

- Incorporate into council training and orientation.
- Include in church visitor training (also with the Healthy Church Executive survey from Pastor Church Resources).
- The current CRCNA staff Code of Conduct can incorporate new elements from the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and be reviewed at the annual performance review.

Grounds:

1. The abuse of power is an urgent matter.
2. Synod 2019 recognized the urgent need for a code of conduct policy and asked that one be created. Three years later the need is even more apparent.
3. The policy and implementation process was created in consultation with experts in the field, including safe church advocates and Pastor Church Resources staff.
4. The COD has already deliberated, approved, and implemented this policy for members of the COD.

(The report of Advisory Committee 5 is continued in Article 71.)

ARTICLE 57

The morning session recesses at 11:51 a.m. Ms. Ashley Medendorp, Synodical Services staff, leads in closing prayer. Synod will reconvene Tuesday afternoon at 1:15 p.m.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON, June 14, 2022

Tenth Session

ARTICLE 58

The afternoon session convenes at 1:18 p.m. Rev. Timothy Kuperus leads in opening prayer.

Elder delegate Melvin Vander Bie (Georgetown) replaces Douglas D. Holtrop. He rises to express agreement with the forms of unity.

ARTICLE 59

The vice president assumes the chair.

Advisory Committee 8, Human Sexuality, Rev. Douglas E. Fakkema reporting, presents the following:

I. Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

A. Materials:

1. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, pp. 313-487
2. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Council of Delegates Report (section II, A, 9, including Appendix A), pp. 38, 57-71
3. 73 Overtures and Communications in the *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, the *Agenda for Synod 2022*, and the 2022 Supplement

B. Background

1. In 2016, synod responded to several overtures asking for clarification of the meaning of biblical marriage in Church Order Article 69-c by appointing a study committee with the following 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)

2. The mandate for this committee includes discussion of how a Reformed perspective on biblical authority should be applied, dialogue with other voices and the current scientific studies in these areas, reflections on evaluation of questions around Church Order Article 69, the confessional status of synodical decisions, and whether a new statement on human sexuality is needed.
3. The Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (HSR Committee) met first in October 2016, then by Zoom following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in June 2020. Four of these meetings were set aside to interact with people in specialized ministries or life situations whose input the HSR committee sought. The HSR committee submitted an interim report to Synod 2019, and three committee members were present to facilitate discussions and solicit feedback. The Human Sexuality Report (HSR) was finally presented to Synod 2022 after a delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. The HSR followed this outline:
 - I. Introduction
 - II. Preamble which opens with stories from our churches
 - III. A biblical theology of human sexuality
 - IV. Note on science and general revelation
 - V. Pornography: Cultural context
 - VI. Pornography: Scripture
 - VII. Pornography: Pastoral care
 - VIII. Gender identity: Cultural context
 - IX. Gender identity: Scripture
 - X. Gender identity: Pastoral care
 - XI. Homosexuality: Cultural context
 - XII. Homosexuality: Scripture
 - XIII. Homosexuality: Pastoral care
 - XIV. Reflections on singleness, premarital sex and cohabitation, polyamory, and divorce
 - XV. Sexual desire: Bodies, bonding, and boundaries in the Song of Songs
 - XVI. Confessional status
 - XVII. Recommendations

Appendix A: What Can Science Tell Us about the Biological Origins of Sexual Orientation?

Appendix B: Disorders of Sexual Development and Their Implications

C. *Observations on “weightiness”*

1. The HSR committee’s mandate includes grounds for the five-year window granted to the committee to complete its work which noted the “scope of the task assigned” and that the weightiness of this matter “requires extended and careful deliberation” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 927). This weightiness was confirmed in dialogue with the HSR committee and felt by this advisory committee.

This weightiness is observed in these two ways: (1) In the large number of overtures, communications, and extrasynodical conversations around the HSR, and (2) in the fact that we were constantly reminded, through story and testimony, that we were considering elements of our community that touch the lives of so many who face questions, pain, and brokenness in one of the most intimate and personal areas of our lives, our sexuality:

Tragically, the church’s response to the confusion, questions, and sexual turbulence of a desperate world, and even of its hurting members, has often been silence. Whether because we are caught in our own hidden sexual sins, unsure whether God’s grace actually has power, or we are afraid to speak unpopular or unaffirming words, we have not offered the healing words of the gospel of grace to fellow sinners.

(*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 320)

In five powerful words, the HSR declares: “We have failed each other” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 320).

2. This weightiness affords the Christian Reformed Church an unprecedented opportunity to lament, to repent, and to reimagine our life together around the Word, sacraments, and discipleship.

The church is facing a crisis of gospel proportions. Our failure to be salt and light through love, sexuality, marriage, friendship, and mutual accountability has deeply compromised our witness to the gospel. We are facing not just one problem, or even two or three. Our whole way of life has fallen out of step with the Spirit and with the teaching of Scripture, and all of us must be called to account. And yet in this very realization we have the opportunity, together, to repent. We have the opportunity to reexamine our lives and our communities, to confess the sins we have committed against each other, and to call one another back to the costly path of loving discipleship. By following this path, we once again can find hope and offer hope to a desperate, broken world.

(*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 321)

3. This advisory committee calls Synod 2022 to begin these deliberations with prayer.

Members of Advisory Committee 8 lead in a prayer of common lament: “Lord Jesus, we embrace the call to be the manifestation of your body on earth. We desire to offer grace and radical hospitality to all persons who come seeking your presence through the ministries of our congregations

and communities. We want to be like you: welcoming our noblest neighbors, notorious sinners, and even our own immoral (or fallen) selves.

“To you, O God, we surrender our will, our power, our privilege. We surrender fully to your power, Blessed Trinity.”

4. This advisory committee shares the desire of the HSR committee: “The Holy Spirit leads. God pours out love and grace. May our desire to love one another and our neighbors increase, grounded in the confidence that we ‘belong—body and soul . . . –to [our] faithful Savior, Jesus Christ’ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1)” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 327).

D. *Recommendations*

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to HSR committee members Mary-Lee Bouma, Jim Vanderwoerd, and Jeff Weima, and, when Council of Delegates material is addressed, to Andy de Ruyter, chair of the Council of Delegates; Michael L. Ten Haken, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Colin P. Watson, Sr., executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed.

—*Adopted*

2. That synod thank the following:

- a. The members of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for their service to the church.
- b. The individuals who shared and compiled the many stories we heard. It is with great appreciation, and has been a tremendous honor, to receive and to hear the stories of those who shared in the HSR report, in the agenda, and through various overtures submitted to synod. We recognize that this was not done lightly and required significant courage and vulnerability. For all of this, and the ways the stories included in the HSR, in the COD Report, and in Overtures 20 and 23 (*Deferred Agenda for Synod 2021*) and 38 and 56 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*) enriched and informed our deliberations, we extend our sincerest thanks.
- c. The individuals who faithfully served our church, this process, and our God by praying, by engaging with our advisory committee, and by giving the many hours it took to research and write the more than seventy overtures and communications that engaged with the HSR and guided our advisory committee work.

—*Adopted*

3. That synod solemnly take note of the pervasive sin of pornography and its harm, and lead our churches into repentance and healing. The HSR describes the problem this way: “We have tolerated [pornography] because the lusts of our hearts are dear to us. We have tolerated it because we are comfortable with the objectification and domination of women. The sins that lie closest to our hearts are those for which it is the most difficult to repent” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 362).

Background: The work of the HSR with regard to pornography is deeply needed for the church today. The work of the CRC to address the sin of pornography first came to the surface in 1987 as Classis Grandville over-tured synod to take a position on pornography. Synod 1988 approved a

revised statement on pornography (*Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 368-69, 605-607). Synod gave several recommendations in response to an overture for Classis Eastern Canada in 2012 (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 477; *Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 758-59). Synod 2016 adopted a description in the Church Order Supplement, Article 84 stating that “participation in pornography” is ungodly conduct (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 716).

Grounds:

- a. The advisory committee turns its attention first to pornography because it is a sin that transcends sexual orientation and so, in considering a report so identified with how to address homosexual orientation, gives each one of us the opportunity to find ourselves in this report.
- b. The advisory committee turns its attention first to pornography because it is so often a secret burden and because it so clearly violates the dignity of other imagebearers of God. It is the conviction of the advisory committee that we will not be successful in dealing with the rest of the HSR if we do not deal first with the sin of pornography in our church. We note that the key New Testament text on same-sex activity, Romans 1, leads into Romans 2, which reminds us that “when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:3-4).
- c. The HSR’s teaching and pastoral care advice concerning pornography is consistent with a Reformed perspective of biblical authority and a helpful application of a biblical theology of the body.

—*Noted*

4. That synod encourage the churches to make use of the curriculum prepared by Pastor Church Resources, in conjunction with members of the committee, to help small groups study and discuss aspects of the committee’s report which may be controversial.

—*Adopted*

Note: The advisory committee divided the HSR Recommendation B into two separate recommendations and presents them in reverse order.

5. That synod recommend the pastoral care sections in the HSR as offering sound, introductory guidance to the churches and strongly encourage continuing conversations around the complex items within the HSR and how to faithfully implement these practices in the life of the church.

The advisory committee sensed complexity in this area, so we make the following observations:

- The HSR’s pastoral care sections ought to be conversation starters regarding what it means to live a healthy Christian sexual life for both married and single persons.
- The text of the HSR recognizes the need for continued dialogue among scholars and research into the fields of biblical studies and the biological and social sciences, especially related to the topic of

gender dysphoria (HRS sections VIII-X). This need was also recognized in Overtures 40 and 42 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*).

- It is important that listening and supporting conversations concerning pastoral care are initiated with a variety of unique cultural settings and geographic regions. We were encouraged by the engagement with the Korean Council, with Classis Red Mesa, with Consejo Latino and with sisters and brothers in the African-American community, and we see a need for much more engagement in the future.
- We need each other for this work of pastoral care, and the contributions of those representing different generations, different cultural and geographic contexts, and different roles (areas of expertise that include social scientists, teachers, pastors, elders, counselors, students, young adults, and health-care providers) will be essential for developing guidelines for pastoral care. This will be especially true as the scope of pastoral care in the context of human sexuality expands to address topics like sexual consent, sexual violence, technological advances, and the shift toward more single persons in the church.
- Continued conversation around pastoral care might have a powerful influence on elements of congregational life such as gospel preaching, faith formation, the diaconate, our missional calling, the sacraments, and church discipline.
- Finally, reflecting a lengthy committee discussion over the first paragraph under section XVI, B of the HSR report (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 460), that the churches need help balancing Scripture and the confessions with regard to the more difficult portions of Scripture. The church needs wisdom to preach and teach the solemn warning texts (i.e., 1 Cor. 6 and 11) in a way that is consistent with the confessions. Indeed, we need a better balance of radical hospitality and radical obedience as an outpouring of the lavish grace of God. Only in this balance can we offer as a demonstration to all persons the words and deeds of costly discipleship that are the responsibility of all who call on the name of the Lord.

Grounds:

- a. There is a gap between our theology and our practice of pastoral care in the context of human sexuality.
- b. The advisory committee recognized the need for a continued conversation regarding our practice of pastoral care building on the foundation of the HSR.

— *Adopted*

The following negative votes are registered: deacon delegate David Nightingale (Toronto) and Rev. Dominic J. Palacios (Rocky Mountain).

6. That synod not appoint a team of individuals to draft a statement of faith on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the conclusion of the report, but that synod warmly encourage the institutions and agencies of the Christian Reformed Church to develop resources to support effective, life-affirming pastoral care in the areas of sexuality, marriage, and gender.

Grounds:

- a. Congregations and classes need time to reflect on the implications of this year's decisions.
- b. Future synods can prioritize which of the many suggested tasks related to human sexuality (including suggested edits to the report, additional studies, etc.) will be most urgent.

—*Adopted*

7. That synod not accede to Overture 57.

Grounds:

- a. The recommendation is a weighty matter that has not been before the churches.
- b. The recommended change is not consistent with the foundational starting point of the HSR found in the 1973 study report on homosexuality, and would undermine its reception in the churches.

—*Adopted*

8. That synod not accede to overtures that recommend the appointment of a new committee at this time.

Grounds:

- a. Congregations and classes need time to reflect on the implications of this year's decisions.
- b. Future synods can prioritize which of the many suggested tasks related to human sexuality (including suggested edits to the report, additional studies, etc.) will be most urgent.

—*Adopted*

9. That synod declare the above recommendations to be its responses to the following overtures:

- a. Recommendation 4: Overture 52 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)
- b. Recommendation 5: Overtures 20, 27-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 20-21, 42-43, 45-48, 50, 53-54 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)
- c. Recommendation 6: Overtures 30 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 52 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)
- d. Recommendation 7: Overture 57 (2022 Supplement)
- e. Recommendation 8: Overtures 26 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 20, 37, 45, 47, 50-D, 53 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)

—*Adopted*

II. Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality: Majority/Minority reports (majority report)

A. Materials

1. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, pp. 313-487
2. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Council of Delegates Report (section II, A, 9, including Appendix A), pp. 38, 57-71
3. 73 Overtures and Communications in the *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, the *Agenda for Synod 2022*, and the 2022 Supplement

B. Recommendations

1. That synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.

Grounds:

- a. The report is consistent with Scripture.
 - b. The report is consistent with earlier synodical reports on the interpretation of Scripture, including “Infallibility and Inspiration” (1961) and “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority” (1972).
 - c. The report is consistent with shared convictions of the majority of Christian traditions and denominations historically and globally.
2. That synod affirm that “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation “an interpretation of [a] confession” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.

Grounds:

- a. “When a synodical pronouncement is set forth as an interpretation of the confession, this is its use and function” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603).
 - b. We discern the need to call the church to radical obedience for chaste living.
 - c. This is consistent with the intent of Recommendation D in the HSR.
 - d. This action is consistent with prior synodical decisions regarding human sexuality (Report 42: Committee to Study Homosexuality, *Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 609-633).
 - e. This action is grounded in a Reformed approach to the authority and inspiration of Scripture as expressed in “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority” (1972).
 - f. This reflects the shared perspectives of the majority of the Christian traditions and denominations historically and globally.
 - g. The advisory committee chose to clarify the language of the HSR committee’s Recommendation D because of the confusion expressed by several of the overtures received over the scope of the confessional status of this interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism.
3. That synod add a footnote to Q. and A. 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism with regard to “unchastity,” and that synod direct the executive director to consult with historical theologians and denominational staff for the language, ensuring that this footnote is consistent with Recommendation 1.

Grounds:

- a. This addition is warranted to establish clarity in what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches and puts this teaching into the hands of the churches.
- b. There is precedent for adding a clarifying footnote to the confessions (e.g., the footnote included with Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 80, *Acts of Synod 2006*, pp. 710-11).

4. That synod affirm that “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 also encompasses “sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage.” The complete sentence would thus read: “‘unchastity’ in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment.”

Observation: While members representing the minority report were unable to agree in full with this recommendation, they do affirm the intent of including sexual violence as prohibited by the seventh commandment.

Grounds:

- a. Scriptural prohibitions against sexual immorality warn against wronging or taking advantage of anyone—for example, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” (1 Thess. 4:3-6).
 - b. Concern over the weighty sin of sexual violence has been affirmed by synod in its decisions to establish, instruct, and affirm the work of the Safe Church office—originally called Abuse Prevention (*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 178-81, 555-65), adding ministries focused on sexual violence to the approved list of offerings, and in its actions on Judicial Code matters over several years.
 - c. Concern over sexual violence and abuse within and outside of marriage was identified as an urgent matter by several entries in the *Agenda for Synod 2022*, including:
 - references in agency reports: pp. 92, 108, 110, 217, 234, 238-39, 242
 - references in the Human Sexuality Report: pp. 319, 332, 352, 354-56, 358, 362-369, 375, 397, 403, 410, 425, 428, 443, 445
 - Overtures 36, 52
 - several poignant stories shared by members of the CRCNA included within overtures and communications
 - d. Concern about sexual violence is consistent with the theology of the body in HSR (esp. section XV).
 - e. Sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage is a grievous matter, causing devastating trauma and impairing the witness of the church.
5. 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.
- Ground:* A change in the text of Church Order Article 69-c is not necessary.
6. That synod declare these recommendations to be its responses to the following overtures received:

- a. Recommendation 1: Overtures 18-23, 26-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*), 14-24, 35-36, 40-41, 43-45, 51, 55-56 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*), and 57 (2022 Supplement).
- b. Recommendation 2: Overtures 21, 24-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 20-21, 25-35, 37-39, 49-50, 55 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*).
- c. Recommendation 5: Overtures 24-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 23, 36-37, 56 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*).

According to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, the minority report re the response to the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality is presented as information by delegate Rev. Lynette van de Hoef Meyers.

Response to the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (minority report)

A. *Materials: Agenda for Synod 2022*, Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, pp. 313-487

B. *Background*

1. General

We cherish the gift of the faith we share, the creeds and confessions of the church, and the Reformed interpretation of Scripture. Like the section of the Human Sexuality Report (HSR) on desire, we are inspired by the delight that the Song of Songs lovers find in each other's bodies, the equality of their love for each other, and the exclusivity of their relationship, as well as the deep intimacy God desires to have with us (pp. 453-56). We affirm the importance of Paul's warning to flee from immorality and the biblical admonition against willful, unrepentant sin.

Human sexuality is a broad topic addressed by fields such as theology, psychology, and biology and experienced daily by each human on our planet in different ways. Human sexuality is stunning and awe-inspiring in its complexity. Current scientific research has spurred theological reflection. This reflection at times causes anxiety as long-held beliefs are challenged; it can sometimes feel as if this reflection creates fault lines in the foundations of our faith. We fear losing our foundations. Or perhaps we do not understand where these reflections might lead, and we fear what the unknown future might hold.

Within our denomination, there are differences of opinions. This is obvious due to the large volume of overtures and communications sent regarding the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (HSR). It is our desire to be curious together, to hold space for more conversations to happen in our churches.

The members representing the minority report wonder what the various conclusions raised in the HSR mean for the CRCNA and its members. Some of us have fairly settled viewpoints, while others are still wrestling with this. We hope we can engage these spaces and conversations together with grace and truth as we strive to live with the humility of Jesus.

We share the belief that everyone is made in the image of God. We acknowledge that we do not always treat all people as such, and therefore we have people in our communities who live on the margins. Many of our LGBTQ+ members inhabit such margins. We lament that we have not followed in Jesus' steps, as he demonstrated radical hospitality and love to people who were marginalized. Jesus always demonstrated the compelling nature of grace and truth side by side in their fullness. We are in awe of Jesus' ability to hold these two together, and we strive to do likewise. We do not, however, fully understand the truth of all things, and therefore we would like to approach this topic with grace-filled curiosity.

As the members representing the minority report, we are united in our desire for clarity, humility, and grace with regard to the topic of human sexuality in the CRCNA. We desire to model the radical hospitality of Jesus toward all in our communities. We are committed to walking alongside people in their lives of discipleship.

2. Theology

The Christian Reformed Church recognizes the strength of a Reformed hermeneutic, the guidelines we use to interpret the Bible. The Reformed tradition uses four main elements in its guidelines for interpreting a text: *literary*, *historical*, *grammatical*, and *theological*. These four elements are all undergirded by our understanding that Scripture is inspired by God and that the Holy Spirit helps us to understand Scripture today.

We note that by applying a Reformed hermeneutic, those who hold to a high view of Scripture come to different conclusions about what God ordains as normative for human relationships. For members representing the minority report, the interpretations of key texts that inform the theology of human sexuality in the HSR are not the only or even the most compelling and faithful way to interpret these texts. The HSR's interpretation of Matthew 19, for instance, describes Jesus as presenting an overarching theology on human sexuality. God's will for sexuality is rooted in the creational norm set in Genesis 1 and 2: that male and female persons, a proper binary like day and night, may join in marriage. This union is made by God and is thus indivisible by man.

As Overture 36 points out, however, "a more faithful interpretation of Matthew 19:1-12 would begin with a look at the literary and cultural context of the passage. . . . In each of the first three pericopes of the unit Jesus commands people to care for, welcome, and be generous to those who are on the margins of society, those who are vulnerable and/or have no status (women, eunuchs, children, and the poor). He concludes the unit with a parable that demonstrates that it is God's character to be scandalously gracious rather than to follow what is 'fair' according to the letter of the law" (Overture 36, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 574).

Jesus points to Genesis 1 and 2 in this text, not in order to affirm universal creational norms, but "to remind everyone that the purpose of marriage was so that men and women could together live into the fruitfulness of God's blessing. Moses' law regarding divorce was given as a measure of protection for women because of the sinfulness of men. A certificate allowed them to remarry and thus secure their economic and social space in society. Jesus' point is that men should love their wives rather than look

for a law that enables them to shirk their duties. In other words, he calls men to fulfill the law with radical, costly love and justice" (Ibid, p. 575).

In its treatment of Genesis 1-2, the HSR emphasizes that God created humans both male and female, and it concludes that it is through our biological sexual differences that we image God. However, "[the HSR] ignores the simpler reading that males and females are each created in the image of God" (Overture 33, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 567). The HSR also does not define how our binary sexual differences image God.

Overture 24 notes that "in Genesis 1, not only humans but also the fish and 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" (Overture 24, *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, p. 526).

We also wonder at the unbalanced application of this creational norm to homosexual and heterosexual practices. The HSR clearly finds that same-sex sexual practices violate this creational norm by being, necessarily, nonprocreative. However, it is silent on the topic of nonprocreative heterosexual practices (such as the use of contraception).

The HSR's focus on universal creational norms also undermines the New Testament emphasis on creating disciples to grow God's kingdom instead of growth through producing children.

3. Science, general revelation, gender identity

The HSR properly highlights the challenges we face in a world where members of our community don't identify in strictly binary or cisgendered terms. It also properly points out that the science in this area is constantly evolving and that we must be ready to learn more.

The HSR notes that science is not general revelation in itself, but a cultural response to general revelation, and therefore not to be given the authority of revelation. However, there remains a bias. While science is recognized as fallible and cultural, theology is not recognized as the cultural response to special revelation. Through the emphasis on special revelation as "readable" and "primary", without the properly Reformed humility of recognizing one's own fallibility, the HSR is at danger of equating their theological perspective on Scripture with Scripture itself. Just as science is provisional, fallible, and political, so too is theology provisional, fallible, and political. "For now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Multiple overtures have pointed to the suspect use of scientific evidence in the HSR. Issues that have been raised include questions about the reliability of studies referenced, the proper conclusions drawn from

various studies, and the reputability of institutions and sources referenced (Overtures 33, 37, 39, 40, 42; *Agenda for Synod 2022*). Therefore, the HSR's discussion on gender identity is at best, incomplete, and at worst, insensitive and lacking scientific rigor to many who read this report.

4. Homosexuality

It is evident from the volume of overtures regarding the homosexuality portion of the HSR that there are differences of interpretation in the CRCNA on this topic and a desire for more dialogue within the churches. They also draw attention to the differing theological arguments arising from Reformed theologians. Overture 37 states that "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" (Overture 37, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 581).

We also draw attention to the fact that "the report does not represent the diversity of voices present in the Christian Reformed Church . . ." (Overture 41, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 629). While the HSR includes a number of stories of people who have same-sex attraction, nearly all of them reinforce the conclusions of the HSR (Overture 46, *Agenda for Synod 2022*) and fail to recognize what is good, true, and beautiful within the lives of many who are in committed same-sex relationships. Multiple overtures rightfully speak to this gap in the report, and we are grateful for the stories that were shared (from 2022, Overtures 38, 55, 56; from 2021, Overtures 20, 23). Hearing the diversity of LGBTQ+ voices is critical as we continue to seek clarity.

Additionally, we recognize "the report does not serve us well as we learn how to live with our differences" (Overture 40, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 625). Instead, it creates a position that brings further harm and pain to those who already feel marginalized by the church and its people. Both the HSR and Overture 24 highlight troubling statistics of increased rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide among LGBTQ+ people, particularly among youth (Overture 24, *Deferred Agenda 2021*, p. 523). These troubling health outcomes give us great pause, and suggest even more urgently the need for further grace-filled conversations as a people of God within the CRCNA.

5. Reflections on divorce

We are also troubled by the HSR's reflections on divorce. The HSR encourages the church to "act more intentionally to call married partners to reconciliation and renewed commitment" and reinforces the 1980 guidelines on divorce that encourage churches to exercise "formal discipline when persons in hardness of heart refuse to heed the admonitions of the consistory and do not acknowledge and repent of their sins involved in divorce and remarriage" (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 451). While we affirm the significance of the covenantal commitments of marriage, this strong encouragement to preserve the marriage relationship is given without qualification. Our concern is for those who experience intimate partner abuse in their marriage. The report's reflections imply and communicate to church leaders and abused spouses that both leaving the marriage and

remarrying is a sin worthy of church discipline, thus encouraging those who are being abused to remain in abusive relationships.

6. Confessional status and Church Order Article 69-c

In terms of the teachings of the confessions regarding human sexuality and relationships, and the matter of the confessional status of the HSR's understanding of the biblical teachings on human sexuality, we highlight the following comments and concerns reflected in various overtures before Synod 2022.

Overture 28 reminds us that "the CRCNA is what is known as a 'confessional church,' meaning that 'professing members of the CRC claim to believe not only that the Bible is the Word of God but also that 'the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation.' The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, and our belief in them, stand as a statement of unity" (Overture 28, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 551).

The overture goes on to claim that declaring that the teachings *already* have confessional status does not align with our understanding of decisions of previous synods, particularly the denomination's teachings on homosexuality as defined as "pastoral advice" in the *Acts of Synod 1973*.

The overture concludes, "Given that the teachings were not designated as an interpretation of the confessions at prior synods, we believe that disagreeing with the report's conclusions does not violate our affirmation of the Three Forms of Unity, and in particular the Heidelberg Catechism. We understand that synodical decisions 'shall be considered settled and binding' (Church Order Art. 29), but we also emphasize Synod 1975's point that 'there is an obvious difference between the use and function of a pronouncement as interpretation of the confessions and a decision involving 'guidelines' or 'pastoral advice' (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598)" (Overture 28, *Agenda for Synod 2022*, pp. 551-52).

In applying Church Order Article 69-c, ministers of the Word have the freedom to discern what would constitute a marriage that is "in conflict with the Word of God" (Art. 69-c). The recommendation of the HSR would limit their discernment process. It is unclear how far the implications of this decision would go (e.g., Would ministers be required to not marry a couple where one partner is engaging in pornography?). As Overture 24 states, "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" (Overture 24, *Deferred Agenda 2020-2021*, p. 530).

Because there is sufficient reason to question the interpretations and claims made in the report, we present to you, the body of synod, an alternative voice in the form of the following recommendations.

C. *Recommendations*

1. That synod urge churches to prayerfully reflect on the trauma experienced by many in our congregations (e.g., LGBTQ+, divorced, single, abused, and addicted individuals) as we struggle to live out our call to love God and love our neighbors.

2. That synod receive the report for information but not adopt it.

Grounds:

- a. The interpretations of key texts (namely Gen. 1-2 and Matt. 19) that inform the theology of human sexuality in the report are not the only or even the most compelling and faithful way to interpret these texts. Applying a Reformed hermeneutic, those who hold to a high view of Scripture could come to different conclusions about what God ordains as normative for human relationships.
- b. The confessions proper do not speak explicitly against faithful same-sex relationships and therefore do not necessarily support the conclusions of this report.
- c. The report's engagement with scientific evidence is insufficient and raises significant questions.
- d. This recommendation creates space requested by many in our denomination to keep the door open to dialogue and grace-filled conversations and demonstrates our commitment to love and respect those in the LGBTQ+ community and those who support them who are wrestling with the church's stance on same-sex relationships.
- e. The report's discussion on divorce conveys that abused spouses are to stay in harmful and dangerous relationships. This would be a significant step backward in the church's efforts to prevent and respond justly and compassionately to abuse.

3. That synod not accede to recommendation D of the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

- a. "The denomination's position on homosexuality does not hold confessional status via the word 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 108 because a previous synod has not declared such an interpretation of the word" (*Overture 25, Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 547).
- b. Several overtures and communications that affirmed the HSR urged synod not to make a determination about its confessional status until greater clarity could be provided about the wording of the recommendations, and until churches could more clearly discern the implications of this decision for church life (e.g., discipline, officebearing, profession of faith, etc.) (*Overtures 44-47, 56, Agenda for Synod 2022; Communication 1 [2021], Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*).

4. That synod not accede to Recommendation E of the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

- a. Since the biblical interpretation (Recommendation B) is not being adopted in full, then E cannot be adopted.
- b. The implications of this decision are unclear.

5. That synod encourage denominational ministries to intentionally support the churches and classes by developing /sharing resources as well as providing training and consultation as churches/ classes work to
 - enfold, support, and love those who identify as LGBTQ+.
 - walk alongside those experiencing the harms of pornography, intimate partner abuse, and questions of gender identity.

Grounds:

- a. Those who identify as LGBTQ+, regardless of whether they hold a traditional or affirming position regarding human sexuality, have noted that the church is often a challenging and inhospitable place. Various denominational ministries have resources and competence to help churches better understand the needs of the LGBTQ+ community and guidance in creating more hospitable environments.
- b. Churches can feel at a loss on how to respond to the vast variety of needs that may present themselves in relation to human sexuality. Denominational ministries can help people with resources and guide them as they access others within the continuum of care.

Following the rules of procedure, synod returns to consideration of the recommendation of the advisory committee’s majority report.

Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (majority report)

A. Materials

1. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, pp. 313-487
2. *Agenda for Synod 2022*, Council of Delegates Report (section II, A, 9, including Appendix A), pp. 38, 57-71
3. 73 Overtures and Communications in the *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, the *Agenda for Synod 2022*, and the 2022 Supplement

B. Recommendations

1. That synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.

Grounds:

- a. The report is consistent with Scripture.
- b. The report is consistent with earlier synodical reports on the interpretation of Scripture, including “Infallibility and Inspiration” (1961) and “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority” (1972).
- c. The report is consistent with shared convictions of the majority of Christian traditions and denominations historically and globally.

– *Adopted*

The following negative votes are registered: Ingrid A. Beck (Niagara), Patricia L. Borgdorff (Grand Rapids East), Rev. Daniel G. Brown (Quinte), Janet deWinter (Toronto), Rev. Anthony Elenbaas (Hamilton), Rev. Rebecca L. Jordan Heys (Grand Rapids East), Rev. Daniel Hoogland (Eastern Canada), Leo B. Jonker (Quinte), Janice E. Kostelyk (B.C. South-East), Larry L. Louters

(Grand Rapids East), Rev. Lynette A. van de Hoef Meyers (Ontario Southwest), David Nightingale (Toronto), Rev. Dominic J. Palacios (Rocky Mountain), Migael L. Randall (Central Plains), Heidi J. Sytsema (Muskegon), and John A. Vanderstoep (Huron).

(The report of Advisory Committee 8 is continued in Article 62.)

ARTICLE 60

The afternoon session recesses at 5:50 p.m. Rev. Douglas E. Fakkema (Pacific Northwest) leads in closing prayer. Synod will reconvene Tuesday evening at 7:15 p.m.

TUESDAY EVENING, June 14, 2022

Eleventh Session

ARTICLE 61

The evening session convenes at 7:15 p.m. The executive director leads in opening prayer.

Deacon delegate Geoffrey W. Vanderburg (Alberta South/Saskatchewan) has returned home and is no longer able to attend and participate at synod.

ARTICLE 62

The vice president assumes the chair.

(The report of Advisory Committee 8 is continued from Article 59.)

Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (majority report)

Recommendations (continued)

2. That synod affirm that “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation “an interpretation of [a] confession” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.

Grounds:

- a. “When a synodical pronouncement is set forth as an interpretation of the confession, this is its use and function” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603).
- b. We discern the need to call the church to radical obedience for chaste living.
- c. This is consistent with the intent of Recommendation D in the HSR.
- d. This action is consistent with prior synodical decisions regarding human sexuality (Report 42: Committee to Study Homosexuality, *Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 609-33).

- e. This action is grounded in a Reformed approach to the authority and inspiration of Scripture as expressed in “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority” (1972).
- f. This reflects the shared perspectives of the majority of the Christian traditions and denominations historically and globally.
- g. The advisory committee chose to clarify the language of the HSR committee’s Recommendation D because of the confusion expressed by several of the overtures received over the scope of the confessional status of this interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The delegates deliberate on the above recommendation during the evening session without a vote.

(The report of Advisory Committee 8 is continued in Article 65.)

ARTICLE 63

The evening session recesses at 9:11 p.m. Rev. Julius T. Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, leads in closing prayer. Synod will reconvene Wednesday morning at 8:15 a.m.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, June 15, 2022

Twelfth Session

ARTICLE 64

The praise team leads delegates in singing “The Goodness of God” and “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less.”

The Christ candle is lit as a reminder that God is present. Elder delegate Jenny Douma (Ontario Southwest), Rev. Hyung Jun Kim (ethnic adviser), and Rev. Joel D. Vande Werken (Atlantic Northeast) lead in the call to worship from Psalm 46. Delegates respond by singing “A Mighty Fortress.”

Delegates offer prayer by singing “Our Father in Heaven.” Synod is invited to reflect on the Lord’s Prayer statement “Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” Rev. Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries, reads Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 127: “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one” means: By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.” Debra L. Chee (Red Mesa) reads 1 Peter 5:1-11, and Rev. Schoon offers prayer. The assembly sings “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

Delegates participate in a “concentric circle of prayer” and sing “Yet Not I, but through Christ in Me.” Rev. Schoon offers the sending from 1 Peter 5:10-11 and 2 Thessalonians 1:16-17. Delegates respond by singing “Let Us Be Known by Our Love.”

The roll call indicates that the following delegate is absent: elder delegate Steven Zielinski (Atlantic Northeast).

President Rayas offers prayer for the day ahead, asking for a sense of peace to do God's work.

ARTICLE 65

The vice president assumes the chair.

(The report of Advisory Committee 8 is continued from Article 62.)

Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (majority report)

Recommendations (continued)

Delegates resume consideration of the following recommendation, presented during the evening session, June 14.

2. That synod affirm that "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation "an interpretation of [a] confession" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.

Grounds:

- a. "When a synodical pronouncement is set forth as an interpretation of the confession, this is its use and function" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603).
- b. We discern the need to call the church to radical obedience for chaste living.
- c. This is consistent with the intent of Recommendation D in the HSR.
- d. This action is consistent with prior synodical decisions regarding human sexuality (Report 42: Committee to Study Homosexuality, *Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 609-33).
- e. This action is grounded in a Reformed approach to the authority and inspiration of Scripture as expressed in "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority" (1972).
- f. This reflects the shared perspectives of the majority of the Christian traditions and denominations historically and globally.
- g. The advisory committee chose to clarify the language of the HSR committee's Recommendation D because of the confusion expressed by several of the overtures received over the scope of the confessional status of this interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

—*Adopted*

President Rayas offers a prayer to build up and edify God's church.

The following negative votes are registered: Patricia Borgdorff (Grand Rapids East), Matthew Borst (Pacific Northwest), Robert Broekema (Muskegon), Daniel Brown (Quinte), Barbara Bulthuis (Rocky Mountain), Samuel Cooper (Toronto), Steven deBoer (Niagara), Janet deWinter (Toronto), Anthony Elenbaas (Hamilton), Elizabeth Gysbers (B.C. North-West), Rebecca Jordan Heys (Grand Rapids East), Michael Hoogeboom (Grand Rapids South), Daniel Hoogland (Eastern Canada), Peter Hoytema (Ontario Southwest), Leo Jonker (Quinte), Alice G. Joesse (Alberta North), Tamara

Kuklenski (Pacific Northwest), Sally Larsen (Chicago South), Larry Louters (Grand Rapids East), Lynette van de Hoef Meyers (Ontario Southwest), David Nightingale (Toronto), Dominic Palacios (Rocky Mountain), Mary Rupke (Lake Erie), Heidi J. Sytsema (Muskegon), Glenda VanderKam (California South), John Vanderstoep (Huron)..

3. That synod, in accordance with its clarification that “‘unchastity’ in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment,” instruct the executive director to add the following clarifying footnote to Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108:

*Synod 2022 clarified that “unchastity” encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex.

Grounds:

- a. This addition is warranted to establish clarity in what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches and puts this teaching into the hands of the churches.
- b. There is precedent for adding a clarifying footnote to the confessions (e.g., the footnote included with Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 80, *Acts of Synod 2006*, pp. 710-11). [The footnote added to Q. and A. 80 in 2006 did not require ratification by a subsequent synod.]

Note: This footnote is a clarification of what the catechism always meant, not an alteration.

—*Defeated*

4. That synod affirm that “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses “sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage.”

Grounds:

- a. Scriptural prohibitions against sexual immorality warn against wronging or taking advantage of anyone—for example, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” (1 Thess. 4:3-6).
- b. Concern over the weighty sin of sexual violence has been affirmed by synod in its decisions to establish, instruct, and affirm the work of the Safe Church office—originally called Abuse Prevention (*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 178-81, 555-65), adding ministries focused on sexual violence to the approved list of offerings, and in its actions on Judicial Code matters over several years.
- c. Concern over sexual violence and abuse within and outside of marriage was identified as an urgent matter by several entries in the *Agenda for Synod 2022*, including:

- references in agency reports: pp. 92, 108, 110, 217, 234, 238-39, 242
- references in the Human Sexuality Report: pp. 319, 332, 352, 354-56, 358, 362-369, 375, 397, 403, 410, 425, 428, 443, 445

- Overtures 36, 52
 - several poignant stories shared by members of the CRCNA included within overtures and communications
- d. Concern about sexual violence is consistent with the theology of the body in HSR (esp. section XV).
 - e. Sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage is a grievous matter, causing devastating trauma and impairing the witness of the church.

— *Adopted*

5. 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.

Ground: A change in the text of Church Order Article 69-c is not necessary.

Todd L. Eckstein offers prayer for the vote.

— *Adopted*

The following negative votes are recorded: Anthony Elenbaas (Hamilton), Rebecca Jordan Heys (Grand Rapids East), Dominic Palacios (Rocky Mountain), Migael Randall (Central Plains), and John Vanderstoep (Huron).

6. That synod declare these recommendations to be its responses to the following overtures received:

- a. Recommendation 1: Overtures 18-23, 26-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*), 14-24, 35-36, 40-41, 43-45, 51, 55-57 (*Agenda for Synod 2022 and Supplement*).
- b. Recommendation 2: Overtures 21, 24-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*), 20-21, 25-35, 37-39, 49-50, 55 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)
- c. Recommendation 5: Overtures 24-29 (*Deferred Agenda 2021*) and 23, 36-37, 56 (*Agenda for Synod 2022*)

Synod offers gratitude for the work of the members of Advisory Committee 8.

— *Adopted*

7. That synod declare the work of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology complete and dismiss them with thanks..

— *Adopted*

Synod offers gratitude for the work of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology.

Rev. Tim Kuperus, chair of Advisory Committee 8, offers a prayer of gratitude.

ARTICLE 66

The president resumes the chair.

(The report of Advisory Committee 2 is continued from Article 43.)