

Dear CRC Council Members:

Delegates and advisers to Synod 2022 addressed a weighty agenda—matters deferred from 2020 and 2021 (due to the cancellation of Synods 2020 and 2021), in addition to the *Agenda for Synod 2022*. We are deeply grateful for their prayerful deliberations and the great care given to consideration of each matter. The officers of synod led the meetings with grace, wisdom, and diligence, ensuring that significant time was given to listening to each other and the Spirit's leading throughout the discussions.

Matters addressed by the delegates to synod this year included the definition of *heresy*, the importance of upholding the clear teaching of the Scriptures and confessions on the nature of Christ's substitutionary work, the responsibility as leaders and members to represent the biblical and Reformed perspective on race and justice, conversation around the Human Sexuality Report and recommended pastoral care sections of the report as guidance, the interpretation of "unchastity" (Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108) and its confessional status, a new ecclesiastical and corporate structure for our binational denomination, and much more. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for your council and church members, we have summarized the decisions of Synod 2022 on the following pages. **Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights during your next council meeting.**

Synod interviewed and approved Dr. Zachary J. King for the new leadership position of general secretary for the CRCNA as part of the new denominational structure. Other highlights included the interviews and appointments of two new Calvin Theological Seminary professors: Dr. Yudha Thianto as professor of history of Christianity and Reformed theology, and Dr. Wilson Cunha as professor of Old Testament. We are always grateful for the opportunity during synod to honor and declare candidates for ministry of the Word within the CRCNA—*twenty-three* new candidates were approved this year (see crcna.org/candidates)! It is a true joy to witness a standing ovation for the candidates and to conclude the celebration with a prayer of gratitude for their commitment to and preparation for service to the church in ministry. Synod gave special recognition to *thirty-four* ministerial retirees and *ten* commissioned pastors who concluded service to the denomination in the past year. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church and wish them God's grace as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

The digital version of the *Acts of Synod 2022* is posted to the CRC website at crcna.org/SynodResources. The printed version of the *Acts* will follow later this summer.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I want to express my sincere appreciation to all who served the church as delegates and advisers to Synod 2022. These individuals generously gave of their time and endless energy for weeks—praying, preparing, discussing, and fellowshiping together as a body of Christ-followers. May we all demonstrate Christ's love in all its fullness to every people and nation, doing so together in "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Yours faithfully,



Zachary J. King
General Secretary of the CRCNA

Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2022 for the Churches
Summary regarding Human Sexuality Report Decisions

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Summary of Decisions of Synod 2022 for the Churches

1. Defining *heresy*

A comprehensive report defining *heresy*, written in response to an instruction by Synod 2019, was adopted by synod and is being recommended to the churches “as a helpful guide to what heresy is and when it might be appropriate to use the term.” The report will also serve future synods to identify characteristics “typically associated with heresy.” (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 843-44.)

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. 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.)

- *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* will 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.

4. Decisions regarding the Human Sexuality Report

Councils are encouraged to read and discuss the summary letter sent to the churches by the general secretary, Zachary King, regarding synod's response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (HSR) (see **Appendix**). The full listing of decisions of synod in response to the HSR and to the many related overtures and communications received by synod is available in the *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 904-24.

5. Response to actions taken by Neland Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Synod responded to overtures and communications about Neland Avenue CRC's action to ordain a deacon who is in a same-sex marriage by instructing Neland Avenue to rescind its decision to ordain the person as an officebearer, and to "uphold our shared denominational covenants and procedures as laid out in the Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers."

The general secretary of the CRCNA is tasked with appointing a committee *in loco* with the following mandate:

- Meet with Neland Avenue CRC to oversee its compliance to synod's rulings.
- Meet with Classis Grand Rapids East to admonish them regarding their responsibility to uphold our shared denominational covenants and procedures.
- Report to Classis Grand Rapids East at the autumn meeting (Sept. 15, 2022) and make pertinent recommendations for its deliberations and action.
- If necessary, invite three other classes to assist the committee in dealing with the issues regarding Neland Avenue CRC.
- Report to Synod 2023 on its actions and any classical actions taken, and present recommendations.

(See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 925-26, 941-42.)

6. Changes to our denominational structure

The advisory committee to synod that addressed the structure changes proposed in the Structure and Leadership Task Force Report (deferred from 2021) and subsequent structure recommendations by the COD in its supplementary report to Synod 2022, shared with delegates, "It is our hope and prayer that within these new structures some of the challenges of creating a healthy binational ministry can be more effectively addressed. . . . As a committee, we believe that the proposed structure and leadership align with originally stated goals and enables Synod 2022 to move forward based on our stated organizational values (i.e., partnership; collaboration; cooperation; shared mission; and interdependence between countries, ministry institutions, agencies, programs, and partners)."

Synod responded by

- affirming that we desire a binational organizational culture shaped by partnership; collaboration; cooperation; shared mission; and interdependency between countries, ministry institutions, agencies, programs, and partners. Board members and leaders will be persons who affirm these cultural values.
- adopting the formation of a separate legal entity to house the ecclesiastical office (to be known as the Office of General Secretary) of the CRCNA.

- adopting the establishment of the senior leadership positions of general secretary and chief administrative officer, as well as the Office of General Secretary, to be governed by the new legal entity.
- acknowledging the revised role of the CRCNA Canada Corporation and taking note that the CRCNA Canada Corporation has revised their charter and bylaws to be in compliance with Canada Revenue Agency regulations, and taking note of the appointment of the director of U.S. ministry operations for the CRCNA U.S. Corporation as a counterpart to the executive director-Canada.
- adopting an Ecclesiastical Mandate Letter to underscore that the CRCNA Canada Corporation has ecclesiastical obligations and accountability alongside its legal requirements as a registered charity in Canada.
- taking note of the adopted process for developing and approving joint ministry agreements.

(See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 926-31.)

7. 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).

8. Church Order changes adopted

Changes to the following Church Order Articles and their Supplements were present to Synod 2022 for adoption as proposed by Synod 2019 according to Church Order (see *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, pp. 154-56). Each of the changes proposed was adopted—the list of Church Order Articles to be updated follows:

Categories of affiliation

Supplement, Article 8, G; Articles 38-g and -h; Supplement, Article 38-h; Article 49; Article 59-e, Articles 66-a and -b; Article 67.

Tasks of synod

Article 47

The Lord’s Day

Articles 51-a and -b; Article 54-b was deleted

(See *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 936-39.)

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

Councils 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 ~~strikethrough~~):

“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.”

10. 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.)

11. Task force to be appointed to review Church Order Articles 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17 and their supplements

A number of overtures deferred from 2020 and included in the *Agenda for Synod 2022* requested changes to or study of Church Order Articles 12-17. In response, synod directed the Council of Delegates to appoint a task force to “conduct a comprehensive review of Church Order Articles 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17 and their supplements in conversation with Pastor Church Resources and relevant voices, and to bring an interim report to Synod 2023 through the COD and a final report to Synod 2024.” The task force is mandated to “develop suggestions for clearer guidelines to pastors and churches in times of conflict, as well as assistance for positive pastoral transitions and more effective oversight of individuals in specialized ministries, including attention to the readmission of pastors via Article 8.” (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 849.)

12. New City Catechism reviewed

In response to an overture in 2019 asking that the New City Catechism be classified as a contemporary testimony, Synod 2019 did not accede to the overture but rather asked the executive director to refer the New City Catechism to Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) for review and potential use by the churches. FFM submitted a full report (see *Deferred Agenda for Synod 2020-2021*, pp. 206-16), serving the churches with advice about use of the New City Catechism. Synod 2022 approved the report, and CRC churches are encouraged to “share with FFM the ways in which they are engaging in catechetical teaching in their local contexts, particularly with regard to people who come to faith as adults,” by writing faithformation@crcna.org. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 850.)

13. Separation agreement template for churches and pastors

Synod approved a revised separation agreement template for use by churches when a pastor departs from service to a congregation. The new template removes nondisclosure-agreement language suggested in earlier guidelines. Pastor Church Resources will recommend use of the revised agreement template in its future work with churches. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, COD Supplement, Appendix E, pp. 757-58; and synod’s action, p. 935.)

14. Varia

Following are several decisions of synod for churches and councils to note . . .

- Use of *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan) encouraged
Churches 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—crcna.org/OurJourney/resources (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 856).
- Work of ReFrame Ministries commended
Synod encourages congregations to use ReFrame Ministries materials to support their own local ministries and outreach (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 857).
- Approved special offerings
All Christian Reformed congregations are encouraged 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. In addition, the work of mercy carried on by World Renew is commended, and churches are urged to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 830).
- Organizations recommended for offerings
Synod ratified the list of above-ministry share and specially designated offerings for denominational agencies, institutions, and ministries of the CRC—as well as the list of nondenominational organizations, previously accredited, that have been approved by the COD for calendar year 2023 (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 711-13 for the lists; p. 845 for synod’s decisions).
- Pension Trustees matter
The churches are asked to take note that the 2023 per-member assessment for the Canadian Plan remain \$37.20 and that the Canadian per-participant assessment remain \$7,704. Similarly, that the 2023 per-member assessment for the U.S. Plan remain \$37.20 and the U.S. per-participant assessment remain \$7,704. (See *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 845.)

15. Three overtures deferred to Synod 2023

The synod advisory committee recognized that Synod 2022 had many significant matters on its agenda that would require careful deliberation, and the likelihood that synod would not be able to give adequate time to everything on the agenda (totaling more than 1,400 pages). Synod decided to defer three overtures to Synod 2023 (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 942-43):

- Overture 3 (*deferred from 2021*): Clarify Distinctions in Synodical Decisions
- Overture 11 (*Agenda 2022*): Appoint a Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers, Including Disaffiliation Initiated by a Major Assembly
- Overture 7 (*deferred from 2020*): Adopt an Additional Supplement to Church Order Articles 82-84

Note: The reports of two synodical task forces are deferred to Synod 2023 as decided by the Program Committee of synod (officers of Synod 2019): the Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force (originally scheduled to report in 2021) and the Study of Bivocationality Task Force (originally scheduled to report in 2021).

Appendix

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.