

Global Mission

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Overtures

I. Response to Overture 12: Classis Southeast U.S., Develop a Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Membership Decline and Require Annual Reporting of Progress

A. *Materials: Agenda for Synod 2023, Overture 12, pp. 389-96*

B. *Recommendations*

1. That synod, in **humility**, acknowledge as of grave importance the troubling trend of membership decline in the CRCNA numerated in Overture 12 and our deep need to prioritize discipleship and evangelism by addressing individuals and communities holistically.
2. That synod **celebrate** the work that Resonate and Thrive are already doing with churches; and encourage Resonate and Thrive to collaborate with the churches so that the churches can better grow in discipleship and evangelism in their contexts; That synod celebrate the work of church renewal and planting already underway. That synod celebrate significant growth in ethnic minority congregations.
3. That synod, with **hope**, urge the churches to make use of Resonate and Thrive resources, coaching opportunities, and personnel; and that synod encourage the churches to give careful thought to the responses from Resonate and Thrive to Overture 12 (*2023 Supplement to Agenda for Synod p.758-771*). Especially significant are six calls from Resonate to the churches (p.767-768).
4. That synod **thank** Classis Southeast for their passion in highlighting the trend of membership decline in the CRCNA and our deep need for church renewal and church planting.

Note: Resonate and Thrive, together with Calvin Seminary, are already working with the churches to address the concerns brought up in Overture 12. As a result, we expect that additional resources will be needed for church renewal and planting in North America and internationally.

5. That synod consider this to be our response to Overture 12.

Grounds:

In addition to above rationale, we sense a high value for contextual ministry within the CRCNA rather than a top-down approach.

II. Response to Overture 13: Council of Wyoming (Ont.) CRC, Declare that a Virtual Church Is Not a Church, pp. 397-401

A. *Materials: Agenda for Synod 2023, Overture 13, pp. 397-401*

B. *Recommendations*

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to oversee the creation of a report that gives thought to and theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church: "A church which, by design, meets only online".

- a) This report requires input from (at least) a faculty or staff member of Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, and Thriving Congregations.
 - b) This report should address the marks of the true church articulated in the Belgic Confession.
 - c) This report might address similarities and differences between online ministry and a virtual church, exploring opportunities and pitfalls of each.
 - d) This report should be presented to COD for discernment.
2. That synod consider this our response to overture 13.

Grounds:

- a) Online ministry remains an emerging mission field; but the possibility of virtual community and an entirely virtual church remain untested areas of exploration within the CRCNA.
- b) It seems premature to us to end conversation at this time.

III. Response to Overture 14: Council of First Hamilton CRC, Hamilton, Ontario, Adopt Belhar Confession as a Confession of the CRC

A. *Materials: Agenda for Synod 2023, Overture 14, pp. 401-03*

B. *Recommendations*

- 1. That synod not accede to overture 14 on the grounds that the overture does not provide new and specific grounds since Synod 2017 decided to affirm the Belhar as a Contemporary Testimony of the Christian Reformed Church.
- 2. That synod recognize that the movement in 2017 of the Belhar Confession into the category of a Contemporary Testimony of the Christian Reformed Church was a significant step in a journey of ongoing racial reconciliation, and more steps are needed.
- 3. That synod encourage churches to make regular use of the Belhar Confession in worship and daily practice, recognizing that, as stated in the Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 282-83, “the history of oppression in our own countries, and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time call for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—to confess that the Lord of life, who entrusted to us the ‘message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor. 5:19), is the Lord of our hopes and aspirations for a just and reconciled people.”
- 4. That synod encourage the churches to make use of resources already available from Indigenous Ministries (Canada) and Thrive.

Note: The Belhar Confession calls us onward toward this good gospel work, and we exhort our congregations to “stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Belhar Confession §4)