

Congregational Ministries

Chair: James Dykstra
Reporter: Daniel Meinema

Study Committee

I. Materials

- A. Study Report on Ecclesiastical Marriage, pp. 251-284

II. Privilege of the floor

Gerry Koning, chair, Gayle Doornbos, reporter, and Loren Veldhuizen

III. Recommendations

- A. That synod instruct the General Secretary to disseminate the report on ecclesiastical marriage to the churches of the CRC to serve as guidance regarding the issue of ecclesiastical marriage.
- B. That synod strongly advise pastors of the CRC not to solemnize ecclesiastical marriages (as defined in this report) as sanctioned and solemnized solely by the church to the exclusion of the state (civil government) whereby a couple is considered “married in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state.”

Grounds:

- 1. The biblical record clearly teaches us to submit to the governing authorities in all matters that do not conflict with the Word of God.
- 2. Historically, Reformed churches have acknowledged the role and right of civil authorities to regulate marriage in their jurisdictions.
- 3. In both the United States and Canada there could be negative legal consequences for the participants and/or for pastors who solemnize a non-civil or ecclesiastical marriage.

- C. That synod encourage the churches to respect and honor the marriages of immigrants who did not obtain a civil marriage prior to arriving in Canada or the United States and counsel them in the understanding of Christian marriage and its relationship to civil authority in our countries.

Grounds:

- 1. It is not the case that in every country where immigrants have come from that the civil authorities regulate marriage, so it might not have been possible for a civil marriage to occur.
- 2. In the interest of grace and acceptance, we want to acknowledge the beautiful Christian marriage traditions that have developed in various cultures.
- 3. The law is permissive but not prescriptive in this regard.

- D. That synod caution pastors against acting as legal experts or offering legal advice, especially with regard to the issue of ecclesiastical marriage, and that synod encourage pastors to advise couples to seek independent legal counsel as necessary.

- E. That Synod instruct the General Secretary to disseminate a letter of warning to the pastors and councils regarding the potential legal ramifications of solemnizing an ecclesiastical marriage.
- F. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force and dismiss the task force with our whole-hearted thanks.