

Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates  
June 2021

## Advisory Committee 1

Chair: Dr. William T. Koopmans  
Vice Chair: Ms. Laurie Harkema

### I. Addressing structure and leadership

The vice chair assumes the chair to avoid any possible appearance of a conflict of interest as William Koopmans, chair, serves on the CRCNA Canada Corporation, was a member of the Structure and Leadership Task Force, and serves as chair of the synodical Program Committee.

#### A. *Materials*

1. *Deferred Agenda 2020*, Council of Delegates Report, section I, D (p. 72)
2. *Deferred Agenda 2020*, Council of Delegates Supplement Report, section I, G (pp. 146-48, 150-51)
3. *Agenda 2021*, Council of Delegates Report, section II, A, 8, a (pp. 23-24)
4. *Agenda 2021*, Overtures 1 and 2 (pp. 347-50)
5. *Agenda Supplement 2021*, Council of Delegates Supplement (section I, G, and Appendix A)

#### B. *Observations*

We appreciate the intent of the Overtures 1 and 2 to emphasize our unity as a binational church. We also appreciate their commitment to ensuring that good order and proper process has been followed. Yet, we believe that the COD has acted with the same intent and commitment.

The overtures contain some inaccurate and/or incomplete information. For example, there has been no attempt to create two denominations. The intent has only been to contextualize ministries in an optimal way and to be compliant with government regulations.

Similarly, the COD has mandated the CRCNA Canada Corporation to maintain fiduciary matters, synod has endorsed and supported bylaws for CRCNA Canada Corporation, and, as such, this action was not in violation of Church Order.

Because the overtures were written and submitted by the March 2021 deadline, we believe some of the concerns within them may have been dealt with at the May 2021 COD meeting. The Structure and Leadership Task Force (SALT) recommendations may make elements of these overtures moot.

Finally, we recognize that the current situation, in terms of senior leadership positions and working relationships, is untenable for much longer. Practically, it does not seem possible to halt the process at this time. In addition, it should be noted that the decisions or actions of the COD with regards to these matters are not final. These decisions will be presented to Synod 2022, and churches and classes will have ample opportunity to respond to them before a new structure is finalized.

### C. *Recommendations*

1. That the COD, on behalf of synod, not accede to Overtures 1 and 2.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. In appreciation of the intent of the overtures to emphasize unity as a binational denomination, we affirm that this has also been the intent of the SALT report, the COD, and the CRCNA Canada Corporation as they made decisions.
  - b. Some of the information in the overtures, as noted in the background and observations above, is based on incomplete and/or inaccurate information.
  - c. The COD has passed the SALT report that addresses some of these concerns.
  - d. The CRCNA Canada Corporation and the COD have been tasked with maintaining fiduciary and legal matters. This includes being proactive and responsible when it comes to charitable law. As such, their actions were not out of order.
  - e. All actions taken by CRCNA Canada Corporation have been reviewed by the COD. These decisions will be reviewed by Synod 2022, and churches and classes will have ample opportunity to respond to the actions before the decisions are finalized.
2. That the COD, on behalf of synod, declare this to be its response to Overtures 1 and 2.

## **II. Consideration of a Neland Avenue CRC matter**

### A. *Materials*

1. *Agenda 2021*, Overtures 4-11 (pp. 352-476)
2. *Agenda Supplement 2021*, Communication 6

### B. *Observations*

The COD acting on behalf of synod is uncharted territory, and there are no clear Church Order rules to regulate how to deal with matters like this. It is a delicate balance between overstepping the reach of the COD and failing to act on significant and timely matters for the wellbeing of the denomination. That having been said, the advisory committee offers the following observations:

We have deep respect for the people and ministry of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church over many decades. We were moved by Michael's letter and the documentation of the long history of conversation that the church has had. We acknowledge that there are times when we want to speak to something that is high priority, and that urge may lead us to break the rules or bend processes.

At the same time, what Neland Avenue CRC did was outside of our denominationally held position and good order. We have covenanted together as a denomination to abide by a shared commitment to biblical interpretation and pastoral care, and will change them only through appropriate processes. To act outside of these things hurts the broader community.

On the Neland Avenue matter, the COD has already acted. A letter of admonishment was sent to the council on behalf of the COD. It acknowledged our disappointment in their actions

and lamented the breaking of community that resulted. If we go further than that, it is outside of the scope of our mandate. The COD cannot discipline a local council. Anything we do would be interim until Synod 2022 acts.

As a COD we urgently request all congregations to prayerfully maintain unity and to live within the process and procedures of our covenant. This includes taking a posture of listening to each other and to those with whom we disagree.

### *C. Recommendations*

1. That the COD, on behalf of synod, defer action on overtures and other communications regarding the Neland Avenue CRC matter (Overtures 4-10) and refer them to Synod 2022 for action, while pleading with all congregations in the denomination to maintain covenant with each other and respect proper process with regard to these matters.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. The COD has already addressed this matter in previous response and communication.
- b. The report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, which will be received and acted upon by Synod 2022, will provide a natural opportunity to deliberate and make decisions regarding these matters. In fact, the actions of Synod 2022 in regard to this report will heavily influence a proper response to Neland Avenue CRC's actions.

The following negative vote is registered within the advisory committee: Rev. Lora A. Copley (Red Mesa).

2. That the COD, on behalf of synod, not accede to Overture 11.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. The COD, in its previous letter to Neland Avenue CRC (October 29, 2020), acted in accordance with the denomination's position.
  - b. Any COD actions, by their very nature, are received and evaluated by the next synod. It would be better for Synod 2022 to evaluate the appropriateness of the letter than to be decided by the COD acting in lieu of synod.
3. That the COD, on behalf of synod, declare the previous two recommendations to be its response to Overtures 4-11.

### **III. Varia: Gratitude to retiring committee members**

#### *A. Materials*

1. *Agenda 2021*, Council of Delegates Report, section II, A, 16, a (p. 28)
2. *Agenda for Synod 2021*, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, section III (p. 246)

#### *B. Recommendations*

1. That the COD, on behalf of synod, express gratitude to Roberta Vriesma for her service to the Judicial Code Committee.

2. That the COD, on behalf of synod, express its gratitude to Kathy Smith and John Tenyenhuis for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.