Human Sexuality

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Preamble

The Human Sexuality Advisory Committee recognizes the weightiness of the issues we considered on behalf of Synod 2023 and the broader CRCNA. During our deliberations, we appreciated the insights of Communication 3 (Agenda for Synod 2023, 601-11). In what follows, we summarize some of the most salient points as a background for our recommendations. As Synod 2022 and the Human Sexuality Report recognized, God calls each of us to live holy lives in fellowship with God and with one another. One important part of holy living is honoring our created, physical bodies, including the sexual dimension of our being. Although Christians have always struggled to be faithful in this area of life, recent years have been especially challenging. As a committee, we echo Synod 2022's confession that our denomination has too often failed to be faithful to God in our sexual lives and, in particular, has failed to serve and walk alongside our LGBTQ+ members and friends. As a committee, we also echo Synod 2022's call to faithfulness in our sexual lives.

As the many overtures to this synod indicate, responses to Synod 2022 have been mixed, particularly regarding its decisions relative to same-sex attraction and activity. Our committee is concerned that the differing views on Synod 2022's decisions both expose differences that have been present for many years and threaten to divide our church. Yet we believe that Jesus Christ has called us as a church to come together in unity and to live in unity as a witness that Jesus was sent by the Father (Jn. 17:20-23). As our differences are reconciled and we as a church move toward unity, our reconciled life together is a witness to the power of the Gospel.

To that end, our committee calls all members of the CRCNA to humbly listen to God's Word and to those with whom we disagree. Given the turmoil in our world and the church's inadequate pastoral care, we as a committee call those who agree with Synod 2022's decisions to have patience with those who disagree, bearing "with one another in love" (Agenda for Synod 2023, 603; Eph. 4:2). Thus, let us as a church be gracious toward those who submit confessional-difficulty gravamina, let us exercise discipline with great care and love, and let us be compassionate, respectful, and loving toward those who decide that they can no longer remain among our membership (Agenda for Synod 2023, 602-6). Since we as a church must acknowledge that "we have tolerated any number of other areas of nonsexual sin" without exercising faithful discipline, "To begin a program of discipline with sexually active or married LGBTQ+ members, or with those who err in doctrine in this area, after all we have tolerated and overlooked, would be hypocrisy of the worst kind" (Agenda for Synod 2023, 605-6).

Given the importance of the unity of the church and faithfulness to God's call on our lives, we as a committee call those who disagree with at least some of Synod 2022's decisions to listen to the voice of God in the church. Synod 2022 and the Human Sexuality Report called the church to live faithfully before God and in community, including in our sexual lives. Each of us needs to hear that call and recognize our own failures. Furthermore, as a denomination, we are called to respect one another and to respect the decisions of the church. We cannot function well as a church or properly help one another
if the "settled and binding" (Church Order, Art. 29) decisions of Synod are disregarded or rejected. Although members of our denominations come from diverse places and have diverse opinions on many matters, our goal is not diversity, but a growing unity amid our diversity: "As countercultural as this may be, then, our unity cannot be located in the freedom of our individual consciences or interpretations but in our complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of the church" (Agenda for Synod 2023, 608-9; Church Order, Art. 1).

We as a committee call our Reformed denomination to work toward true reform in this important area of our lives, which means that we need to engage in patient, humble listening to God and to one another as we encourage one another and pray for God’s Spirit to renew us in the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Overtures and Communication

I. Response to Overture 17: Benjamin J. Petroelje, minister of the Word, Fourteenth Street CRC, Holland, Michigan, Clarify and Affirm That the CRC’s Doctrine of Marriage Is Confessional Doctrine, pp. 406-10

A. Recommendation
   1. That synod not accede to Overture 17.
      
      Grounds:
      1. The CRCNA’s position on the doctrine of marriage is already clearly articulated and reiterated in the study reports of 1973 and 2022.
      2. The CRCNA’s website includes our position statement on “marriage” and shall be regularly updated to reflect decisions of synod.


A. Recommendations
   1. That synod not accede to overture 21A.
      
      Grounds:
      1. It is not necessary to define “chastity” as it is not a word we find in the Heidelberg Catechism.
      2. The Human Sexuality Report adequately describes chastity (Agenda for Synod 2022, p. 442)
   2. That synod declare the above recommendation to be its responses to the following overtures 18A and 18C.
   3. That synod accede to Overture 21B, affirming Synod 2022’s “interpretation of the confession” as offering a helpful and representative list of what constitutes “unchastity.”
      
      1. That synod not accede to overtures that recommend a reversal of the decision of Synod 2022 to impose a definition on the word “unchastity” as found in Q. and A. 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism. (Acts of Synod 2022, p 922)
   4. That synod declare the above recommendation (3) to be its responses to the overtures 26, 28, 35, 37, 38, and 44.

III. Response to Overture 22: Council of Maranatha CRC, Edmonton, Alberta, Confessional-Revision Gravamen, pp. 430-32

A. Recommendations
1. That synod not accede to overtures that recommend the removal of the phrase "and homosexual sex" from the list of practices cited to contravene the definition of unchastity as it pertains to Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108. (Acts of Synod 2022, p. 922)

   Grounds:
   1. See response to Overture 21.
   2. The Human Sexuality Report addresses this (Agenda for Synod 2022, p. 442)

2. That synod declare the above recommendation to be its responses to overtures 34, 36, 42, 43, 45, 47B, and 48.

IV. Response to Overture 25: Council of Monroe Community CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Alter the Action of Synod 2022 regarding Confessional Status of Interpretation of "Unchastity," pp. 440-43

   A. Recommendations
      1. That synod not accede to overtures that seek to delay the implementation of the decisions of the Human Sexuality Report.

         Grounds:
         1. We acknowledge the immediacy of the call and mutual accountability of all members of the Christian Reformed Church of North America to follow through with the pastoral care outlined in the Human Sexuality Report for the sake of our witness to Jesus Christ. We do so in a spirit of lament for failing in our pastoral care to those who identify as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.
         2. That synod declare the above recommendation to be its responses to overtures 31, 32, 40B, and 41.

V. Response to Overture 27: Classis Eastern Canada, Allow Classes of the CRCNA to Declare Article 65, Item 2 of the Acts of Synod 2022 Inoperative, pp. 448-50

   A. Recommendations
      1. That synod not accede to Overture 27.

         Grounds:
         1. Synod declared in 1973 that “churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals.” (1973 Acts of Synod, p. 632)
         2. To grant churches and classes the privilege of declaring confessional matters “inoperative” would be a violation of the Covenant of Officebearers.
         3. To declare that Article 65, item 2 of the Acts of Synod 2022 (p.922) to be inoperative in effect creates a local option. Whereas the “women in office” issue recognizes that Scripture allows for two practices, the same criteria does not apply to homosexual sex.

VI. Response to Overture 33: Classis Southeast U.S., Revise Definition of Homosexuality, pp. 461-67

   A. Recommendation
      1. That synod not accede to Overture 33.

         Grounds:
1. Overture 33 is a recommitment of Overture 57 from Synod 2022 and, under Church Order Article 31, fails to present sufficient and new grounds for consideration.

VII. Response to Overture 39: Council of Church of the Savior CRC, South Bend, Indiana, Reverse Synod’s Endorsement of the Human Sexuality Report, pp. 488-92
A. Recommendation
1. That synod not accede to Overture 39.
Grounds:
   1. Overture 39 does not present sufficient and new grounds (Church Order Article 31) that haven’t already been considered by the Human Sexuality Report and its deliberations.
   2. While Overture 39 calls specific attention to the confessions, the focus of the Human Sexuality Report was to lay a Biblical Theology of human sexuality, presuming and affirming confessional alignment.

VIII. Response to Overture 47: Council of Fellowship CRC, Edmonton, Alberta, Create Local Option to Allow LGBTQ+ Christians to Participate Fully, pp. 515-17
A. Recommendation
1. That synod not accede to Overture 47A
Grounds:
   1. While Synod declared in 1973 that “churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals” (1973 Acts of Synod, p. 632), those who practice unchastity contravene the seventh commandment.