

Advisory Committee 8, Discipline Matters, Rev. Maria Bowater reporting, presents the following:

**I. Response to Overtures 23, 25, 26, 30, 31, 34, 67, and Communications 8, 12, 28**

*A. Materials*

1. Overture 67 (*Deferred from 2023*), pp. 388-389
2. Overture 23, pp. 472-474
3. Overture 25, pp. 476-479
4. Overture 26, pp. 479-481
5. Overture 30, pp.495-497
6. Overture 31, pp. 497-498
7. Overture 33, pp. 501-503
8. Overture 34, pp. 503-505
9. Communication 8, pp. 562-565
10. Communication 12, pp. 583-584
11. Communication 28, Supplement

*B. Background*

As a committee we recognize that recent decisions regarding same sex relationships have been difficult in many of our churches. For many it seems that the decision to accept a synodical interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism QA 108 as confessional has been done in haste. One of the ways some churches have dealt with that difficulty is to write public statements that conflict with the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

By this recommendation, we want to speak in love, grace and truth. We strive to work with those churches who are in conflict with the confessions of the CRCNA rather than to them or for them. We seek to rebuild trust where trust has been lost.

We offer a path toward restoration or disaffiliation.

*C. Recommendation*

1. Synod instruct churches who have made public statements, by their actions or in media, that directly contradict synod's decision to repent of their failure to submit to the authority of the church. This would include:
  - A statement to classis indicating repentance for these public statements.

- A removal of any public statements/declarations/creeds which are opposed to the teaching of the church including materials designed to teach against or contradict the denomination's position.
- A commitment not to ordain as officebearers individuals who are in a same-sex marriage, nor any who are in a non celibate, same-sex relationship.
- A commitment not to instruct publicly against the denomination's position in our "preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living," as we promise in the Covenant for Officebearers.
- A commitment not to officiate a marriage of a same-sex couple.

*Grounds:*

- a. Because our unity is our greatest witness to unbelievers, our desire is for restoration and reconciliation (John 17:23, 1 John 1:9-10; Gal 6:1)
  - b. When Synod declares an interpretation of a confession that interpretation is "settled and binding."
2. That after the conclusion of Synod 2024, all office-bearers from churches in non-compliance, by actions or in any form of media, be placed on a limited suspension. That suspension would include a loss of the ability to be delegated to classis, synod, the Council of Delegates or other CRCNA agencies. Officebearers under limited suspension may serve classis, Council of Delegates and other CRCNA agencies as an advisor or consultant with privilege of the floor but not as a voting delegate.

*Ground:* We want to create an environment where people can think, act and speak with integrity, and the CRCNA continues to demonstrate our desire for restoration with our invitation for their voice to be heard on matters where they are in compliance with the positions of the CRCNA.

3. That Synod 2024 instruct the Office of the General Secretary to prioritize the development of a process with resources to help classes and churches navigate a way towards restoration or disaffiliation. This defined process and resources should be in the hands of classes by November 29, 2024.

Churches will continue in the process as long as there is continued momentum towards restoration through the measurable expectations listed in 1 a - e or disaffiliation. Classes will submit bi-annual reports to the Office of the General Secretary of the progress made. These classical reports should be submitted to the General Secretary by March 15 and October 15 each year.

This process is intended to be completed in one year from the beginning of the limited suspension. A classis can lengthen the suspension an additional year as long as the church is participating in the process. The

entire process cannot exceed two years. Classes must provide grounds for the extension in their report to the General Secretary.

*Ground:* A clearly defined process with resources to support will allow a uniform, predictable, and just process that works with churches and classes of the CRCNA.

4. If the church refuses to engage the process or prevents the process from moving forward in a timely manner, the classis shall initiate special discipline of the council.

*Grounds:*

- a. We recognize that we are not in unity and do not interpret 'guiding into compliance' in a uniform way.
  - b. Refusal to engage the process indicates a settled conviction and necessitates implementing special discipline.
5. If neither restoration nor disaffiliation are completed after the year of limited suspension (possibly extended by classis) classis is to remove the council, revert the church to emerging status, and place them under the authority of a neighboring council.

*Grounds:*

- a. Synod 1926 asserted the right for ecclesiastical assemblies to take decisive disciplinary action even if the Church Order does not stipulate an exact process of action (*Acts of Synod 1926*, pp. 329-30). It also made clear that a consistory worthy of discipline had "placed itself outside of the church relationship" (*Acts of Synod 1926*, p. 139).
  - b. Classis Hudson in 1992 recognized that one of the churches in its classis had "broken the bonds of fellowship with the denomination and therefore [had] placed themselves outside the fellowship of the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 610). Synod itself said that the church that was no longer in fellowship with the denomination would be allowed to participate in synod's process of appeals if it would "bring itself into conformity with the standards from which it was declared to have deviated" (p. 610)
  - c. Although the council's authority to discipline is original, the CRCNA has long recognized that broader assemblies have delegated authority to discipline narrower assemblies.
6. That this be synod's response to Overtures 67 (*Deferred from 2023*), 23, 25, 26, 30, 31, 33, 34 and communications 8, 12, 28.

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