

August 15, 2022

Stated Clerks of Classes

Dear Friends:

Synodical delegates, along with ethnic advisers, faculty advisers, and young adult representatives, participated in much prayer leading up to and during Synod 2022 as they considered a number of weighty agenda matters. The officers of synod led the meetings with grace, wisdom, and diligence. Significant time was given to listening to each other and the Spirit's leading throughout the discussions. Synod 2022 included a virtual convening session and preliminary advisory committee meetings prior to in-person sessions held June 10-16—nearly two hundred participants selflessly gave of their time and inspiring leadership to the church. We are truly grateful for their commitment and service.

The decisions of synod are now recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2022*. We have been intently sorting through synod's many decisions, highlighting for the appropriate bodies any that would affect their specific work and ministry. Some important decisions affecting classes include (1) study and input on the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and the proposed implementation plan, (2) revisions to the appeal process, and (3) changes regarding who may be delegated to classis and synod. These are but a few of several recommendations for follow-up by your classis in the months ahead.

In addition to sending you a copy of the printed *Acts of Synod 2022* as soon as it is available later this summer, we are enclosing a summary of synod's decisions, outlining matters that we believe to be specific to the classes and to your work. You can access the digital version of the *Acts of Synod 2022* posted to the CRC website at crcna.org/SynodResources. A "Stated Clerks Connect" video meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2022, at 1 p.m. (EDT) to review decisions of synod and to help answer questions you may have arising from synod's decisions. We hope you will reserve this time to join us for a conversation about synod. Write to Dee Recker at drecker@crcna.org if you have trouble locating the invitation.

Thank you for carefully reviewing the attached summary of synod and for assisting your classis in processing and carrying out the decisions of Synod 2022. If you have any questions as you read through the summary, or if we can be of further assistance in your work, please do not hesitate to call or write.

Yours faithfully,



Zachary J. King
General Secretary of the CRCNA



Diane (Dee) S. Recker
Director of Synodical Services

Encl: Summary of Synod 2022 Decisions for Classes
Summary regarding Human Sexuality Report Decisions

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407
616-241-1691
616-224-5895 fax

3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 STN LCD I
Burlington ON L7R 3Y8
905-336-2920
905-336-8344 fax

Summary of Synod 2022 Decisions for Classes

1. Study of and input regarding the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders

The Council of Delegates, acting in lieu of Synod 2021 in June 2021, adopted the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and decided to develop an implementation plan for its use. Synod 2022 considered the proposed implementation plan (see *Agenda for Synod 2022*, pp. 83-90) and decided to forward the amended Code of Conduct and the implementation plan to the classes for study and input because the churches would need more time to consider them and offer feedback. The executive director will facilitate a mechanism to receive feedback and report to Synod 2023 for its consideration. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 931-32.)

2. Upholding the teaching of the Scriptures and confessions on the nature of Christ's substitutionary work

In response to an overture deferred from 2021, synod affirmed that "it is a serious deviation from the teachings of the confessions of the Christian Reformed Church 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." To deny this is to "take away from the glory of our Savior." Thus, any officebearer who explicitly denies penal substitutionary atonement is worthy of special discipline in accordance with Church Order Article 83. Read the full decision in response to the overture in the *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 895-96.

3. Revisions to appeal process and "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader"

Synod took action to clarify and strengthen the appeal process as provided in the Church Order Supplement, Articles 30-a and 42-b, adding the involvement of classis church visitors at the council level in situations of abuse by a church leader, and the involvement of synodical deputies as advisers at the classis level.

In addition, orientation and training on due process, abuse awareness, and response are required for a classis and a synod advisory committee, if applicable, prior to handling an appeal regarding abuse allegations against a church leader. Additional changes regarding investigation, responsibility to the claimant and the accused, and follow-up care were also adopted.

Revisions to the "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" were also adopted (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, Appendix C2, pp. 746-53, for these guidelines; and *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 851-53 for the adopted Church Order changes).

4. Campus ministers as delegates to classis

Synod adopted changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 40-a, allowing councils to delegate campus ministers, who are ordained officebearers under their care, to the meetings of classis. Grounds provided for this change include the following: "such a delegation will benefit classes by the expected presence and contributions of campus ministers at classis meetings,"

and “such a delegation will give greater recognition and encouragement to these officebearers in classis.” (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 847-48.)

5. Proposed revision in delegation to synod

Synod 2022 is proposing a revision to Church Order Article 45 for consideration for adoption by Synod 2023. The change being recommended is that “each classis shall *ordinarily* delegate one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod. *A classis may send no more than two delegates bearing the same office*” (proposed changes indicated by italics). Churches/classes have the opportunity to respond to the proposed Church Order change by way of overtures to synod by the March 15 deadline for consideration by synod in June. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 848.)

6. New regions for Calvin University Board of Directors

Upon the adoption by synod of proposed revisions to the bylaws of Calvin University, new regions for delegates on the Calvin University Board of Trustees go into effect immediately. The Calvin University board has transitioned from a twelve-region representation to a six-region representation. *Note:* The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees continues to be represented by twelve regions. See the **Appendix** for the respective board regions for your classis. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 841.)

7. Addressing white supremacy and systemic racism

Following extensive introductory comments by the advisory committee regarding racism, justice, and systemic injustices, synod responded to Overture 8 regarding white supremacy and systemic racism as summarized below. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 943-46, 952.) Classes are encouraged to ask questions of all candidates for ministry regarding their commitment to preach a biblical and Reformed perspective on race and justice.

- *Calvin Theological Seminary* will give a report to the COD on how they are teaching a biblical and Reformed perspective on issues of race and justice.
- *Classes* are encouraged to ask questions of all candidates for ministry regarding their commitment to preach a biblical and Reformed perspective on race and justice.
- *Elders* are responsible to defend the faith and doctrine taught from their church pulpit, including our denomination’s position on a biblical response to matters of racism and justice.
- *Deacons* are responsible to seek justice and work to change exploitative structures and systems for the flourishing of all people.
- *Worship Ministries* is to continue to curate and provide resources to the churches that help congregations in matters of racial injustice to lament, confess, and receive assurance of pardon in corporate worship.
- *Leaders at all levels* of the church are to continue to provide opportunities for listening, learning, and practicing civil dialogue on the difficult conversations needed to better understand one another’s perspectives on racism and biblical justice.
- *Churches* are encouraged to make use of denominational resources.

- *The general secretary* will solicit input from all the classes on providing the above opportunities and report to Synod 2023, including praise reports about positive progress and prayer requests regarding challenges and concerns.

8. Updates related to Church Order Article 8 regarding *need* and to the Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a

Classes should take note of the following two matters adopted by synod as presented by the Candidacy Committee (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 837-38):

- The Journey Toward Ordination document will be updated to include the strategy of requiring the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC) in Article 8 cases when it seems debatable that a “sustained and realistic” search effort has been put forth or that the situation is in need of contextualization.
- The Supplement to Article 24-a, which addresses calling a commissioned pastor to a solo leadership position, has been revised (noted by *italics* and ~~striketrough~~):

“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.”

9. Use of *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan) resources encouraged

Classes are encouraged 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—cncna.org/OurJourney/resources (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 856).

Appendix Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University Board Regions

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees

Note: Members of the Calvin Theological Seminary regional board (that follows) are elected from the following twelve regions:

Region 1—Classes B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East

Region 2—Classes Alberta North, Alberta South/Saskatchewan, and Lake Superior (Canadian congregations)

Region 3—Classes Eastern Canada, Quinte, and Toronto

Region 4—Classes Hamilton, Huron, Niagara, and Ontario Southwest (formerly Chatham)

Region 5—Classes Columbia, North Cascades, Pacific Northwest, and Yellowstone

Region 6—Classes California South, Central California, Greater Los Angeles, Hanmi, and Ko-Am

Region 7—Classes Arizona, Red Mesa, and Rocky Mountain

Region 8—Classes Central Plains, Heartland, Iakota, Lake Superior (U.S. congregations), Minnkota, and Northcentral Iowa

Region 9—Classes Chicago South, Illiana, Northern Illinois, and Wisconsin

Region 10—Classes Georgetown, Holland, Kalamazoo, Muskegon, Northern Michigan, and Zeeland

Region 11—Classes Grand Rapids East, Grand Rapids North, Grand Rapids South, Grandville, Lake Erie, and Thornapple Valley

Region 12—Classes Atlantic Northeast, Hackensack, Hudson, and Southeast U.S.

Calvin University Board of Trustees

Note: Members of the Calvin University regional board (that follows) are elected from the following six regions:

Region 1—Classes Alberta North, Alberta South/Saskatchewan, B.C. North-West, B.C. South-East, and Lake Superior (Canadian)

Region 2—Classes Eastern Canada, Hamilton, Huron, Niagara, Ontario Southwest (formerly Chatham), Quinte, and Toronto

Region 3—Classes Atlantic Northeast, Hackensack, Hudson, and Southeast U.S.

Region 4—Classes Georgetown, Grand Rapids East, Grand Rapids North, Grand Rapids South, Grandville, Holland, Kalamazoo, Lake Erie, Muskegon, Northern Michigan, Thornapple Valley, and Zeeland

Region 5—Classes Central Plains, Chicago South, Heartland, Iakota, Illiana, Lake Superior (U.S.), Minnkota, Northcentral Iowa, Northern Illinois, Wisconsin, and Yellowstone-Montana

Region 6—Classes Arizona, California South, Central California, Columbia, Greater Los Angeles, Hanmi, Ko-Am, North Cascades, Pacific Northwest, Red Mesa, Rocky Mountain, and Yellowstone-Utah

Summary regarding Human Sexuality Report Decisions

Following is a summary of Synod 2022 decisions in response to the Human Sexuality Report; additional information is available in an FAQ format at crcna.org/synod/hsr-faq.

What did Synod decide with regard to the human sexuality report?

Synod 2022 made a number of decisions related to the HSR, which was on its agenda in June 2022, along with more than seventy overtures and communications from various classes and councils related to this topic. All of Synod 2022's decisions related to the HSR can be found in the [forthcoming] *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 904-24. Please review those pages for a fuller understanding and record of synod's decisions.

Some of synod's decisions, summarized below, were recommended by every member of the advisory committee that was assigned the HSR materials. This includes the following:

1. "That synod thank": the members of the HSR committee; those who courageously shared their stories through the HSR report, the agenda for synod, and many overtures; and those who gave many hours to pray, engage with the committee, and write overtures.
2. "That synod solemnly take note of the pervasive sin of pornography and its harm, and lead our churches into repentance and healing."
3. "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."
4. "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." Those continuing conversations should include:
 - consideration of what it means to live a healthy Christian sexual life for both married and single persons
 - 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
 - listening and supporting conversations ... with a variety of unique cultural settings and geographic regions
 - 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
 - continued conversation around pastoral care might have a powerful influence on elements of congregational life like gospel preaching, faith formation, the diaconate, our missional calling, the sacraments, and church discipline
 - 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."

5. Synod did not accede to overtures that asked to appoint new committees, adopt a new statement of faith on sexuality, or change the position the CRC has held since 1973 and declare that same-sex orientation is in itself sinful. The 1973 position stands, based on the biblical interpretation of the CRC, that same-sex orientation is not considered sinful, but same-sex sexual behavior is considered sinful.

Synod received both a majority and minority report from the advisory committee on the matter of human sexuality. As presented by way of the majority report, synod also adopted the following recommendations:

1. “That synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.”
2. “That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital 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.”
3. “That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses ‘sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage.’”
4. “That synod declare that Church Order 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report.” [Note: Article 69-c says: “Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that are in conflict with the Word of God.”]

Synod did not adopt a recommendation of the majority report to add a footnote to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108.

Though the minority report from the advisory committee was not debated, it was presented on the floor of synod and will be printed in the Acts of Synod. Some of the recommendations of the minority report that were not dealt with include, “That synod urge churches to prayerfully reflect on the trauma experienced by many in our congregations (ex. LGBTQ+, divorced, single, abused, and addicted individuals) as we struggle to live out our call to love God and love our neighbors,” and “that synod receive the report for information, but not adopt it,” and “not accede to Recommendations C and D,” regarding confessional status and Church Order Article 69-c.