

OVERTURE, APPEALS, COMMUNICATIONS

Response to Synod 2025 regarding Calvin University Report

I. Background

Synod 2024 gave the following directives to the Calvin University Board of Trustees:

That synod instruct the boards of the denominational agencies and institutions and the Council of Delegates to review and revise, as needed, their gravamina policies (e.g., exceptions) related to the decisions of Synod 2024 and report on their actions to Synod 2025.

Ground:

Implementing a consistent approach to handling gravamina provides clarity and safeguards fidelity to the creeds and confessions in the denomination's agencies and institutions.

(Acts of Synod 2024, p. 880)

That synod instruct the Calvin University Board of Trustees to define the differences in Calvin's use of "confessional difficulties" in relation to the decisions of synod concerning gravamina and to develop language and processes in alignment with those in the CRC in order to build trust in its relationships with CRC churches, and to report back to Synod 2025 on its progress.

Grounds:

- a. Calvin University has declared that "Calvin desires to be robustly confessional . . ." (Calvin University Supplement). This would provide shared accountability to such a declaration.
- b. Calvin University recognizes that "authority to make binding judgments about the meaning and implications of the confessions is assigned to synod" (*Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom*, p. 41; see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, pp. 166 and 170).

(Acts of Synod 2024, pp. 882-83)

In response to Synod 2024's directive, the Calvin University Board of Trustees met multiple times in-person and via Zoom to craft their response to synod, which subsequently was released after the February meeting of Classis Zeeland. The board's response has now been published [see "The Calvin University Board of Trustees Response to Synod," *Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 155ff.]. Classis Zeeland now interacts with that published board response.

II. Observations

We are thankful for the Calvin University Board of Trustees' appreciation of the close relationship that the university has with the Christian Reformed Church. We are also thankful for Calvin's inviting the CRC to join them in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the university in 2026. Likewise, the

CRC is thankful for the many ways it has benefited from and been blessed by Calvin as the denomination's college over those nearly 150 years.

However, we are also concerned about the university board's inability to put forward a response that honors the spirit as well as the instruction of synod regarding a very serious ethical issue facing the broader church today. In doing so they have also missed an opportunity to present a robustly Reformed set of standards for itself as a board, as well as the faculty and administration, as servant-leaders in the Christian Reformed denomination which Calvin University belongs to and represents.

III. Overture

Therefore, Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

A. Create a synodical *in loco* committee with a mandate to guide the Calvin University Board of Trustees' creation of a new policy for its current and future board members that brings these denominational leaders of the CRC's educational institution into convictional alignment and compliance with the same confessional standards expected and required of its officebearers, and report that proposed new policy back to Synod 2026 for review and possible approval.

Grounds:

1. The university board's proposal to Synod 2025 of having two tiers of trustee membership, with one tier having convictional confessional alignment and the other tier being allowed to not have convictional alignment with the teachings of our Reformed confessions, fails to submit to the authority of Synod 2024 with its clear instructions regarding confessional alignment with no exceptions.
2. While the university board is made up of non-CRC members as well as those who are not officebearers, the reasonable expectation is that board members, as they serve as servant-leaders in this important educational institution of the CRC, would believe in our doctrines and ethical teachings.
3. Leaders that don't fully believe in the mission and values of the church that owns and calls these trustee leaders to govern and run her institution on the church's behalf ought not to serve in such leadership and governance roles.
4. Calvin University teaches all her students the vital importance of having a Reformed world and life view, thereby understanding that what we as Christians *convictionally believe* shapes how we therefore behave and govern in the spheres which God has entrusted to us.
5. Synod has created an *in loco* committee before with the goal of helping to guide into alignment and compliance.

B. Instruct the Calvin University Board of Trustees to ask for the immediate resignation of all current board members who are unwilling to carry out the will of the synod who has called them to these servant-leadership roles, and

to then submit nominations for new replacements of these trustee members to Synod 2026; those newly nominated must be able to wholeheartedly believe the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions and be in convictional alignment with them.

Grounds:

1. The current board appears unable to carry out synod's instructions regarding confessional alignment, even though given an opportunity to do so by synod, and therefore has failed to build trust in its relationship with the churches of the CRCNA.
2. The churches of the denomination need to be able to trust all of the leadership of her educational institutions, not just some of it.

C. Inform the Calvin University Board of Trustees that if it is unable to fully carry out the instructions and mandate of Synod 2024 and now Synod 2025 regarding alignment with our Reformed confessions, then Synod 2026 will be tasked with entering into the process of interviewing and subsequently removing all trustee members who cannot believe and promote our Reformed confessional beliefs and ethics, to be replaced by trustees who can wholeheartedly believe the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions and be in convictional alignment with them.

Grounds:

1. The synod of the CRCNA has a duty before her Lord and one another to promote the mission of Christ's church, as understood and interpreted by our ecumenical creeds and Three Forms of Unity.
2. The churches of the CRCNA, through our elected institutional educational board trusteeship, have a reasonable expectation that all trustee members will be in full agreement with our ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions.
3. Trust is granted when it is earned; a failure to earn that trust, when given an opportunity to do so, will result in needing new trust-building trustee members.
4. The CRCNA desires to see the Reformed mission and witness of her Calvin University enthusiastically and solidly go forward for another 150 years and longer, for as long as the Lord tarries.

Classis Zeeland,
Ronald Meyer, stated clerk

APPEAL 1

Councils of Alliston (Ont.) CRC; Covenant CRC, Barrie, Ontario; CrossPoint CRC, Brampton, Ontario; Georgetown (Ont.) CRC; and Bethel Community CRC, Newmarket, Ontario

Note: The Council of Delegates, acting on the recommendation of the general secretary, has judged that the following appeal “raises an issue the resolution of which by synod will likely have significant application outside of and beyond the classis from which the appeal came” and has decided to include it in the printed agenda, in keeping with the regulations of Church Order Supplement, Article 30-a, B, 3.

I. Background

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). Sadly, this unity is currently broken in many of our CRC churches and between the churches in many of our classes, including our own Classis Toronto. The crux of our disunity is currently due to some church councils finding themselves unable or unwilling to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers and, with it, our three confessional forms of unity. We are thankful that recent decisions of synod have found a gracious and charitable way to include churches in the discussions of classis meetings who have decided not to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers while at the same time not allowing the privileges of voting. However, Classis Toronto is not abiding by those synodical decisions, even after attempts have been made to encourage them to do so.

II. Appeal

Thus, for the sake of biblical confessional unity, the councils of Alliston (Ont.) CRC; Covenant CRC of Barrie, Ontario; CrossPoint CRC of Brampton, Ontario; Georgetown (Ont.) CRC; and Bethel CRC of Newmarket, Ontario—all of which are part of Classis Toronto—appeal to synod, according to Church Order Article 30-a, to overturn the following overtures approved by Classis Toronto at its October 9, 2024, meeting (overtures that Classis Toronto reaffirmed at its February 12, 2025, classis meeting by voting down an overture asking that classis rescind them), and instruct it to follow synod’s decision of 2024 that classical delegates from councils under “limited suspension” and classical delegates unable to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers may not vote at classis meetings:

Overtures approved at the October 9, 2024, meeting of Classis Toronto and reaffirmed at its February 12, 2025, meeting, in order of their approval:

1. From Heritage Fellowship CRC: “Classis Toronto will be wise and gentle and seat delegates [i.e., allow voting privileges] from all

churches in classis regardless of their being under ‘limited suspension’ or holding a letter ‘in protest’” (Oct. 9, 2024, Classis Toronto minutes, Item 7).

2. From Etobicoke Fellowship CRC: “Classis Toronto will continue to welcome and seat with voting privileges all delegates appointed by their councils without requiring them to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers at classis meetings for the next two years” (Oct. 9, 2024, Classis Toronto minutes, Item 8).

With the above appeal, we also ask synod to do the following:

- A. To declare that all meetings of Classis Toronto from the point in its October 9, 2024, meeting when the first overture was approved, and all subsequent meetings, were and are unduly constituted and that all decisions and actions made in said meetings, after the approval of the first overture, are invalid. Meetings of Classis Toronto may, again, be duly constituted once they rescind the above decisions.
- B. To disallow the seating of all officebearers nominated by Classis Toronto as delegates to Synod 2025 and beyond unless and until it rescinds these decisions by the start of Synod 2025 or of any subsequent synods, and assuming that all delegates can affirm the Covenant for Officebearers.
- C. If deemed necessary or wise by synod, to appoint an *in loco* synodical committee to guide Classis Toronto into compliance and/or to convene our next meeting of Classis Toronto to ensure that it only seats delegates who can affirm the Covenant for Officebearers unreservedly and who disagree with or have repented of the above decisions.

Grounds:

1. The above decisions of Classis Toronto are a knowing and intentional violation of the decisions of Synod 2024, of our covenant commitment to the CRC as outlined in the Covenant for Officebearers, and of our biblical and Church Order decisions. Specifically, the decisions of Classis Toronto are contrary to the following promise in the Covenant for Officebearers: “Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God’s Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church’s judgement and authority.” The decisions of Classis Toronto are also contrary to Church Order Article 28-c (“Matters referred by minor assemblies to major assemblies shall be presented in harmony with the rules for classical and synodical procedure”) and Church Order Article 29 (“Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration. The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.”)

2. The above decisions of Classis Toronto are also contrary to its own Classis Rules and Mandates:

Section II, C: Classis shall be constituted and function according to the Church Order of the CRCNA.

Section X, A, 2: A motion is not acceptable under the following conditions:

 - a) It is contrary to the Scriptures, the Confessions, or the Church Order.
3. In making the above decisions, Classis Toronto invoked, as a ground, a mistaken or confused notion of covenant—namely, that local, personal, long-term relationships constitute a stronger and priority covenant than submission to the covenant decisions we have made as the larger CRC as a whole.
4. The gentleness sought in the first overture is already encouraged by synod, as well as a “spirit of love and fellowship” in the Covenant for Officebearers, by letting those under limited suspension continue to have a voice in discussions but, because of the first steps of discipline, not vote regarding decisions of the body that they have distanced themselves from.
5. The above decisions of Classis Toronto undercut the disciplinary process intended to bring errant churches to repentance and compliance as it removes any consequences for disobedience to God’s will and to our denominational covenant with one another.

Council of Alliston (Ont.) CRC
Wendy Colyn, clerk

Council of Covenant CRC, Barrie, Ontario
Luke Veenstra, clerk

Council of CrossPoint CRC, Brampton, Ontario
Peggy King, clerk

Council of Georgetown (Ont.) CRC
Hank Visser, clerk

Council of Bethel Community CRC, Newmarket, Ontario
Bob Zondag, clerk

Note: Classis Toronto's response to this appeal is included as Communication 10 in this agenda supplement.

APPEAL 2

Members of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Joseph, Michigan

COMMUNICATION 9

Classis Grand Rapids East

Response to Overture 21: Provide Steps of Accountability toward Churches and Classes in Defiance and Open Rebellion

After consulting with denominational administrators and synodical deputies, Classis Grand Rapids East used the *ad hoc* committee under dispute in Overture 21 expressly in order to comply with Synod 2024. Adhering to our bylaws as required by the State of Michigan, classis as a whole obtained a quorum and conducted its “ordinary business” (e.g., prayer, approving minutes, and having the privilege to speak). In matters with denomination-wide implications (e.g., approving candidates for ordination), the ten congregations of classis under limited suspension voluntarily submitted to Synod 2024 through the formation of the *ad hoc* committee as a legally appropriate way of disenfranchising themselves in order to comply with Synod 2024.

Classis Grand Rapids East,
Robert Arbogast, clerk

COMMUNICATION 10

Classis Toronto Response to Appeal 1

I. Background

In response to the synodical appeal sent by the councils of Alliston (Ont.) CRC; Covenant CRC of Barrie, Ontario; CrossPoint CRC of Brampton, Ontario; Georgetown (Ont.) CRC, and Bethel CRC of Newmarket, Ontario, Classis Toronto submits the following for your consideration.

We all fully recognize the difficult and fraught moment at present in the Christian Reformed Church, a time of heightened tension and anxiety. We also recognize that our responses in this moment will present a witness to the gospel that unites us. At Classis Toronto, we have wondered, “How are we embodying together the sacrificial love of the Lamb, the grace of God’s kingdom?” Our prayer is that this response would measure up to that couplet of virtues we find in Jesus—and, we trust, found in his body, the church—both grace and truth.

II. Observations

- A. After a difficult and challenging Synod 2024, with decisions that all knew would be consequential to churches and the denomination as a

whole, synod President Rev. Derek Buikema implored the church to act with gentleness, saying, “Can we make sure that the hermeneutical lens of all of the decisions of synod be gentleness . . . demonstrated by our actions?” Classis Toronto has sought to demonstrate such gentleness by our actions.

- B. The substance of the appeal regards the matter of voting privileges at classis. Classis Toronto approved the motion to extend voting privileges, limited to two years, to all duly credentialed delegates to Classis Toronto, regardless of their being under “limited suspension” or holding a letter “in protest.”
- C. Surrounding this core issue is the larger circumstance of how we navigate our way through this divisive season with grace and mercy, as well as accountability to the direction of synod. Please know, there is no one in Classis Toronto who is under any illusions that the CRC will change course after three successive synods have ruled in the same direction. Given that clear reality, and without any intent to alter or dismiss this direction, Classis Toronto sought to create the charitable space to listen, to patiently allow faithful churches in classis the time to speak about and wrestle with next steps in a context of grace.
- D. The appellants state that the decisions of Classis Toronto were grounded in “a mistaken or confused notion of covenant—namely, that local, personal, long-term relationships constitute a stronger and priority covenant than submission to the covenant decisions we have made as the larger CRC as a whole.” The majority of churches in Classis Toronto disagree. We are fully aware of the obligations of being in a denominational covenant relationship with one another.

However, we do believe that these local, personal, and long-term relationships constitute a compelling basis for a patient and gentle response, within the directives set by synod.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, we would concur with the appellants that this was a knowing and intentional action by Classis Toronto; however, it was not a knowing and intentional violation. These actions were a knowing and intentional discernment of the spirit of the Church Order; they were a knowing and intentional response to the substantial synodical actions that required time and space to fully process together at a classical level. They were actions by which Classis Toronto followed the direction of synod in ways that knowingly and intentionally demonstrated timely and needed gentleness.

Classis Toronto
Tilly Berg, clerk

APPENDIX

We do believe the actions of Classis Toronto have substantive basis in CRC Church Order. We did not want, however, our primary response to the appeal to consist of technicalities and procedural intricacies of the Church Order. We believe the moment calls for something more—a humble understanding of the fraught time we are in, along with a gentle and patient witness and response. That being said, we felt it good to also include the Church Order and procedural rationale for our decisions as an appendix to our response.

Grounds:

1. The introduction to the CRC Church Order notes “that substantial changes need to be communicated to all the churches for feedback before they even go to a synod. If that has not happened, any changes must be approved by a subsequent synod before they take effect” (p. 8).
2. Synod’s actions to create a limited suspension category constituted a substantial change to the Church Order. Overture 23 from Classis Zeeland (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 472-74) asked that synod define limited suspension “to include loss of all privileges at broader assemblies, on denominational boards, and on the Council of Delegates. Councils and officebearers that demonstrate repentance shall be welcomed back into full covenant fellowship.” The overture asked synod to include something new within our ecclesiastical procedure that was not previously specified in the Church Order. Classis Toronto discerned that this, in effect, asked for a substantial alteration to the Church Order.
3. CRC Church Order Supplement, Article 47, “Regulations Pertaining to Article 47 of the Church Order,” states, “A substantial alteration is any alteration which changes the essential meaning of the creeds or the articles of the Church Order.” Further, it notes that “a committee recommending any change in these matters shall specify what change is being recommended and shall state whether or not the change is a ‘substantial alteration.’” Advisory Committee 8, in their majority report response (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 885-93) made no specification of whether or not the recommendations were substantial alterations, other than to assert the general observation that the CRCNA has long recognized that broader assemblies have delegated authority to discipline narrower assemblies.
4. Advisory Committee 8 referred to the *Acts of Synod 1926* to substantiate the general observation. We find in the reference to Synod 1926 the very basis for the decisions of Classis Toronto. *Acts of Synod 1926* states, “Also it must not be forgotten, that our C.O. is not a constitution, covering all subdivisions, but a collection of general and guiding ecclesiastical governmental principles, which must be applied in concrete cases according to circumstances, when such cases occur which are not stipulated in de-

- tail in the C.O.” (*Acts of Synod 1926*, p. 329). The decisions of Classis Toronto sought to do what the *Acts of Synod 1926* calls us to: abide by guiding principles and direction set by synod but apply them according to the circumstances of a time and place where churches are reconsidering their relationship with the denomination.
5. Church Order Article 28-a calls all assemblies of the church to transact ecclesiastical matters in “an ecclesiastical manner.” We believe that patience and gentleness demonstrated in these actions of Classis Toronto fulfilled the appropriate ecclesiastical manner called for in our Church Order, in our current denominational climate, and by the president of Synod 2024.

COMMUNICATION 11

Classis Toronto

Classis Toronto is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the overture coming to synod that names Classis Toronto (Overture 21). We were saddened to see our decisions characterized as “defiance and open rebellion,” and we are hurt by being labeled as “law and covenant breakers” (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 383, 385).

These words fail to recognize our classis’ deep commitment to the historic confessions of the Christian Reformed Church, our love for Jesus Christ, and our dedication to advancing the kingdom of God in the Greater Toronto Area. They are a mischaracterization of the actions and motives of our classis.

With humility, Classis Toronto was calling its members to an alternative process. We were advocating for synodality—walking together toward discerning the will of God. In its recent meetings and decisions, Classis Toronto has attempted to create space for listening, discussing, and understanding.

We share the desire of Classis Iakota to more deeply covenant together. The end result of synodality may be actionable steps, but, more importantly, for this time, we believe that it can contribute to harmony within the church and create the opportunity to keep covenant in spite of differences.

We encourage synod not to accede to Overture 21.

Classis Toronto
Tilly Berg, stated clerk