusion nor healing.

Finally, we would address the section titled "A word to church members who are attracted to the same sex (p. 122)."

Yes, we are all made in the image of God, and have great value just as we are. As well, God desires to free us from the guilt and shame we have inflicted upon ourselves and that has been inflicted upon us. Are the conclusions in this report enabling this? Our deepest concern in this "word" to same-sex attracted persons is the statement "Most longtime Jesus-followers also describe a lessening of the power of their same-sex attraction as they seek holiness. . . . Some also find themselves attracted to an opposite-sex friend . . . and they are able to marry" (p. 123). Again, the report has stated that we cannot encourage ex-gay ministries, and yet this mindset continues not only to be promoted but also to offer the false expectation that people can change their attractions through faith in Jesus. It also encourages marriage with opposite-sex friends as the only acceptable way forward. Frankly, this section on pastoral care exemplifies the fact that the church has not moved beyond the ex-gay mindset, which is significantly problematic for us.

IV. Conclusion

Within the pages of this report, we do not see evidence of the many LGBTQ+ persons who continue to be maligned in their desire for human intimacy. "Nothing about us, without us, is for us" has been a useful guiding principle in other spheres when composing any belief system or structure to be implemented, and it needs to be applied in studies of this kind. Despite some members' having more theological education than others, God speaks to and is imaged in every human being. Second, while humanity's actions have caused division and separation from our God, we would strongly argue that this is not a separation of soul and spirit from our Creator but rather a devastating misconception of division, into which enter shame and domination (among a host of other issues). We profess our belief in the grace of a God from whom none of us has ever been or can ever be separated. Finally, we lament the further division within the CRC that will result due to this report. Have we not learned from a racist history and from the "women's issue" that long-held interpretations of Scripture must evolve to continue to speak life and grace? We lament the many voices of healing that will no longer in good conscience hold leadership positions, as well as the loss of the wisdom and beauty of those members who will continue to leave the denomination if this report is approved. Thus we oppose recommendations B, D, and E.

Classis Toronto
Richard A. Bodini, stated clerk

Overture 28: Do Not Accede to Recommendations B, D, and E of the Human Sexuality Report regarding *Status Confessionis*

I. Overture

Classis Toronto overtures Synod 2021 not to accede to Recommendation D of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. The report misuses and misunderstands *status confessionis*.
2. The report's interpretation of *status confessionis* overreaches the committee's authority, and their attempt to declare it offends against the denomination's tendency to affirm local church authority.

II. History

A. Introduction

We believe that the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality employs a faulty conception of *status confessionis* that makes overreaching and restrictive claims about how Scripture can be interpreted on issues of human sexuality and thereby threatens both the unity of the Christian Reformed Church and the faithful application of scriptural guidance in congregational life. The conception of *status confessionis* in the document is historically flawed, and the argument for the uniformity of the tradition fails to take account of the historical lack of consensus on such matters. We believe that in place of such an overreaching and restrictive conclusion, there ought to be a local option which allows for differing interpretations of Scripture and discernment by local church councils.

We believe that the report threatens the unity of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Given First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto's experience within the denomination, we do not take that unity for granted. Such unity has been forged through charity, mutual respect, and mutual understanding. This document dismantles such hard-fought unity in favor of an imposition of uniformity where there is no clear consensus.

The document begins by delineating people within the denomination into "traditionalist" and "revisionist" camps and proceeding as if those descriptors were simply factual rather than being morally charged. The truth is that there is a wide range of positions that churches and their members take on the range of issues discussed in the document. The document represents a step back in the church's discussions and discernment of these issues because it makes an exclusive and exhaustive claim to proper biblical interpretation. It problematically asserts the report's conclusions as the "traditional" teaching of the church and then assigns to the authors the authority to declare *status confessionis*,[1] thus provoking (if passed) potential division in the church. The authors were asked to examine *if* a *status confessionis* should be declared *by the church*, not whether the *authors* ought to declare one. This

[1] Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 146: "We conclude, then, that the church's teaching against sexual immorality, including homosexual sex, *already* has confessional status."

assignation of authority to the authors of the report is misplaced. We disagree with the material claims made in the report. The point here is not to contest the material claims, but to raise grave concerns about the methodological presumptions of the report. Thus, our conviction is that *even if* there was something approaching consensus on the material claims (and there is not), *it would still be a mistake to pass such a report*.

Furthermore, the claims presented regarding *status confessionis* rely on a historically inaccurate understanding of the term. The authors of the report on human sexuality state that they were asked to consider whether a future synod might declare a *status confessionis* regarding the church's understanding of human sexuality.[2] Their conclusion after such consideration is that their position on human sexuality (which they regard as the traditional teaching) *already* has confessional status since it appears in foundational documents in the Reformed tradition. However, their explanation of *status confessionis* is historically problematic at best.

B. History of status confessionis

Status confessionis is misunderstood by the report; it has much deeper historical meaning than simply giving something confessional status (i.e., arguing that it is a central doctrine). It is used when the church's public witness is compromised by the state (see examples below). *Status confessionis* is therefore not the right term to use when discussing human sexuality.

Status confessionis originated in the Lutheran tradition and is first mentioned in the Formula of Concord. It is first invoked in debates about *adiaphora* ("things indifferent"), which are things that attend the gospel (like rites and ceremonies) but that are not necessary for its communication. However, *status confessionis* is not the opposite of *adiaphora* (as the document implies). The *status* referred to here is not the status *of the confession* as if it were central as opposed to the nonessential things (*adiaphora*). In the original formulation, the word *casus* actually appears before *status*. Both of these words apply not to the confession *but to the "case" or "state" of affairs more generally*. Within the debates about *adiaphora*, the case of religious persecution was raised. The authors of the Formula of Concord held that, in *status confessionis*, the category of *adiaphora* no longer applies. That is, when the state tries to dictate matters of observance to the church, things that were previously considered *adiaphora* become essential parts of the Christian witness since the church is under attack. That is, the church was called to the stand, so to speak, to discern how the church's witness in this special situation is related to its ongoing witness. There are, the Formula concluded, "no indifferent matters when it comes to confessing the faith or giving offence." When the state or another body attempts to "use chicanery or violence" to undermine the true worship of God, Christians are "obligated according to God's Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly . . . not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters."[3]

While the authors of the report on human sexuality clearly hold their proposed teaching on human sexuality as confessional, it is confusing and

[2] Ibid., p. 145

[3] Michael P. DeJonge, "Bonhoeffer, *status confessionis,* and the Lutheran Tradition" in *Stellenbosch Theological Journal 3 (2)*, pp. 41-60.

incorrect to argue that on the basis of *status confessionis*. However, since invocations in World War II and Apartheid South Africa, *status confessionis* has had what the Reformed theologian Dirk J. Smit calls an "inflationistic" interpretation, where it amounts to "ethical protest with the volume turned up."[4] According to the original meaning of *status confessionis,* however, the issue of human sexuality would not constitute grounds for this, because the state is not demanding and justifying that the church hold a particular position. With respect to the global church, it could be argued that a *status confessionis* is necessary as there are still countries where, for example, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by death (since making homosexuality punishable by death would clearly interfere with the church's heralding of God's grace). This last observation brings us to a further point concerning the declaration of *status confessionis* more recently in World War II and Apartheid South Africa; namely, it was declared because the state dictated a certain position *and certain churches gave theological justification for that position*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer used it against the German state church in World War II precisely on the grounds that they theologically justified the mistreatment of Jews. Likewise, the pro-Apartheid church in South Africa saw the separation of church into races as God-ordained, but apartheid was judged by others to be not only a sin but a heresy.

Classis Toronto
Richard A. Bodini, stated clerk

Overture 29: Do Not Accede to Recommendations B, D, and E of the Human Sexuality Report; Recognize Different Perspectives and Convictions on Homosexuality; Support Local Option on Issues of Human Sexuality

Note: Classis Toronto adopted recommendation A of the following overture and submitted its overture separately (see Overture 28).

I. Overture

First CRC of Toronto, Ontario, overtures Synod 2021 to adopt the following:

A. That synod not accede to Recommendations B, D, and E of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

B. That synod recognize that there are different perspectives and convictions on homosexuality, which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God as has been acknowledged concerning other issues in the past (see *Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 731-32).

C. That synod commit to continuing to safeguard the unity of the church by declaring their commitment to a local option for these particular issues, reaffirming the primary role of the local church council (Church Order

[4] Dirk J. Smit, "A *Status Confessionis* in South Africa?" *JTSA* 47 (1984), pp. 21-46; cited in Paul R. Hinlicky, *"Status Confessionis"* in *The Brill Online Dictionary of Christianity,* n.p.

Art. 27), and encouraging local church councils to provide robust pastoral care on issues of human sexuality. After all, Paul tells us to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" and to "bear one another in love" (Eph. 4:2-3).

Grounds:

1. The report misuses and misunderstands *status confessionis*.
2. The report's interpretation of *status confessionis* overreaches the committee's authority, and their attempt to declare it offends against the denomination's tendency to affirm local church authority.
3. The local option has proven to be an effective and biblically sound approach to maintain the unity of our church in times of intractable division and should be used in these matters.

II. History

We believe that the report on human sexuality employs a faulty conception of *status confessionis* that makes overreaching and restrictive claims about how Scripture can be interpreted on issues of human sexuality and thereby threatens both the unity of the Christian Reformed Church and the faithful application of scriptural guidance in congregational life. The conception of *status confessionis* in the document is historically flawed, and the argument for the uniformity of the tradition fails to take account of the historical lack of consensus on such matters. We believe that in place of such an overreaching and restrictive conclusion, there ought to be a local option which allows for differing interpretations of Scripture and discernment by local church councils.

We believe that the report on human sexuality threatens the unity of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Given First CRC of Toronto's experience within the denomination, we do not take that unity for granted. Such unity has been forged through charity, mutual respect, and mutual understanding. This document dismantles such hard-fought unity in favor of an imposition of uniformity where there is no clear consensus.

The document begins by delineating people within the denomination into "traditionalist" and "revisionist" camps and proceeding as if those descriptors were simply factual rather than being morally charged. The truth is that there is a wide range of positions that churches and their members take on the range of issues discussed in the document. The document represents a step back in the church's discussions and discernment of these issues because it makes an exclusive and exhaustive claim to proper biblical interpretation. It problematically asserts the report's conclusions as the "traditional" teaching of the church and then assigns to the authors the authority to declare *status confessionis*,[1] thus provoking (if passed) potential division in the church. The authors were asked to examine if a *status confessionis* should be declared by the church, not whether the authors ought to declare one. This assignation of authority to the authors of the report is misplaced. We disagree with the material claims made in the report. The point here is not to contest the material claims, but to raise grave concerns about the

[1] Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, p. 146: "We conclude, then, that the church's teaching against sexual immorality, including homosexual sex, *already* has confessional status."

methodological presumptions of the report. Thus, our conviction is that even if there was something approaching consensus on the material claims (and there is not), it would still be a mistake to pass such a report.

Furthermore, the claims presented regarding *status confessionis* rely on a historically inaccurate understanding of the term. The authors of the report on human sexuality state that they were asked to consider whether a future synod might declare a *status confessionis* regarding the church's understanding of human sexuality.[2] Their conclusion after such consideration is that their position on human sexuality (which they regard as the traditional teaching) already has confessional status since it appears in foundational documents in the Reformed tradition. However, their explanation of *status confessionis* is historically problematic at best.

Given that the invocation of *status confessionis* (as it is used in the report) attempts to impose doctrinal uniformity through a sweeping and universal declaration, we contend that this runs counter to the polity of the CRCNA, which emphasizes the strength of the local councils bound together in unity by denominational structures. Article 27-a of our Church Order states, "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated." It is this original authority that is being infringed on by this report and the claims it makes in its recommendations.

We care deeply about the CRCNA and value the delegated authority which the major assemblies have. We have worked hard to maintain a unity of purpose and vision with our larger denominational family while wrestling together, for many years, with issues we know we disagree on. Appendices A, B, and C illustrate in graphic and overwhelming detail both the historical, denominational, and synodical struggles to achieve singular biblical interpretations and their ultimate resolve to preserve broader critical unity through recognition of the authority ascribed to local church councils. We need to determine who has the authority on these matters so that we can protect all levels of our church governance, and live together in unity. On these issues, as with other previous controversial issues, we see the local option as most accurately reflecting CRCNA polity, most likely to secure the unity of the church when consensus on such issues cannot be reached, and most representative of Christian love and justice.

A. History of status confessionis

Status confessionis is misunderstood by the report: it has much deeper historical meaning than simply giving something confessional status (i.e., arguing that it is a central doctrine). It is used when the church's public witness is compromised by the state (see examples below). *Status confessionis* is therefore not the right term to use when discussing human sexuality.

Status confessionis originated in the Lutheran tradition and is first mentioned in the Formula of Concord. It is first invoked in debates about adiaphora ("things indifferent"), which are things that attend the gospel (like rites and ceremonies) but that are not necessary for its communication. However, *status confessionis* is not the opposite of adiaphora (as the document implies). The status referred to here is not the status of the confession

[2] Ibid., p. 145.

as if it were central as opposed to the nonessential things (adiaphora). In the original formulation, the word *casus* actually appears before *status*. Both of these words apply not to the confession but to the "case" or "state" of affairs more generally. Within the debates about adiaphora, the case of religious persecution was raised. The authors of the Formula of Concord held that, in *status confessionis*, the category of adiaphora no longer applies. That is, when the state tries to dictate matters of observance to the church, things that were previously considered adiaphora become essential parts of the Christian witness since the church is under attack. That is, the church was called to the stand, so to speak, to discern how the church's witness in this special situation is related to its ongoing witness. There are, the Formula concluded, "no indifferent matters when it comes to confessing the faith or giving offence." When the state or another body attempts to "use chicanery or violence" to undermine the true worship of God, Christians are "obligated according to God's Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion freely and publicly . . . not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters."[3]

While the authors of the report on human sexuality clearly hold their proposed teaching on human sexuality as confessional, it is confusing and incorrect to argue that on the basis of *status confessionis*. However, since invocations in World War II and Apartheid South Africa, *status confessionis* has had what the Reformed theologian Dirk J. Smit calls an "inflationistic" interpretation where it amounts to "ethical protest with the volume turned up."[4] According to the original meaning of *status confessionis,* however, the issue of human sexuality would not constitute grounds for this, because the state is not demanding and justifying that the church hold a particular position. With respect to the global church, it could be argued that a *status confessionis* is necessary as there are still countries where, for example, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by death (since making homosexuality punishable by death would clearly interfere with the church's heralding of God's grace). This last observation brings us to a further point concerning the declaration of *status confessionis* more recently in World War II and Apartheid South Africa: namely, it was declared because the state dictated a certain position and certain churches gave theological justification for that position. Dietrich Bonhoeffer used it against the German state church in World War II precisely on the grounds that they theologically justified the mistreatment of Jews. Likewise, the pro-Apartheid church in South Africa saw the separation of church into races as God-ordained, but apartheid was judged by others to be not only a sin but a heresy.

B. Implications of status confessionis

The point in delving into the history of *status confessionis* is to temper the strong claims of the authors of this report. Again, they are free to argue that their teaching on human sexuality is central to the gospel, but their deployment of *status confessionis* falls prey to the modern tendency to use it as

[3] Michael P. DeJonge, "Bonhoeffer, *status confessionis,* and the Lutheran Tradition" in *Stellenbosch Theological Journal 3 (2),* pp. 41-60.

[4] Dirk J. Smit, "A *Status Confessionis* in South Africa?" *JTSA* 47 (1984), pp. 21–46; cited in Paul R. Hinlicky, *"Status Confessionis,"* in *The Brill Online Dictionary of Christianity,* n.p.

ethical protest "with the volume turned up." The church in North America is not under siege; we are therefore not currently in a *status confessionis*, and as such, a document as comprehensive and tendentious[5] as this report seems unwise to adopt for the whole of the denomination. It also seems to lend the report a kind of urgency that has not historically been characteristic of the church's discernment on matters of human sexuality. As this is an issue in the normal and ongoing witness of the church, it seems to us best not to hastily adopt such a comprehensive report but rather to allow discernment (as we have done before) by way of the local option.

While the report deals with many different aspects of human sexuality, clearly same-sex marriage and the place of LGBTQ+ peoples bear special emphasis. In fact, treating all these topics under the heading of sexual immorality actually has the effect of obscuring relevant moral differences between them. Part of the reason that same-sex marriage and the place of LGBTQ+ people in our communities is different is that, whether we think it should be so or not, these are matters that are publicly observable. Thus, the public nature of these involves the witness of the church. Because of this, we focus our talk of the local option particularly on same-sex marriage and the role of LGBTQ+ people in the church. Other matters, such as how to properly handle a member's confession to the (ab)use of pornography, would also be covered in the local option, but judgments about same-sex marriage and partnerships is uniquely public among these issues. This does not mean that we do not disagree with some of the treatments of the other topics and issues, but rather that our advocacy for a local option is more narrowly focused on same-sex marriage and partnerships.

C. The local option as a way to preserve unity amid disagreement

The report's overreaching and restrictive judgments, encapsulated in its invocation of *status confessionis*, also run counter to the polity of the Christian Reformed Church. Not only do the authors of the report overstep the authority allotted to a committee, but they also betray the CRC's commitment to strong local councils by seeking theological uniformity on a divisive issue. The CRC hierarchy binds together local congregations, whose councils retain authority over most of the matters in the congregation. The strength of such a model is that it allows for unity in the midst of theological disagreement. Some attribute to Augustine the quote: "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity." The structures of the Reformed church allow for both liberty and charity in ways that the authors of the report do not. Appendices A and B to this overture list a series of synodical decisions on issues regarding marriage and sexuality that upheld the authority of local councils.

Moreover, the inability of the church, with over 45 years of study, to reach a resolution that unifies the church on the issue of inclusion of people who are gay renders unintelligible the claim that the report's conclusions on human sexuality have confessional status (a different claim from *status confessionis*) and support a different resolution. The mere fact that a report on such matters was commissioned demonstrates that the conclusions of the

[5] The authors assume the mantle of "tradition" for their own case while labeling any who might oppose as "revisionist" and simply use these terms as though they were fact and that any case other than their own must inherently break somehow with tradition.

report do not have the kind of foundational status that the authors argue. In fact, disagreement on such issues has persisted for over 50 years. In 1970 the Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada approved of the "legislative changes related to homosexual acts" and asked for synodical approval as well.[6] Synod instead recommended "that synod appoint a study committee to study the problem of homosexuality and to delineate the church's position on this matter."[7] The 1973 report brought the matter before synod. Like the issue of women in office, the issue of same-sex relationships has been studied and debated, without clear theological resolution since 1973.

The split majority and minority reports from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage only enhance the unresolved tension regarding "the problem of homosexuality."[8] Further delay only makes the issue more divisive and hurtful. The majority report frequently urges local discretion and discernment. As with Synod 1995, where the local option was allowed for the ordination of women, "It did not do so because a broad-based consensus had been achieved on this emotionally draining issue. It did so to give the church some peace and to allow it to attend to the denomination's many-sided, excellent ministries, which were increasingly overshadowed by the debate."[9]

In short, this argument is about authority, faithfulness to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, and church polity. While we dissent from many of the conclusions reached in the report, the danger we see in passing such a report is that such action strikes against the practices of our church that secure our unity. It is the domain of synod to declare *status confessionis* on behalf of the church; this is not in the purview of a committee. And, as with previous controversial issues, our polity binds us together in some instances by acknowledging the strength of the local congregation in discernment on issues where different interpretations of Scripture are faithful and valid.

Council of First CRC, Toronto, Ontario
Margaret Nott, clerk

Note: The council of First (Toronto) CRC submitted the above overture to Classis Toronto, which discussed it at its meeting on March 11, 2021, and adopted only recommendation A (not recommendations B and C). Classis Toronto also submitted a variation of this original overture to reflect the section it adopted (re *status confessionis*; see Overture 28).

[6] *Acts of Synod 1970,* p. 540.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 121.

[8] Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage, *Agenda for Synod 2016,* p. 403.

[9] Report of the Committee to Review the Decision re Women in Office for Synod 2000, *Agenda for Synod 2000,* p. 351.

Appendix A: Divorce and Remarriage

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Overture 30: Do Not Adopt Recommendations B, D, E, or F of the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

I. Background

In November 2020 the council of the Ann Arbor (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church received notification that the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality had been posted. Despite not knowing if Synod 2021 would be able to meet, our council leadership immediately laid out a plan for council review, and two of our pastors took the denomination's Challenging Conversations Toolkit training. In January our council invested in three full evenings listening, learning, and discerning together. We were faithful in a timeline that, at best, served to confuse, complicate, and constrain our review of this report. While we appreciate that human sexuality is being addressed, we do not agree that what is outlined in the report holds confessional status in the CRCNA, nor that it should be given such status.

II. Overture

The council of Ann Arbor CRC overtures synod not to adopt Recommendations B, D, E, or F in the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. The report's claim that its teaching on human sexuality already has confessional status is opportunistic and unfounded.
2. The report does not adequately represent Reformed scholarship on the issues of human sexuality.
3. The report does not adequately represent the diversity of voices within the CRCNA.
4. The report relies on incomplete and even faulty scientific and medical claims.
5. The report's tone often failed to reflect the grace necessary for such a sensitive conversation.

The following points provide an elaboration of the grounds:

1. The report's claim that its teaching on human sexuality already has confessional status is opportunistic and unfounded.

   a. This section of the report is problematic for at least three reasons. First, this statement violates the CRC's statement on how items receive confessional status: "the consideration of *status confessionis* is a weighty matter that requires extended and careful deliberation" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report, p. 3). Second, the report states, "To raise the question of confessional status is to wonder whether some teaching or ecclesiastical practice, if adopted, would violate the teachings of the confessions of the church" (p. 144). But it is not true that a simple lack of explicit conflict results in confessional status. If this were true, *Our World Belongs to God* would have confessional status; instead,

the CRC has given it the designation of *contemporary testimony*, as it has been deemed true and helpful while not rising to the level of a confession. Third, the section states, "Even if a teaching has confessional status, that does not mean there is no room for disagreement within the bounds of that teaching" (p. 145). This is a misleading statement that at best undersells—and at worst undermines—the way the confessions function in the CRCNA.

b. We recognize and lament that the binding and retroactive status recommended by this report, if adopted, may force many current and future officebearers to choose whether to continue serving in violation of their conscience, or to resign in personal integrity. In addition, this binding status will affect current and future membership for the local church.

2. The report does not adequately represent Reformed scholarship on the issues of human sexuality.

   We found the report's overall handling of Scripture to be undergirded by theologies best described as fundamentalist. This insufficiently Reformed engagement is evident in the report's treatment of individual texts as well as the whole arc of Scripture. The report routinely interprets Scripture through noncovenantal frameworks. Further, significant voices within the Reformed tradition were either incorrectly dismissed as "novel" or simply ignored within the report.

3. The report does not adequately represent the diversity of voices within the CRCNA.

   Affirming the CRC's 1973 Statement on Homosexuality was a prerequisite to serving on the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. This foreclosed the possibility of a comprehensive treatment of the subject matter and limited the probability of a minority report for the denomination's consideration.

4. The report relies on incomplete and even faulty scientific and medical claims.

   a. Scientific method—There is no description of the literature review process used in the report, which casts doubt on the reliability of the scientific evidence cited in the report. It would have been prudent to involve a medical adviser on matters of human sexuality, but there is no mention of this type of consultation occurring.

   b. Opinions seeking data—The report repeatedly presents incomplete analysis leading to claims that are oversimplified or simply incorrect. In one example, the report asserts that "a child who is given hormones to block puberty and who then later takes hormones to change their sex will become sterile" (p. 71). However, the issues around fertility and hormone treatment are complex, and not all treatments cause sterility. Elsewhere the report says, "The claim that attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research" (p. 93). The study cited is weak and inconclusive, and its use is apparently designed to reinforce a predetermined conclusion. Incorrect use of the medical literature can increase fear and stigmatization, and it impairs the church's discernment.

c. Resources—The report includes pastoral resources, such as kelseycoalition.org, which offer highly biased and medically inaccurate information. It is unacceptable to recommend resources that do not present a balanced, compassionate, and medically accurate review of complex issues such as gender dysphoria. While pastoral care involves much more than balance and medical accuracy, it does not involve less. The resources go beyond being merely unhelpful; in several instances, the guidance offered may actually induce harm to individuals and families.

5. The report's tone often failed to reflect the grace necessary for such a sensitive conversation.

   We found the report to lack sufficient pastoral sensitivity and relational wisdom, especially as it wrote off positions that seemed to disagree with the report's conclusions. Our council struggled with the definitive statements that were directed to people we love and with whom we desire to live a life of faith.

Council of Ann Arbor CRC, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Paul Steen, clerk of council

Note: The above overture was presented to Classis Lake Erie at its March 6, 2021, meeting; however, the classis decided to postpone discussion of the human sexuality report and related overtures because the report is being deferred to Synod 2022.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication 1: Classis Grand Rapids East

I. Introduction

The agenda for the February 25, 2021, meeting of Classis Grand Rapids East included several overtures requesting that synod delay consideration of the recommendations of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. These overtures were developed within a context of respect for the efforts behind the report and concern for the well-being of congregations, classes, and the denomination.

II. Rationale to delay consideration

A. Why delay consideration of the report?

One of the overtures puts it this way:

> A comprehensive 176-page report that took four years to write demands a longer period of time for churches and classes to study and prayerfully reflect on its contents. Deferring discussion and voting allows us to deal with this report as carefully, respectfully, and lovingly as possible. It acknowledges and respects the immense time, effort, and work that went into this report. It acknowledges and respects the stories and the lives represented in this report and allows us to treat them as carefully, respectfully, and as lovingly as they deserve.

A request for delay may be moot, given the decision to cancel Synod 2021, but the rationale behind the request remains worthy of consideration.

The reason to delay consideration of the report is that the report's weighty recommendations and the attendant implications demand extended prayer, reflection, and discussion before any action is taken.

To hastily accept the report's recommendations as they stand (i.e., to condemn same-sex marriage as sin and to give that position confessional status) would be deeply divisive for councils, congregations, classes, and denominational institutions (e.g., Calvin University).

To delay consideration of the report, however, would allow us to respect the spirit of Paul's plea to the church in Ephesus, when he wrote "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3, NRSV).

B. Areas of concern

In several areas, the report warrants extended discussion and perhaps significant amendment. That would require more time, particularly in connection with the following areas of concern:

1. Pastoral guidance

   The report contains little pastoral guidance for congregations who encompass differences in approach. Will we lose the mutual respect and love we share as we come to terms with an approach that makes no room for difference? Will we lose our young people over an issue that some do not believe to be central to salvation? How can we care for all those who are touched so personally by questions regarding same-sex orientation and transgender identity? Will the pastoral guidance given in the report be accepted? We have grave concerns about this.

2. Living lovingly with difference

   It is not just the unity in our own congregation that is threatened by this report. The report has implications for the unity of the denomination. There are differences across the denomination in theology, biblical interpretation, and moral approach. Although some of these differences are discussed and dismissed in the report, the fact is that differences remain among serious and devoted Christians within our church. How can we live lovingly with our differences? The report does not address this, although it acknowledges that difficulty and division may follow. Because we all belong to our faithful God through salvation in Jesus Christ, and we all strive to abide by the law of love, as commanded by Jesus (Matt. 22) and amplified by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13), we trust that it is possible to practice love, justice, and hospitality in this contested arena. The report fails to address how we may live lovingly with differences of interpretation with regard to the many complexities of human sexuality.

3. Confessional status

   The report states that its answers to the questions raised in the report have confessional status. This is a momentous claim, backed with little evidence in the report. This claim has profound implications for our pastors, elders, deacons, and members who are faculty at our denominational university and seminary. At one point the report refers to its conclusions as a matter of salvation. That is a far more serious claim than the "pastoral guidance" that has marked previous synodical statements about sexuality. We would like to see more discussion of the claim of confessional status in the report, given its momentous implications for the church.

III. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

In addition to the above, plans for when to consider the report ought to take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on congregations and classes. Not only did COVID-19 prevent Synod 2020 and Synod 2021 from gathering, it has also hindered, and for some time will continue to hinder, shared prayer and reflection, and even conversation, on the congregational and classical levels. Zoom is no substitute for face-to-face gatherings.

One of the overtures makes the case this way:

> [Zoom and other online platforms] make meaningful discussion difficult and imperfect; they inhibit trust, empathy, and understanding and are mentally wearing. Any discussion held over video chat would be significantly less effective than one held face-to-face. Deferring discussion and vote will allow for more meaningful and effective in-person discussion at the local, classical, and synodical levels. Studies show that video chat inhibits trust between people,

> and limits their ability to connect and to empathize with one another.[1] It has also been found to be mentally and emotionally straining, resulting in the so-called "Zoom Gloom."[2]

In conclusion, a prudent delay to consideration of the report, for all of the reasons outlined above, would demonstrate humility (understanding the limitations of technology and human nature), gentleness (acknowledging the difficulties of this pandemic), patience (delaying our impulse for action for the greater good of the church body), and love (demonstrating our desire for deeper understanding in disagreement). It is one of the "efforts" we can make "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Classis Grand Rapids East
Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Communication 2: Classis Northcentral Iowa

The churches of Classis Northcentral Iowa are writing to share our deep concerns regarding the actions taken by Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The council at Neland Avenue CRC has seated a deacon who is LGBTQ+ and is currently in a same-sex marriage. Classis Minnkota expressed their concern with the actions taken by the council of Neland Avenue CRC and the actions or lack thereof by Classis Grand Rapids East in letters to the council, to the classis, and to the Council of Delegates. These letters are well written and straightforward. We do not wish to restate what has been said but want to add our voice to the concern over the actions taken by Neland Avenue CRC. We also do not want the letters or their representatives to be silenced or forgotten.

As individuals, churches, and a denomination, we must recognize and repent from past failings of behavior regarding sexual immorality. In section XI, B of the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, the committee makes the need for this repentance clear:

> It is a sad truth that the Christian community, including our Christian Reformed denomination, has failed in its calling to empathize with, love, and bear the burdens of persons who are attracted to the same sex, making it very difficult for them to live a life of holiness.
>
> The sin of homosexual practice is often singled out for condemnation while other sexual sins are ignored or minimized. For example, many people in our churches engage in premarital sex, use pornography, commit adultery, or divorce their spouses without a legitimate cause, but they are not disciplined in any way.
>
> (p. 95)

If we are to move forward with grace and claim to serve a just God, we must recognize and repent of our old ways. We must move forward using church

[1] Kate Murphy, "Why Zoom Is Terrible," *New York Times*, 29 Apr. 2020; nytimes.com/2020/04/29/sunday-review/zoom-video-conference.html.

[2] Julia Sklar, "'Zoom fatigue' is taxing the brain. Here's why that happens," *National Geographic*, 24 Apr. 2020; nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/04/coronavirus-zoom-fatigue-is-taxing-the-brain-here-is-why-that-happens/.

discipline to condemn all sexual immorality and live under the clear teaching of Scripture.

To live under the clear teaching of Scripture, we must recognize the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture is attested to in the creeds and confessions of our denomination. The Belgic Confession, Article 5, states, "We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith . . . because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God." Scripture is our only rule of faith. Article 7 goes on to say, "We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it." Many challenges to the traditional understanding of same-sex sexual activity have been raised. We defer to the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality and the in-depth study and explanation of Scripture that is given in section XII. To stray from this rule of our faith is to build our house on the sand. We must recognize and conform to the Word of God.

The denomination has in place avenues for handling disagreements. We must use the existing system available for change in the church and honor those changes. By not using this system, Neland Avenue CRC and other churches break covenant with the denomination. Doing this makes it appear that Church Order is only binding when it works in their favor. Otherwise, Church Order is not recognized or honored. Behavior like this runs against foundational systems that have served the denomination for generations. Churches and classes need to comply with the system and the decisions or move to a denomination that aligns with their choices more closely. Working within an existing system can seem ponderous and slow; however, this is the means to do the work of the church and the denomination decently and in good order. When we use the system as it is designed, then we honor each other with the ability to discuss and confront those issues that face the church in a way that honors God.

We can and must do better. As individuals, churches, and a denomination, we must rededicate ourselves to doing better in our interactions, we must do better in submitting ourselves to the clear teaching of Scripture, and we must do better with our disagreements. We must avoid using poor hermeneutics and exegesis of partial Scriptures and cultural influences to justify our life choices, and we must return to a life that gives honor and glory to God. We must rededicate ourselves to being the city on a hill—a beacon of truth and hope in this dark world.

Classis Northcentral Iowa
Brian M. Hofman, stated clerk

Communication 3: Classis Northern Michigan

We send this letter as a communication to Synod 2021 from Classis Northern Michigan regarding the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

We recognize that the many issues discussed in this report are potentially divisive in our denomination. We are grateful to synod for commissioning

this report in 2016 and for shepherding the study committee through subsequent synods so that it is ready to present to Synod 2021. We are grateful for a clear and solid biblical discussion to guide the Christian Reformed Church through these potentially contentious issues in our denomination and culture. We encourage synod to continue to shepherd this process well and avoid any unnecessary delays in taking a clear and decisive position regarding this report and its recommendations.

In addition to affirming the mandate of this study committee, we commend their process, particularly in dealing with a breadth of contemporary issues related to human sexuality, but also for their excellent use of the tools and principles of Reformed hermeneutics. We find this report and its recommendations to be well grounded in a proper exegesis of Scripture.

Accordingly, we send this communication as an expression of support for report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (2021). We encourage synod to adopt it and all its recommendations. We draw special attention to the recommendation that acknowledges this interpretation already has confessional status under Lord's Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism. We affirm that interpreting Scripture is best done as a church and not as individual believers or congregations. In our tradition this interpretation happens through synod as informed by our confessional statements. By acknowledging confessional status for this report's interpretation of *unchastity* as expressed in the Catechism, it gives us a way forward as a denomination to deal with disagreements regarding human sexuality.

We are praying as well for God's blessing, wisdom, and guidance for synod this year.

Classis Northern Michigan
Roger Hoeksema, stated clerk

Communication 4: Classis Minnkota

The churches of Classis Minnkota affirm that men and women are created by God with equality in essence and dignity but with distinction in some roles. We praise God for the beautiful diversity he created when he made us male and female. These distinct roles are taught in Scripture, derive from God's creative will, and are to be manifest in complementary roles in the family and church. This belief is reflected in an accurate translation of the Belgic Confession, Article 30, which reads, "when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." (See the original French wording, which refers to persons using the masculine gender.) This belief is therefore not rooted in chauvinism or patriarchy but in Scripture and in our historic confession of faith. It is our hope and prayer that this communication will provide a clear and respectful understanding of our convictions in this matter.

We believe that men and women are created equal as imagebearers of God and as heirs of salvation. We also believe that men and women complement each other in mutually enriching ways and that God has given each gender specific callings in the church and home. We seek to honor and glorify God

by celebrating and using the gifts and abilities he has given to us within the roles he has established for us.

A. As a classis we affirm the following convictions:

1. That men and women equally bear the image of God and are called to serve him throughout their lives (Gen. 1:27-28).
2. That we are to follow Christ's example when he honored and respected women during his earthly ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42) and as he continues to equip them for service in his church today (1 Cor. 12:4-7).
3. That the roles for men and women in the church must be defined solely by the Word of God and not by human ideologies such as feminism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, or sexist oppression (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
4. That from the beginning of creation God assigned headship to males in the family and in the church (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).
5. That the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" and then grounded this argument in the good created order (1 Tim. 2:12-13). The church, therefore, should not ordain women to its authoritative offices.
6. That the purpose of spiritual gifts is not self-fulfillment but service to God and others, to the end that God receives all the glory (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26).
7. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women is contrary to Scripture.

B. We also offer the following observations:

1. That even though Synod 1995 declared that both complementarian and egalitarian views are faithful interpretations of the Word of God, synodical practice since that time has become markedly egalitarian, making it difficult for complementarians to participate in good conscience.
2. That the complementarian position is held by many male and female members and by other officebearers, churches, and classes in the CRCNA.
3. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women has resulted in offense, division, strife, loss of members, and our expulsion from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council in 1997.
4. That celebration of the egalitarian position and practice through video and song (as done at Synod 2018) causes offense and pricks the consciences of those who hold to the historic complementarian position regarding women in church office.

As members of the body of Christ in the CRCNA, Classis Minnkota does not present this communication in order to offend our brothers and sisters who hold to the egalitarian view; rather we wish to explain that our convictions are rooted in the Word of God. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Communication 5: River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta

I. Preamble from the Council of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta

This is a communication submitted by the council of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta. Our council submitted this to the March meeting of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, but the classis did not adopt it.

This is not a communication of the council's collective agreements; rather, it is primarily a communication from one member of our congregation that we believe is important material to be included in the discussion on the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

II. Overview

This communication is intended to honor the process of discernment as a denomination. It seems that asking the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Theology of Human Sexuality (the committee) to perform the significant work of assembling this human sexuality report (the report) is the first part of the process. Once the CRCNA has received the report, the expectation is on us as a denomination to wrestle with the report. This writing is intended to faithfully follow that expectation and participate in the process.

A handful of initial notes may be helpful. First, I want to express gratitude for the time and energy put into the report by the committee. It is a monumental task. Second, I want to express thanks for the denominational process, notably for the invitation to wrestle with the content of the report. Third, much of this communication is shaped around potential concerns raised by engaging with the report. While there is much in the report that is appreciated, this report necessitates faithful engagement, including hearing strong critiques when these critiques are made in good faith. Fourth, there was not significant enough time to engage the full report. So please consider this communication simply a highlighting of concerns that I had the time and capacity to address. And again, *please receive this communication in the spirit with which it is intended*: *as a part of the faithful work of the church to thoughtfully participate in the discernment around a foundation-laying theology of human sexuality.* I too anticipate concerns with what I have written. To me, this is the good discerning work we do as a community, iron sharpening iron.

III. The report deems its conclusions to have the highest significance: true versus false church

Throughout this human sexuality report, choices are made: exegetical and hermeneutical choices, selection choices on what to include and what not to include, choices on how to summarize the science of the day and how much to trust its conclusions, choices on whom to consult along the way toward making conclusions. Making choices in these matters is common as researchers work toward and finally articulate their conclusions.

What is not common is the level of significance applied to the conclusions of this report. Our denomination has a long history with study committees, and with committees bringing their conclusions to be considered by the CRCNA. Rarely, though, do those study committees assert their conclusions in a way

that *intends to speak for the universal church*, the church of all times and places.[1] It seems that this one does.

It is important to pause here for a moment. The committee writes about various "levels of authority of doctrinal and moral teaching," mentioning Scripture, creed, confession, Church Order, and synodical decision, among other things.[2] And in the recommendations, the committee clearly asserts their conclusions regarding confessional status. But does the committee request that their conclusions be understood to have *merely* the confessional level of authority? No, the committee believes their conclusions are more significant than merely confessional authority. This can be seen in how the committee speaks about our confessions. The committee writes that our "confessions are statements that identify who we are within the larger body of the universal church."[3] They mention that Baptists and Lutherans, though having significant doctrinal differences, are still sisters and brothers in the universal church. So if this was a report on infant baptism, with conclusions that match our Reformed confessions, the CRCNA might acknowledge that believing the conclusions around infant baptism is important to being an officebearer in the CRCNA. But the CRCNA would not call the Baptist denomination a "false church." Our different beliefs around baptism give us our *distinct identities within the universal church.*

But the conclusions of the committee around human sexuality are held with a drastically higher significance. They do not see their conclusions as *merely* about confessional differences between one denomination and another denomination, all within the universal church. Rather, the committee assesses that teaching anything other than its own conclusions about human sexuality would be "false teaching" by "false teachers" acting like the "false church."[4]

To be honest, I am not aware of any denomination that clearly and wholeheartedly affirms adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, or the use of pornography. But there are denominations that clearly and wholeheartedly affirm covenantal, lifelong, monogamous marriage between two persons of the same sex. There are denominations that would not ask a same-sex married couple to repent because these denominations do not believe that faithful same-sex marriage is a "[sin that threatens] a person's salvation."[5] This report condemns those that affirm same-sex marriage, in essence saying that these denominations are "acting like the false church."[6] *This committee, it seems, asserts that their conclusions speak for the universal church, the true church—since to conclude anything different than this committee does is to act like the false church.*

To accuse existing denominations to be acting like the false church is a very significant claim. And from that significant claim would follow a

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[1] Perhaps some recent examples of such significant conclusions are found in some recent declarations of heresy. Recently, the CRCNA synod has declared both the Doctrine of Discovery and Kinism as heresies. It seems to us that declaring something a heresy is speaking on behalf of the universal church, and declaring something to be a heresy is declaring something to be false teaching.

[2] Human Sexuality Report (HSR), p. 145.

[3] HSR, 145.

[4] HSR, 147-48, where the phrases "false teaching," "false teacher," "false church" are used.

[5] HSR, 148.

[6] HSR, 148.

significant result. *If we as the CRCNA affirm this report, and this significant claim, then we should not be asking pastors and churches who affirm same-sex marriage to simply find a more suitable denomination, one that affirms same-sex marriage. Why? Because if we truly affirm this report, we would be encouraging them to join a denomination that acts like the false church*. If we affirm this report as written, we cannot faithfully ask for a reorganizing of denominations around theological conclusions regarding same-sex marriage.[7] If we affirm this report wholeheartedly, we cannot head toward "a gracious separation."[8] If we agree with this report, we cannot critique an affirming theology primarily by articulating that it misuses the "Reformed hermeneutic."[9] All three of these regular talking points are moot if we accept this report. Rather, if we wholeheartedly affirm this report, it behooves us to head in the direction of what this report calls "the grace of church discipline."[10] If affirming same-sex marriage is so grievous as to be a "false teaching" in the body of Christ (not merely a significantly different opinion), then we need to lean into the third mark of the true church and enact discipline on our churches, pastors, elders, deacons, and members that hold to this false teaching.

To many of us, such a path feels significantly too radical. That in itself may need to give us pause. Are we that certain about this committee's conclusions? Are we as certain about this committee's conclusions as this committee is about their own conclusions? This committee sees their biblical evidence and conclusions as having the highest significance possible within the body of Christ. This committee asserts that perspectives on same-sex marriage separate true teaching from false teaching; they separate those acting as the true church from those acting as the false church. *If the CRCNA desires to adopt this report and affirm these exceptional conclusions, it behooves us to evaluate their biblical research carefully and meticulously. Their conclusions need to be indisputable. And as you will see, I do not find it to be so.*

IV. Concerns regarding interpretations of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

Due to both the length of the report and the short timeline, I am unable to evaluate all the sections of this report. Instead, I chose to take a closer look at what is some of the most significant exegetical work of the report—namely, its interpretation of Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and Matthew 19. The committee not only begins its section "A biblical theology of human sexuality" with this

[7] For instance, there has been a fairly common proposal that one solution to our denominational disagreement around same-sex marriage is to realign churches with denominations that agree with their perspective on same-sex marriage. One clear articulation of this involves two CRC pastors and two RCA pastors interviewed by a third CRC pastor, where they suggest that the RCA and CRC simply realign around these two different conclusions regarding same-sex marriage: youtube.com/watch?v=JkxeYktqVaM&t=5s. We would suggest that adopting a proposal like this one would mean we would need to reject this report's conclusions as being as clear and significant as the report itself sees them.

[8] Here is an example of a CRC pastor asking for a "gracious separation": thebanner.org/columns/2020/02/lgbtq-incompatible-means-gracious-separation-is-the-church-s-best-option.

[9] It seems to me that one of the central critiques of the 2016 communication from Classis Grand Rapids East (GRE) by Dr. John Cooper was that the GRE study on same-sex marriage did not properly use "Reformed hermeneutics:" Whether Dr. Cooper is correct is up for discussion, but our point here is that this current human sexuality report is raising the significance far beyond hermeneutical rules within a particular denominational tradition.

[10] HSR, 121.

exegetical work, but it also continues to refer to these three passages as foundational throughout their report. In many senses, the conclusions around these three passages underlie their entire report. Since I did not have time to consider every section of the report, I have chosen to spend time to evaluate their exegetical work on these "foundation-laying" passages.

A. Disagreement about interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 as "one interdependent unit"

The report begins its section articulating a biblical theology of human sexuality by interpreting Matthew 19, Genesis 1, and Genesis 2. In that section, the committee sees Jesus' use in Matthew 19 of quotes from Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as demonstrating that "Jesus explicitly treats [Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-25] as one interdependent unit."[11] Later, it says again that Jesus appeals to these two passages as one unit.[12] And then, throughout the report, it speaks of this section of Scripture as "Genesis 1-2," as if these two sections are actually one unit. I would suggest that using phrases from two separate units does not mean that Jesus is treating these two units as one; such an interpretation is overreaching eisegesis. This conclusion is not "read out" of Matthew 19; rather, it is "read into" Matthew 19.[13] In addition, it is clear that these two units are separate units in the book of Genesis. To understand this critique, let us begin by looking at Genesis itself.

Astute readers of the book of Genesis have noted the division of the book through observing the ten uses of the Hebrew word *tōledōt*. Notably, the first occurrence of *tōledōt* is in Genesis 2:4, setting Genesis 1:1-2:3 apart from the rest of the book. In fact, one of those astute readers is Dr. Albert Wolters (a member of the committee that produced this report). In his book, *Creation Regained*, Dr. Wolters separates Genesis 1:1-2:3 off from the rest of Genesis. He speaks about this opening creation story as "setting the stage" for what follows:

> The drama itself begins in Genesis 2, opening with the words, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (KJV). This is the first of ten sections in Genesis introduced by the phrase "these are the generations of . . ." in which the term *generations* (Hebrew *tōledōt*, literally "begettings") seems to mean something like "historical developments arising out of." . . .[14]

We would agree that seeing the distinction between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is deeply significant to a good reading of Genesis, and that a close observation of the text would suggest that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, though being connected, are far from being "one interdependent unit."

Rather than seeing Genesis 1 and 2 as one interdependent unit, a much better interpretation of their connection is precisely as Dr. Wolters notes. Genesis 1 sets the stage with a grand introduction which includes the introduction of humanity (in general) as being made in the image of God, male and female, followed by Genesis 2 as an "on the ground" moment in history where a specific man (Adam) encounters his specific partner (Eve). Notably,

[11] HSR, 16.

[12] HSR, 17.

[13] "Reading out" is one way to talk about "exegesis," while "reading into" is one way to talk about "eisegesis." A faithful interpreter's job is never to "read into" a text more than what it intends; rather, we are called to discern what is in the text itself, and "read it out" of the text.

[14] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), p. 37.

Adam and Eve are not mentioned in Genesis 1. This "one flesh" connection between Adam and Eve begins the drama of humanity's "development of the created earth. . . . In a single word, the task ahead is *civilization*."[15] Thus, the movement is *from* Genesis 1 as a broad introduction with a creation mandate given generally to all humanity *to* Genesis 2 as a particular *working out* of the creation mandate in a particular couple. Indeed, rather than connecting Genesis 1 to Genesis 2, the author of Genesis interconnects Genesis 2, 3 and 4. These three chapters are all in the first *tōledōt* section (the second use of *tōledōt* is in Gen. 5:1). The first "historical development" of the creation shows the reader an entire movement: Adam and Eve are put in the garden of Eden, together they fall and receive the curses from God, and then Adam and Eve begin to "multiply" by giving birth to Cain and Abel—and sin begins to 'multiply' as seen in Cain's murder of Abel and Lamech's desire to "one up" Cain. Indeed, that first *tōledōt* section gives the reader an initial glimpse into the development of civilization. In one interconnected section defined by the use of *tōledōt* (Gen. 2-4), we move from the perfect garden into a devastating avalanche of sin so quickly that the reader echoes the people at the end of that interconnected section who "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26), and the narrator quickly moves us to the second *tōledōt,* focusing on Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, and the historical development of that genetic line.

If Genesis itself makes clear that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are not "one interdependent unit," then what are we to make of Jesus' use of quotes from both chapters so quickly in succession? To me, it seems that there is no need to "make anything" out of Jesus' use of these two quotes from Scripture. Jesus is responding to a specific situation. He is asked about divorce, and he responds to that specific question, referencing both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, and in this particular occasion, connecting those two quotes together. Indeed, the movement even follows the natural movement of Genesis—from a general introduction (Gen. 1) to the specific situation of Adam and Eve's "one fleshness" (Gen. 2) as a response to this specific question about the divorce of a man from a woman. What a beautiful and articulate response! But why should that response of Jesus in Matthew 19 force us as readers to ignore what is clear about the unit division in Genesis?

Jesus often quotes Scripture. Later in this same chapter, Jesus quotes five of the ten commandments (Matt. 19:18-19). But Jesus quotes them in a different order than either Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. What should we "make of" Jesus' reordering the commandments, when he puts honoring father and mother at the end? Maybe an astute reader of Matthew 19 sees a reason for this reordering, and would bring that out in a sermon on Matthew 19. But even if we can discern a reason for Jesus' reordering as he responds in this particular situation, does that mean we should rearrange the order of the commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 because of the way Jesus quotes them in Matthew 19? We hope not. The committee's decision to ignore the natural divisions of Genesis because of the way Jesus quotes from Genesis 1 and 2 seems just as overreaching.

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are clearly distinct units in the book of Genesis. Indeed, many astute readers of Genesis see Genesis 2-4 as a literary section, and Genesis 1 as an introduction to the whole book, drawing an even

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 36.

stronger line between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. For this committee to continually treat Genesis 1 and 2 as "one unit" is a concern.

B. More carefully listening to the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28

One may ask, Why does it matter if Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are seen as separate units? It seems to us that understanding the shape of Genesis, and specifically the way in which Genesis 1 functions, is important in understanding the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Genesis 1 has a distinct quality from the rest of the book of Genesis. As seen above, Dr. Wolters frames it as "setting the stage." Some might say that Genesis 1 offers us the 30,000-foot view. This contrasts with the whole rest of the book of Genesis, which offers us an "on the ground" perspective. Genesis 1 functions as a general introduction; the rest of Genesis follows as it works out the historical developments.

So how are we to hear Genesis 1:28? First of all, we need to hear it as part of the introduction. It is not a mandate given to specific individuals. Adam and Eve have not yet entered the stage. It is part of the introduction, given generally to "all humanity." And this matters, because we North Americans have a habit: individualism. We tend to hear things as individuals. So it is not surprising that we hear the creation mandate as asking each and every individual one of us to "be fruitful and multiply." But that's not the best way to understand it. *We* fulfill this mandate, not just *I*. So is it permissible for a married couple to decide not to have children? Yes, because together *we* fulfill this mandate as a community, and each individual married couple does not need to fulfill it on their own. This makes sense given the "collective" mindset of the ancient Near East. Here we have a general introduction given from 30,000 feet that comes with a corporate mandate. We cannot even yet see every individual "on the ground"; we have not even met any named individuals yet.

Second, our Reformed tradition has a long history of seeing in this creation mandate so much more than simple biological reproduction. We have a habit of calling Genesis 1:28 not only the "creation mandate," but also the "cultural mandate."[16] We call it that because we are fruitful *in many ways*. Hear again the phrase, "the fruits of your labor." That old phrase has a double meaning. It has a connection not only to a woman's labor in giving birth, but is more commonly used about any human laboring in our vocational fields. Like God, we too create. We build. We grow things. As Dr. Wolters discusses, the creation mandate itself is just as much about forming creation, "filling the earth" not simply with humans, but with human-created culture and cultural artifacts.[17] And once again, there are many ways to collectively fulfill this corporate mandate as each of us sees our particular life and work connected corporately to the whole.

Once we see that Genesis 1 is a general introduction, that the creation mandate is a corporate mandate, and that cultural formation is also a part of the mandate, we are able to recognize that it is not essential for every single human to use their biological capacity for reproduction in order to be faithful

[16] See, for example, Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 16; and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 32.

[17] *Creation Regained,* pp. 35-41.

to God's mandate in Genesis 1:28. It is easier to see that, already from the beginning, singleness easily fits within a corporate understanding of the creation mandate. Historically, our Reformed community has also recognized that, given this corporate mandate, contraceptives also become a possible choice. And people participate in the mandate not only through biological reproduction but also through many other forms of human creativity.

Given all of this, it is a challenge to understand or agree with the committee's statement that to exercise our male or female sexuality through procreation "is essential to fulfilling God's creation mandate."[18] This statement seems potentially at odds with a careful reading of the creation mandate as seen above. If we want to affirm such a statement, it becomes very important that we do so by *noticing the collective nature of the creation mandate*. Applying this statement from the committee to each and every individual would be a misinterpretation and a misapplication of the creation mandate. But applying this statement to the church as a community, as a corporate reality, is appropriate to how Genesis situates it. I wish the report was more careful to attend to this important distinction, as noting this distinction has significant impact on how we are called to embody our human sexuality.

V. Concerns regarding the overreaching use of the creation-fall-redemption framework

What follows is a whole set of thoughts, including concerns, about how the committee uses the creation-fall-redemption framework as they lay the foundations of their report. Indeed, the very first paragraph of the section titled "A biblical theology of human sexuality" begins with the following:

> Reformed theology reminds us that a good biblical theology follows the outline of the great moments of redemptive history: creation, fall, redemption, consummation. Our Lord himself took this approach when the Pharisees asked him about what in their day was one of the divisive questions of sexual ethics.

With such a beginning, we are quickly alerted not only that the committee sees this creation-fall-redemption-consummation approach in Jesus' response to the Pharisees, but also that this committee holds this approach or framework up as an example of good process for good theology. As you will see below, there are many good ways in which the CRCNA has enjoyed and been blessed by this framework, but this framework has also created some problems.

A. Enjoying the creation-fall-redemption framework in the CRCNA

The CRCNA has long utilized the frame of "creation-fall-redemption" (and consummation or "new creation") in two ways. We have often used the creation-fall-redemption framework as a way to provide a glimpse of the narrative movement of Scripture itself. And we also have used this creation-fall-redemption framework as a way to see all of life as people in God's great story. That second way, our "Reformed worldview," helps us to understand much about the created world around us, our sense of vocation, and how the gospel calls us into a whole-life response. For a moment, let's enjoy these two particular ways that the creation-fall-redemption framework has supported the CRCNA.

[18] HSR, p. 17.

Seeing the movement of Scripture through the frame of creation-fall-redemption is so clear to many of us that it sometimes goes without mentioning. Though we are not alone in this, the Reformed community has long noticed that the large narrative arc of Scripture begins with a good creation. We soon hear about the original sin of Adam and Eve, followed by the curses brought on this good creation by their fall into sin. And then, already seeded in God's response to that sin, in the midst of articulating the curses, we hear hints of God's intervention in a redemptive way ("he will crush your head"). The majority of the pages of Scripture articulate the large movement of God's redemptive work, finding its center in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But even in that center in Jesus, we find the first fruit of the end, the "new creation," as Jesus' resurrection is the "new creation" breaking in, guaranteeing that all things will be made new. The whole story of Scripture concludes by painting for us a picture of that new creation in Revelation 21 and 22. Indeed, our Reformed tradition has long enjoyed this grand narrative arc as a way to see the biblical revelation of God.

But the Reformed tradition does not only use this creation-fall-redemption framework to help us see the narrative arc of Scripture. We also use that same framework as a lens to help us see our own lives, indeed our whole world. As such, we have called it a "Reformed world-and-life view" or "Reformed worldview." While many church communities may use this creation-fall-redemption framework for Scripture, its application as a lens to see all things, as a worldview, is a bit more distinctive to our Reformed tradition. So we will pause a little longer to enjoy the way we have been served by this gift.

We have been shaped by this creation-fall-redemption worldview in our liturgical and confessional life. Consider this document we have called A Contemporary Testimony: Our World Belongs to God. This Reformed expression of the Christian faith originated within the CRCNA and continues to be used in our worship life and as a guide for our faith. After a preamble, it notably begins with three separate sections titled "creation," "fall," and "redemption." After including other sections, it concludes with "new creation." And while this testimony covers the narrative arc of Scripture, it is not simply or only a summary of Scripture. It is also an extension of this framework into aspects of our life together as the people of God: education and community, rest and leisure, science and technology, government and public justice.

Indeed, we have enjoyed letting this Reformed worldview shape our vision of vocation. This creation-fall-redemption framework has become a staple in many of our Christian day schools, and notably in the universities shaped by the Reformed tradition. Assigned readings in those universities include books like the one mentioned above, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, by Dr. Albert M. Wolters. In this book, Wolters helpfully translates the work of someone earlier in our Reformed tradition, Dr. Herman Dooyeweerd. With chapter titles of "creation," "fall," and "redemption" (among others), Wolters treads out for us a worldview that refuses to accept any division between sacred and secular. A second book commonly used in our Reformed universities is *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* by Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. In both of these books, we hear clearly that all of life, in all of its created variety,

falls under the lordship and leadership of our God, and so all of our life is part of our vocation of responding to God.

Together, through these three resources and many more, the CRCNA has made certain that we recognize how education, politics, science, family, church, and more all fall under our human vocation to follow Christ (again, with this in mind, some have referenced Gen. 1:28 as the "cultural mandate"[19]). All of these cultural domains are already embedded in creation, awaiting the unfolding work of humanity. All of this is already a part of the good creation. But then again, all of these cultural domains are also affected by the fall and in deep need of redemption. As Wolters writes, "Nothing is 'neutral' in the sense that sin fails to affect it or that redemption fails to hold out the promise of deliverance."[20]

B. How "significant" should we find Jesus' use of this framework?

While I want to acknowledge the goodness of this creation-fall-redemption framework in the history of CRCNA, I was struck by what felt like *an inappropriate weightiness with which the committee spoke about this framework*.

Let us first notice the significance this committee gives to the shape of Jesus' response in Matthew 19. The committee notes that, in responding to the Pharisees' question about divorce, Jesus does not point first to humanity in its fallen state. "Rather, he grounds the ethic of marriage in the purposes of God from creation. It is just as significant that Jesus does not immediately point his hearers to the nature of human sexuality in the new creation. He understands sexuality in creational terms."[21]

We would agree that this is what Jesus does, and we appreciate the fact that the committee puts on display for us the movement of Jesus from *creation* through the *fall* and into *redemption*. This is a good observation and true of this particular response from Jesus.

The trouble comes, in my opinion, when this choice of Jesus for this one particular situation seems to be given a bit of an exalted or enshrined status by the committee. You will notice above that the committee seems to find it significant that Jesus, when he is responding to a question about marriage, does not start with the fall. And that it is "just as significant" that Jesus does not start with the new creation. Again, I am not sure why this committee seems intent to give this *weightiness* to Jesus' choice, but it seems fully inappropriate once we look at a couple of other passages.

First, in another question about marriage, Jesus seems to start with the new creation in his response (Matt. 22:23-33). The opening line of this unit says, "That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus] with a question" and they go on to ask a question about a woman who marries seven brothers who die in succession, and then she herself dies. Jesus responds by saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." We would suggest Jesus moves quite directly to "the nature of human sexuality in the

[19] Though it is notable that while Wolters acknowledges this, he prefers "creation mandate." *Creation Regained,* p. 36.

[20] *Creation Regained,* p. 67.

[21] HSR, p. 15.

new creation," the very thing the committee says it is "significant" that Jesus does not do in Matthew 19.

Second, it seems that Mark 10 tells the same story about Jesus that Matthew tells in chapter 19. In Mark 10, the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask him the same question. How does Mark record Jesus' response? In Mark, does Jesus start with creation, move through the fall, and then say, "I tell you" as a way to assert his messianic authority as the Lord of redemption? In short, does Jesus follow the "significant" order the committee sees in Matthew 19? Not at all. In fact, a brief glimpse at Mark 10:1-10 with this report in mind would suggest that Jesus *starts with the fall, moves to creation, and never gets to redemption*.

Does the shape of Jesus' response in Matthew 19 carry "significance," but not the shape of his response in either Matthew 22 or Mark 10? It seems to me an exceptionally arbitrary choice to ascribe significance to one while not even mentioning the others. We feel this committee "reads into" this particular passage more than it is intended to articulate, giving it more methodological weight than it was meant to bear.

For me as a reader, the rhetorical effect of statements like "it is just as significant" is powerful. Phrases like that may give the reader the (false) impression that Jesus was consistent in using this creation-fall-redemption framework, that recognizing this framework in Matthew 19 is undoubtedly important, and therefore that if we want to follow Jesus, we also should use this creation-fall-redemption framework. This would be a dangerous conclusion.

Further, in talking about the "significance" of this creation-fall-redemption movement of Jesus' response, it feels to us that the committee (intentionally or unintentionally) translates that "significance" to their own choice to shape their theological response using the creation-fall-redemption.

C. Concerns when the framework is used to discern "creational order" or "norms"

Again, we may be asking, Why does all of this actually matter? Let me try to point in a few directions where I have concerns, places where I think it actually does matter whether we are holding out methodologies with humility or with certainty.

As noted above, the Reformed community has been enriched by and has deeply enjoyed the creation-fall-redemption framework, both as a way to see Scripture and as a lens through which we view our life and our world. Included in that Reformed worldview is that we have a strong sense of the goodness of creation. And we have a sense that, already at creation, God embedded ways in which to understand and unfold these aspects of creation faithfully. This is part of why the Reformed tradition has cherished chapters like Psalm 19 and 119.[22] We trust that there are faithful ways to do education, good ways to shape a family, and redemptive ways to shape our political life and such a thing as normative aesthetics. We often talk about discerning those faithful ways as trying to understand "creational norms" or the "creation order."

We talk about it this way because of our deep trust in the original goodness of creation. But one question always arises: How can we discern God's

[22] For instance, see "The Good News of Psalm 19," the introduction to Calvin G. Seerveld's *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (Toronto: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980).

original intent embedded in the goodness of creation? It gets complicated both because we and the rest of creation are affected by our fall into sin and exhibit not only goodness but also brokenness. So, as Paul says, "we see through a glass darkly." I would not be surprised if the Reformed tradition, perhaps especially in some philosophical wing, has a whole history of discussion and debate around this question, attempting to answer *how* we discern God's creational norms. I myself catch a glimpse of those conversations through the writings of Dr. Calvin Seerveld for aesthetics, through my former engineering professor, Dr. Charles Adams, as it came to technology, and from Dr. David Smith in terms of education, just to name a few.

It seems to me that all of these people have gently and deliberately held together God's revelation in Scripture and God's revelation in creation (including culture and our experiences of it), listened carefully and in community, and humbly offered their conclusions as part of a hermeneutical spiral, hoping to come closer to embodying God's *shalom* in these cultural domains. When I moved to Canada, there seemed a whole network of organizations humbly working in various cultural domains, for example, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, as they discern God's "norms" for labor relations.

But it is important that while we note some of our successes, we should also note deep failures in discerning creation norms. It was the Reformed church that interpreted God's revelation in Scripture and creation and, out of their interpretation of that dual revelation, *shaped apartheid, believing it to be a faithful political response*. And it is not just the Reformed church that has gone too far in "reading into" Scripture and creation. Christians over much of history have read Scripture and creation in tandem *to support slavery and to minimize the participation of women in society.*

In this context, let me wonder aloud about this creation-fall-redemption framework. As said above, we love how that framework helps us to see the narrative arc of Scripture. And we have used that framework as a lens to shape a Reformed worldview. But I wonder if sometimes we hold that framework as a philosophical lens through which we examine Scripture. It is this third way that, in my mind, has at times overlapped with the deep problems noted above. Rather than listening to Scripture speak as we normally would, using a Reformed hermeneutic that clearly asks how the original audience would have heard the text, it feels to me that we have sometimes "mined" passages of Scripture for "hidden gems" which the original audience may not have heard and the original author may not have intended. This is notably a concern when we are seeking out "creational norms" by "mining" the creation passages of Genesis. Indeed, to me, this philosophical overlay is an underlying reason why the committee needs to improperly connect Genesis 1 with Genesis 2. This connection, as shown above, is most definitely not "read out of" the text and form of Genesis. Instead, it is "read into" Genesis, imposed from above, not at all sensitive to the text itself.

I imagine there is a history of conversation around this of which I am simply not fully aware. I have heard some CRCNA pastors say things like, "But if God is the author, he can have intended things that the original audience would not have known." I believe this is true. And for me, the place where we lean into that the most is when we preach Christ in the Old Testament. We see the story more clearly now that we have seen Christ and

Christ crucified. I am not so certain that we are called to "more clearly see" creational norms. And, as noted above, one thing is clear: we have a history of mistakes when we have tried.

This history should serve as a clear caution about reading too much when we are discerning God's revelation in Scripture and creation together, seeking to discern "creational norms." In some very painful ways, it seems that we as Christians, indeed Reformed Christians, have a habit of looking around us, deciding on what is "normal," and then looking for Scripture passages that might affirm what we already want to see as "normal"—and then we call it a "creational norm." The choice made by this committee to rely on creational norms raises questions and potential concerns, especially given the places in our past that have brought painful lament and repentance (apartheid, slavery, mistreatment of women).

D. Concerns when the framework mutes the messiness of Scripture and our stories

If "overinterpreting" creational norms is one potential concern, there is a second concern as well. The second concern is that sometimes, given the tandem application of a more philosophical overlay of the creation-fall-redemption hermeneutic and the desire to discern creation norms, we simply miss telling "the whole story." With these two powerful forces operating together, we have the strong potential of wrongly sanitizing the story of Scripture and sanitizing the story of our lives. We easily "read over" pieces that do not fit our decided narrative and our discerned normative conclusions. The creation-fall-redemption framework and the application of creational norms can wrongly "erase" parts of reality. In other words, the complexity we encounter in Scripture and in our lives sometimes gets simplified in ways that may stretch the evidence to fit the predetermined conclusions.

Take, for example, this report's lack of engagement with the story of Tamar (Gen. 38). While the report engages with much of the polygamy in Scripture (and even that engagement sometimes looks too "neat" to us[23]), the story of Tamar is an exceptionally messy story. Tamar plans to have sex with her father-in-law, Judah. She dresses up, picks a location, and conceals herself enough that he will not know who she is. Judah and Tamar have sex, and Tamar gets pregnant. This sexual act is clearly "out of bounds." And yet, does Scripture show Tamar to be repentant? Not at all. Judah commands that she be brought before him to be burned to death. Before she arrives, she sends a message, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these" and she sends along Judah's seal, cord, and staff. What is the response? The community

[23] For instance, on pp. 135-36, the report makes sure to distinguish between "descriptive" and "prescriptive" ways of talking about things that Scripture records. They are clear that all the occasions of polygamy in the Old Testament (noting, "over forty key individuals in the Old Testament were married to more than one woman," including Abraham, David, and Solomon) are "descriptive." The report then goes on to say, "In fact, in the case of many Old Testament figures the Bible describes the pain, division, and strife that emerged within these polygamous relationships, thereby implying significant disapproval." While we fully agree that monogamy is the faithful path of following Christ, this back-to-back interpretation seems deeply biased. Why is it that telling stories about polygamy without noting the pain and strife is considered "descriptive," but then when telling stories including the pain, division, and strife, the narrator is implying significant disapproval? Why is one story of polygamy "descriptive" and the next "prescriptive"? It seems to us that the only answer is that this committee is coming to these texts not to listen to their messiness but to "read out" of these texts what they wish these texts were saying.

does not ask both Judah and Tamar to repent. Instead, Judah says, "She is more righteous than I." How does this story fit in the neat delineations of this report? I would note that this messy story, and others like it, simply are not mentioned in this report. But where does this story come up again in Scripture? It shows up when Tamar is mentioned in the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:3). Scripture did not mute the messiness.

This story of Tamar is a Scriptural example—and perhaps there are all sorts of sensible reasons for not including it, although honestly, I wonder how it would fit in the tidiness of the report. But how about stories from today? Are there stories from today that a report hoping to make a very clear decision might avoid? Are there stories in our communities that a report like this one before us simply ignores or "erases"? Did you notice, in reading the report, that it tells more than 30 stories? Did you notice, in reading the report, that there is one very significant, and fairly common, story that is simply never told? I wonder why the report simply never includes any stories of a couple in a same-sex marriage that seems by all accounts to be flourishing in faith, in marriage, and in their community. It is precisely the multitude of these stories that is bringing about the very questions this report is intended to address. And yet never once, in all of its over 30 stories, does this report wrestle with the reality that many of us are confronted with: a seemingly faithful, flourishing same-sex marriage. Is such a story missing because it does not fit the normed narrative that this report desires to present?

It seems to me that this committee has overlooked some stories that would add a messiness to their conclusions, both stories in Scripture and stories in our churches. To me, these omissions weaken any conclusions of the report.

VI. Concerns regarding oversimplifying and bracketing out complexity

In this section, I will highlight what feels like *oversimplified engagement*. This comes as a disappointment to me because I have usually experienced the CRCNA study committees to faithfully wrestle with what are sometimes very complex situations, and to articulate conclusions in a way that is careful and nuanced while still firm in conviction. In the examples below, I was disappointed with what felt like overstated conclusions made without careful nuance.

A. Oversimplified reporting of the Reformed Church in America decision

As this committee considers whether their conclusions on human sexuality should have confessional status, they look at a particular decision of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and share the following:

> By the word "unchastity" the catechism intends to encompass all sexual immorality, including homosexual activity. The Reformed Church in America acknowledged this in 2017, affirming that in the catechism "God condemns 'all unchastity,' which includes same-sex sexual activity.[24]

This certainly happened, and the committee uses this decision to strongly assert that their conclusions are *already confessional*. But pointing to the RCA's decision raises more questions than it answers.

[24] HSR, p. 146.

A first set of questions might simply wonder if there was overwhelming agreement on this conclusion: Was this motion deeply contested? Did the vote barely pass? If so, what does that mean about how we should hear it?

A second set of questions might wonder how the CRC and RCA differ in how they hold the confessions: What significance did this vote have in the RCA? Does the RCA adhere to their confessions in the same way the CRC does? Does an officebearer in the RCA now need to wholeheartedly believe this statement or step down from office? If the RCA holds their confessions with a different degree of significance, what might that mean for how this decision should be imported into the CRCNA?

Finally, a third set of questions around the very fact that the RCA had to vote to decide on this conclusion: If the RCA had to vote on this decision, doesn't that mean that up until this point, it had not officially affirmed this conclusion? Wouldn't that mean that the parallel may be true in the CRCNA—that until we vote to affirm the same, it likely is not affirmed in the CRCNA? And, since the RCA had to vote to affirm this, would that mean that since the CRCNA has not yet voted to affirm this, this teaching does *not already* have confessional status?

To us, these questions come quickly when just reading the report's statement. In addition, the use of this one quote feels highly selective—as if this one quote was used *only because it affirmed the committee's conclusions*. One might ask if the committee more deeply engaged with the RCA, as they too are having similar conversations about human sexuality. In a quick search, it seemed to me that there are other decisions made by the RCA that this committee would find complicating for their conclusions, but did not quote.[25] But thinking further, if the RCA's decision about an interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism is deemed so significant, did the committee research other denominations about their interpretation of the word *unchastity*? Did the committee ask for a collective response from the World Communion of Reformed Churches? If they did, what was the collective response? If not, why did the committee just look for this decision from one denomination?

B. Oversimplified statement about the global church

Near the end of the report, the committee states, "The global church finds the Western church's challenges to biblical teaching on human sexuality incomprehensible and offensive."[26] This is a bold statement. I thought it wise to research it a bit further. As there was no clear link to follow in the report, I decided to assume that one of the teachings found offensive by the global church is an affirmation of same-sex marriage. So I will focus on that.

First, I followed the footnote of the committee. While there is no direct link, the footnote mentions "various statements by non-Western bishops in the United Methodist Church at their 2019 General Assembly."[27] Here are the regional titles used by the United Methodist Church (UMC) that I imagine

[25] In a search for other notable decisions by the RCA that would seemingly relate to this report, we found the work of the RCA's Commission on Theology to be notable. In 2018, the commission was asked to evaluate the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality. In 2019, they came back with their brief report, which did not recommend the catechism for acceptance in the RCA. Notably, one of their concerns was the catechism's reference to "creation order" (images.rca.org/docs/synod/2019Workbook.pdf#page=283, p. 284).

[26] HSR, p. 148.

[27] HSR, p. 148.

would be considered non-Western: Africa Central, Congo, Philippines, West Africa. I wondered about same-sex marriage in those countries represented at the UMC gathering: Is same-sex marriage even legal in those countries? I looked up the legality of same-sex marriage in the Congo, the Philippines, and several of the countries in the regions of Africa noted. In none of the ones I investigated was same-sex marriage legal. This begs the question: Is it possible that these communities have no experiences with what seem to be happily married, faithful, and flourishing Christian same-sex couples? Indeed, this is likely the case, since same-sex marriage is illegal. So perhaps there has been no reason to engage Scripture more deeply on these matters, as these non-Western Christians have not experienced the dissonance encountered by many of us in the West—a dissonance between our traditional interpretation of Scripture regarding same-sex marriage and our experience within God's community of same-sex married couples.

Second, I spent just a little bit of time looking elsewhere in the global church. What I found surprised me. For instance, the National Council of Churches in India has a very affirming statement and a published book around same-sex marriage, transgender identities, and much more. This is not the work of a single denomination, but multiple ones all connected in this national network, and together they agreed to a posture of inclusion that seems well beyond what was proposed at the UMC gathering.[28] So clearly, the global church does not all speak with the same voice.

Third, I wondered if the committee had reached out to any of our CRCNA agencies that have global connections. In December, I happened to be on a Zoom call with several CRCNA global missional leaders. I asked them if they were consulted; they said they had not been consulted directly. Second, I asked what they thought of this statement by the committee about the global church. Their response was mixed. Generally, their response was that a traditional view of marriage was held by most global church bodies of which they were aware. But *they also noted* that in very many of the places to which they were connected, there is unrest about that traditional position and it felt like conversation was starting to bubble up.

Fourth, it seems to me that one of the assumptions that often comes alongside this conversation is that the Western church has been deeply impacted by its culture. The connected conclusion is often that because Western culture affirms same-sex marriage, the church is simply parroting its culture and not following Scripture. But a quick review of perspectives on same-sex marriage around the globe seems to suggest that *almost every church feels the same way as their culture*.[29] What does this mean about our assumption that the

[28] R. Christopher Rajkumar, ed., F*amily and Human Sexuality: A Theological Reader* (Nagpur India: National Council of Churches in India, 2016). Also, "An Ecumenical Document on Human Sexuality," National Council of Churches in India (Nagpur India: Inside Creation, 2012).

[29] Consider these two pages from the PEW research website. On this page, you will find a chart titled "Acceptance of homosexuality varies across the globe," with more than 30 countries listed: pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/. On this second page, you will find a graphic depicting the acceptance of gay marriage by Catholics and a second graph depicting the Catholic perspective on homosexuality, again divided by country: pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/02/how-catholics-around-the-world-see-same-sex-marriage-homosexuality/. It seems to us that at least in this brief comparison, almost all countries found on both pages demonstrate that the church-specific and the public perspective on homosexuality is very similar.

Western church, because it parallels its culture, is not following Scripture? Would this also mean that the non-Western church, because it parallels its culture, is *also* not following Scripture? It seems wrong to conclude the first, but not the second.

Fifth, as noted above, the committee seems to select one decision of the RCA that matches their conclusions, but does not reference other decisions of the RCA that are more complicated for their conclusions. In this global church quote, I wondered if the committee has done the same thing. Is it possible that the concern raised by Soong-Chan Rah fits our situation in the CRCNA as seen in this report? He says: "To make a blanket statement that we should follow the Global South only on one particular matter actually dishonors them," Rah says. "If we're picking and choosing when to listen, we're not actually listening. We're just using them to suit our purposes.[30]

Further, given the history of colonialism and the power imbalances in our global history, we may fail to notice that "the 'perspectives of the Global South' are often the imposed perspectives of the Global North. Sometimes when we think we are listening to 'them,' we may only be hearing the echoes of our own voices."[31]

The committee's quote around the voice of the global church raises many questions. But it also highlights the unique situation of North America and the CRCNA. Perhaps it is worth wondering: Does our experience of legalized same-sex marriage in Canada (and more recently, in the U.S.) give us the capacity to witness something not yet available to be seen in many other countries? Do we have the opportunity, because of the legalization of same-sex marriage, to listen more carefully, more kindly, more generously to same-sex married couples than Christians in other countries? If God has given us access to stories of same-sex married Christians in such abundance, what is our responsibility to steward these stories in a way that serves and equips the global church for a conversation that is, in some places, just beginning? And what if we turned around our inquiry to the global body of Christ and sought out those places that have listened to LGBTQ Christians better than we have, that have a history of a flourishing connection with LGBTQ Christians? What might we find if we intentionally sought out LGBTQ Christians around the world and asked them, "What's working in your Christian community?"

VII. Summary

While there has not been sufficient time to consider the whole of the human sexuality report, I submit my work here as a part of the discernment process. It seems to me that this committee holds its conclusions with a level of certainty that few study committees in our CRCNA history have asserted.

In this communication I have expressed some significant concerns around a portion of the theological work of this report by evaluating a few interpretive decisions made. Given more time, more concerns may arise. But I would consider the committee's work on Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 to be central to their argument, and it is the work specifically on these passages that I

[30] washingtonpost.com/national/religion/evangelicals-want-to-follow-the-global-south-on-gays-they-should-be-careful-what-they-ask-for-commentary/2015/05/08/8bb45344-f5c9-11e4-bca5-21b51bbdf93e_story.html

[31] Ibid.

investigated, concluding that *at least* there are other viable, and perhaps better, interpretive options.

Second, I have spent some time considering how the creation-fall-redemption framework is adopted for this report. The CRCNA has benefited deeply from the use of this framework as a way to summarize the movement of Scripture and to shape our holistic Reformed worldview. But there are ways in which this framework has also caused pain and muted complexity, and I have articulated some concerns that this report might lean into those more problematic pathways.

Finally, I delved into two situations where it seems to me that this committee oversimplifies the situation. Why and how would a decision made in the RCA impinge upon us? We do not know, but the committee asserts that this one decision matters. And how should we understand the voice of the global church, and, notably, which voice of the global church should we listen to? Again, this committee makes an exceptionally strong assertion that, to me, looks at least worth nuancing if we want to listen well.

To me, the concerns raised give us no choice but to at least consider whether the certainty with which the committee holds their conclusions is appropriate. I feel it is not.

I trust that other overtures and communications will delve into other places of concern and places where this report is helpful. But for now, this is all I can do, and I pray that it is helpful in the deliberations of synod regarding the human sexuality report.

Submitted on behalf of a member of River Park CRC as communication,
Council of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta
Dan Visser, clerk

Note: The council of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta, forwarded the above communication to the March meeting of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan for its consideration, but the classis did not consider overtures or communications due to the cancellation of Synod 2021, so the council decided to forward the communication to synod.