



Christian
Reformed
Church

Agenda for Synod 2025

Called

Agenda for Synod **2025**

May 28, 2025
June 13-19, 2025
Redeemer University
Ancaster, Ontario

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PREFACE

It is with gratitude to God that we look forward to coming together as delegates and advisers to synod for conversation and deliberation and to celebrate the continued ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.

The *Agenda for Synod 2025* provides a historical snapshot of what God has continued to do in our ministries and denomination as a whole throughout the past year. The reports of the ministries, agencies, and institutions of the CRCNA, along with responses via overtures and communications, provide an important reminder of God's work among us.

The Council of Delegates of the CRCNA decided in February 2025 that, due to the benefits of convening online at previous synods, Synod 2025 will begin with a virtual convening session on Wednesday, May 28, at 7:00 p.m. (EDT). Reverend Nate Van Denend, pastor of First CRC, Chatham, Ontario, will serve as the president pro tem until synod is duly constituted and its four officers have been elected. Synod will meet in person beginning on Friday, June 13, at 8:15 a.m. in Founders Hall on the campus of Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ontario. A community-wide Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise will be held Sunday, June 15, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. in the Redeemer University Auditorium (777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4).

Prior to the convening session, *all* delegates and advisers to synod are encouraged to take time to view the video orientations posted on the synod site—designed as a secure site for delegates and advisers only. The orientation will assist first-time delegates and advisers in understanding the nature of synod and will provide helpful reminders for returning delegates and advisers to synod. In addition, special orientations will be held for advisers to synod, as well as for advisory committee chairs and reporters and their alternates (see the proposed daily schedule in the Announcements section on the following pages for more information).

The congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America are requested to remember the synodical assembly in intercessory prayers on the Sundays of June 8 and 15. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will equip the synodical delegates to serve in faith and obedience and will lead the Christian Reformed Church in unity, growth, and renewal.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:1-2,

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

May we bring our Lord and Savior joy during Synod 2025 by demonstrating love, compassion, and care for one another. And may we give account for the Spirit's work among us during the joyful and difficult conversations.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
(Eph. 3:20-21)

Zachary J. King
General Secretary of the CRCNA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I. Welcome

Thank you for serving as a delegate to Synod 2025. Whether you are a returning delegate or you are coming for the first time, we sincerely hope and pray that you will find synod to be a rewarding and blessed experience. We come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, as members of the CRC, and as delegates of the classes that appointed you to serve. Synod is more than just a gathering of church leaders or a governing body. It is a reflection of the church and a time for reflection and celebration of what God is doing in and through the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Most of all, it is a time to discern the Holy Spirit's leading by listening to God through the voices of our brothers and sisters in Christ, in prayer, and through careful application of Scripture. God has richly blessed us, and you have been given a unique privilege to serve him and his kingdom by your engagement at synod.

The synodical services staff is available to assist you as you prepare for, arrive at, and serve throughout the week of synod. Please feel free to contact Synodical Services, if you need information or have any questions, by writing synod@crcna.org or calling 800-272-5125.

II. Confidentiality of the executive sessions of synod

The Council of Delegates calls the matter of confidentiality to the attention of Synod 2025 and urges that all necessary precautions be taken to prevent violations of confidentiality.

Synod 1954 stated that “the very principle of executive sessions, or sessions that are not open to the public, involves the practical implication that reporters may not ‘report’” (*Acts of Synod 1954*, p. 15). If reporters are not permitted to report on executive sessions of synod, it is certainly a breach of confidentiality also for delegates to the synodical assembly to report—publicly, privately, orally, or in print—on the discussions held in an executive session of synod (cf. *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 16).

III. Social media contact

Synod 2019 recognized the increased influence of social media on synodical delegates and advisers and decided that delegates and advisers shall follow “guidelines to avoid inappropriate use of social media contact with non-delegates during advisory committee meetings and plenary sessions of synod, because such use might compromise the transparency and integrity of the deliberative process” (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 811-12).

IV. Audio and video recordings of synod

Synod 1979 authorized the making of an official audio recording of the entire proceedings of the general sessions of synod as a way to verify the written record of the synodical proceedings. Although the general sessions of

synod are recorded, executive sessions are not recorded. Delegates to synod are informed at the opening session of synod that all the general sessions are being recorded. Synod has designated that the Office of General Secretary be responsible for the use and storage of the recordings.

The following regulations were adopted by Synod 1989 concerning audio and video recordings of synodical sessions by media representatives and visitors:

- A. Representatives of the media are permitted to make video recordings of synodical proceedings provided they observe the restrictions placed upon them by the synodical news office under the direction of the general secretary of synod.
- B. Visitor privileges
 1. Visitors are at liberty to make audio recordings of the public proceedings of synod provided they do so unobtrusively (i.e., in no way inhibiting or disturbing either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).
 2. Video recordings are permitted provided the following restrictions are observed:
 - a. Video cameras are permitted only at the entrances, not backstage or in the wings.
 - b. Auxiliary lighting is not permitted.
 - c. Video[recording] is to be done unobtrusively (i.e., in such a way that it in no way inhibits or disturbs either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).

(Acts of Synod 1989, p. 445)

V. Proposed daily schedule

Although each new assembly is free to alter the schedule, the following general schedule is tentatively in place for Synod 2025:

Wednesday, May 28

7:00 -10:00 p.m. Virtual convening session

Thursday check-in, June 12

3:30 - 5:00 p.m. Orientation for first-time delegates
5:30 - 7:30 p.m. Orientation during supper for advisory committee chairs and reporters
5:30 - 6:30 p.m. Supper
6:00 - 9:00 p.m. Ministry Fair

Convening Friday, June 13

8:15 - 10:30 a.m. Opening worship and plenary
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Advisory committee meetings
12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Advisory committee meetings
5:00 - 6:30 p.m. Supper
6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Advisory committee meetings

Saturday

8:15 - 10:15 a.m. Plenary session
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Advisory committee meetings
12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Advisory committee meetings
5:00 - 6:30 p.m. President's Picnic
6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Advisory committee meetings or tentative
 plenary session

Sunday

Morning worship at area CRC churches
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Lunch
5:00 - 6:00 p.m. Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise
6:30 - 7:30 p.m. Supper

Monday - Wednesday

8:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Plenary session
12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Plenary session
5:00 - 6:30 p.m. Supper
6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Plenary session

Thursday

8:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Plenary session
12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.* Final session

*Synod will adjourn no later than 3:30 p.m. on Thursday.

DELEGATES TO SYNOD 2025

Alberta North

Minister – Andrew J. Aukema
Minister – Richard J. deLange
Elder – Carlos Rosa
Deacon – Christine Olthuis

Alternate – Art L. Verboon
Alternate – Rebecca G. Hall
Alternate – Scott A. Klooster
Alternate – Daniel K. Harder

Alberta South/Saskatchewan

Minister – Gary van Leeuwen
Minister – Kevin VanderVeen
Elder – Brendan K. Postman
Deacon – Jeremy N. Williamson

Alternate – Henry J. Veldboom
Alternate – Matthew Vanden Heuvel
Alternate – Lee Himbeault
Alternate – Jason A. Hoetmer

Arizona

Minister – Andrew W. Littleton
Elder – Rodney Huguen
Elder – Christopher D. Samuels
Deacon – Kevin Copp

Alternate – Mike Almeroth
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Atlantic Northeast

Minister – Nicholas W. Monsma
Minister – Gilbert Varela
Elder – Josh Stoep
Deacon – Adrian L. VandenBout

Alternate – Michael R. Saville
Alternate – Will H. Barham
Alternate – Henry J. Lane
Alternate – _____

B.C. North-West

Minister – Eun Suk Oh
Minister – Martin Vellekoop
Elder – Andrea Drummond
Deacon – Robin de Haan

Alternate – Willem J. Delleman
Alternate – Sungwoo Park
Alternate – Shelley Hempstead
Alternate – Jack A. Beeksma

B.C. South-East

Minister – Jason R. Truell
Minister – Ben Wimmers
Elder – Joanna DeVries
Deacon – Matthew D. Sebans

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

California South

Minister – Scott Elgersma
Minister – José G. Piñero
Elder – Ruben Aguilar

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Central California

Minister – Paul H. Vander Klay
Minister – Aleah Marsden
Elder – Titus E. Davis
Deacon – Luann D. Sankey

Alternate – Matthew C. McClure
Alternate – Sandra Baerwald
Alternate – David L. Roos
Alternate – Mike McClurg

Central Plains

Minister – Johnlo Xu
Minister – Jonathan Spronk
Elder – Marvin G. Rosendaal
Deacon – Drew Ryder

Alternate – Michael L. Bentley
Alternate – Ryan M. Landt
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Chicago South

Minister – Caley J. Meza
Minister – Israel Ledee
Elder – Jeffrey J. Lampos

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Columbia

Minister – Rob J. Toornstra
Minister – Michael J. Brummel
Deacon – Virgil L. Michael
Deacon – Daniel W. Evans

Alternate – Louis M. Korf
Alternate – John Van Schepen
Alternate – Sergio Alejandro Castillo
Alternate – _____

Eastern Canada

Minister – Aaron Thompson
Minister – Rebecca J. A. Bokma
Elder – Bill Byker
Elder – Ron P. Hosmar

Alternate – Sid Ypma
Alternate – Benjamin Gresik
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Georgetown

Minister – Mark D. Elffers
Minister – Jeffery W. Scripps
Elder – Herbert A. Kraker
Elder – Brandon Seaver

Alternate – Jeremy D. Rhodes
Alternate – Nate Meldrim
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Grand Rapids East

Minister – Andrea Bult
Minister – Darrin J. B. Compagner
Elder – Shirley J. Roels
Elder – Jeffrey A. Fisher

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Grand Rapids North

Minister – Joshua L. Grimes
Elder – Brittany A. Clark
Elder – June L. Atsma
Deacon – Alexander C. Flanders

Alternate – Benjamin D. McKnight
Alternate – Geffrey D. VanderSyde
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Grand Rapids South

Minister – Peter M. Jonker
Minister – Keven C. Vande Streek
Elder – Gary J. Bekker
Elder – Randall J. LeFebre

Alternate – Gerald L. Zandstra
Alternate – Willem de Vries
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Grandville

Elder – Jordan H. Nickell
Elder – Kenneth Frederick
Deacon – James P. Heyboer

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Greater Los Angeles

Minister – Aaron D. Solomon-Mills
Minister – Christina Um Kang
Elder – Isadore C. Labrosse
Deacon – Zackery R. McCain

Alternate – David Kong
Alternate – Bonny S. Mulder-Behnia
Alternate – Tommy A. Bousema
Alternate – _____

Hackensack

Minister – Donald R. Ridder
Minister – Anthony Matias
Deacon – Victoria Navarrete
Deacon – Joe Sanderlin

Alternate – Norman Viss
Alternate – Patricia Meads
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Hamilton

Minister – Kenneth F. Benjamins
Minister – Doug J. Nieuwstraten
Elder – Adrian Guldemon
Deacon – John Brinkman

Alternate – Mark Verbruggen
Alternate – Steven Eckersley
Alternate – Rob Brouwer
Alternate – _____

Hanmi

Minister – Sang M. Moon
Minister – Sangkyu Oh
Elder – Sang Jung Park

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Heartland

Minister – Aaron Greydanus
Minister – Stephen F. Terpstra
Elder – Dan Tracy
Elder – Brad A. Kraayenbrink

Alternate – Nathan Kuperus
Alternate – Brian R. Dunn
Alternate – Daryl L. Byker
Alternate – Rod D. De Boer

Holland

Minister – Nathan Gritter
Minister – Phil D. Kok
Elder – Lucas C. tenBrink
Deacon – Ben J. Hekman

Alternate – Jen Rozema
Alternate – Shelby Gemmen
Alternate – Donald A. Bemis
Alternate – Dwayne L. Nienhuis

Hudson

Minister – Eunbeom Kim
Minister – Moses S. Kang
Elder – John Belanus

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Huron

Minister – Ray Vander Kooij
Minister – Jason D. Crossen
Elder – John Tamming
Elder – Richard J. Van Donkersgoed

Alternate – Cameron W. Oegema
Alternate – Richard D. Golby
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Iakota

Minister – Matthew A. Haan
Minister – Gary J. Maas
Elder – Gerald L. Zwart
Elder – Benjamin Saarloos

Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____
Alternate – _____

Illiana

Minister – Joshua M. Christoffels
 Minister – Cedric W. Parsels
 Elder – Richard G. Vander Woude
 Deacon – Nathan R. Dykstra

Alternate – Randall Bergsma
 Alternate – Jeffrey R. Hale
 Alternate – Joshua Dykstra
 Alternate – _____

Kalamazoo

Minister – Jeffrey Brower
 Minister – Mark Immink
 Elder – Todd E. DeNooyer
 Elder – Craig Lubben

Alternate – Michael D. Koetje
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Ko-Am

Minister – Kyung Ho Park
 Minister – Edward W. Yoon
 Elder – Jenny Yoon
 Deacon – Young Soo Kim

Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Lake Erie

Minister – Joseph Hun-Suk Bae
 Minister – Alex D. Snider
 Deacon – Ron E. Belcher

Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Lake Superior

Minister – Benjamin Verkerk
 Minister – Brian W. Bolkema
 Elder – Robert J. Reinink
 Deacon – Gaye Reiger

Alternate – David S. Huizenga
 Alternate – Margaret Rekman
 Alternate – Matthew Bakker
 Alternate – Samuel J. Van Huizen

Minnkota

Minister – Joseph J. Steenholdt
 Minister – Scott M. Muilenburg
 Elder – Dennis G. Kroll
 Elder – Dave L. DeBlecourt

Alternate – Ryan A. K. VanderWees
 Alternate – Joshua T. Carpenter
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Muskegon

Minister – Drew K. Sweetman
 Minister – Matt Eenigenburg
 Elder – Schuyler T. Pike
 Elder – Jerome J. Troke, Jr.

Alternate – Jeffrey Hough
 Alternate – Ken Krause
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Niagara

Minister – Mike Vandyk
 Minister – Colin Vander Ploeg
 Elder – Bill Hoogland
 Elder – Frank J. Engelage

Alternate – Mark W. DeVos
 Alternate – Timothy L. Raakman
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

North Cascades

Minister – Russel H. Kent III
 Elder – Arie A. Vander Zouwen
 Deacon – Philip Bergman

Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Northcentral Iowa

Minister – Randy Raak
 Minister – Steven J. Mulder
 Elder – Joel Copley
 Deacon – Chistopher G. H. 't Hoen

Alternate – Phil Boender
 Alternate – Pete Louters
 Alternate – Joel Reintz
 Alternate – Sung Chul Lee

Northern Illinois

Minister – Ezra Jang
 Minister – Bobby Moore
 Elder – Al Diepstra

Alternate – Jonathan Serrano
 Alternate – Derk Rauglas
 Alternate – _____

Northern Michigan

Minister – Adam M. H. Barton
 Minister – Todd Kuperus
 Elder – Andrew M. Liimata
 Elder – _____

Alternate – Ashley E. Bonnes
 Alternate – Steve Datema
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Ontario Southwest

Minister – Nate E. Van Denend
 Minister – Philip A. Apoll
 Elder – Clarence J. Nywening
 Deacon – Lindsey T. Scheltema

Alternate – Ralph S. Wigboldus
 Alternate – Peter A. Hoytema
 Alternate – Wilma Dykstra
 Alternate – Mitchell P. VanReenan

Pacific Northwest

Minister – Aaron C. Gonzales
 Elder – Jeffrey R. Bennet
 Elder – Vincent C. Stout
 Deacon – Gordan W. Erdman

Alternate – Douglas Fakkema
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Quinte

Minister – Martin E. Spoelstra
 Minister – Michael D. Nanninga
 Elder – Bill B. Groot-Nibbelink
 Deacon – Joe Ritsema

Alternate – Brad W. Close
 Alternate – Jana VanderLaan
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Red Mesa

Minister – Joseph M. Kamphuis
 Elder – Marilyn Rodriquez-Bowman
 Deacon – Julia A. Alonzo
 Deacon – Sharon K. Jim

Alternate – Caleb N. Dickson
 Alternate – Darlene Silversmith
 Alternate – (Nellie) Theresa Rottschafer

Rocky Mountain

Minister – Rick J. Ebbers
 Minister – Christian Sebastia Almena
 Elder – Randy J. Wester
 Deacon – Scott R. Hill

Alternate – Randy L. Courduff
 Alternate – Jorge E. Embil
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Southeast U.S.

Minister – Scott VanderPloeg
 Minister – Felix Fernandez
 Elder – John E. Granada
 Deacon – Seron R. Brown

Alternate – Christopher N. Cassis
 Alternate – Jesus Bayona
 Alternate – Diego Jr. Granada
 Alternate – _____

Thornapple Valley

Minister – Ben J. Ridder
 Elder – Don L. Faass
 Elder – Ren G. Tubergen
 Deacon – Kevin P. Bos

Alternate – Paul R. De Vries
 Alternate – Alan J. Hooker
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Toronto

Minister – J. Greg Sinclair
 Minister – Richard E. Grift
 Elder – Doreen Horlings
 Deacon – Terry A. VanderHorst

Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Wisconsin

Minister – Chris Ganski
 Minister – Keith Buist
 Elder – Melvin K. Elgersma
 Deacon – Christopher J. Bylsma

Alternate – James C. Kirk
 Alternate – Kurt Ritsema
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Yellowstone

Minister – Timothy Kuperus
 Elder – Curtis Smit
 Elder – Bori Ly
 Deacon – Michael Santarosa

Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____
 Alternate – _____

Zeeland

Minister – Tyler J. Wagenmaker
 Minister – Gary J. DeKoekkoek
 Elder – Steven J. Schrottenboer
 Deacon – Andrew Visser

Alternate – Mark A. Vande Zande
 Alternate – Adam Nordyke
 Alternate – Kenneth R. Estelle
 Alternate – Steven F. Fox

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES REPORT

The Council of Delegates (COD) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) began its service of interim governance on behalf of the CRC's annual synods after being appointed by Synod 2017. COD delegates represent the CRC's forty-nine classes. There are also currently six at-large members. The ministry matters addressed by the COD are divided among seven committees to process the material before it. These committees are the Governance, Finance, Synodical Services, Thrive, ReFrame, Resonate, and Connections committees. There are also three advisory committees: the Banner Advisory Committee, the Bible Translations Committee, and the Dignity Team.

The COD presents the following report as a summary of its work in the interim between the synods of 2024 and 2025. The report is presented in five main sections:

- The **Introduction** provides background information on the COD's role and on foundational principles that guide its work for the CRCNA, such as prayer, spiritual discipline, and diversity efforts.
- **Membership matters** notes the current makeup of the COD, its officers, ministry boards, outgoing members, and nominees for open positions.
- **Program matters** addresses work that relates to the ministry programs and personnel of the denomination, as well as program work that is beyond the scope of or in addition to material in the reports of the agencies, ministries, and institutions.
- **Polity matters** covers the work of the COD as the denomination's governance board in the interim of synod.
- **Financial matters** provides synod with important information about the fiscal health of the CRCNA so that the churches and members of the denomination can assess its stewardship of the resources God has provided.

I. Introduction

A. Governing on behalf of synod

The COD serves as the interim committee of synod (Church Order, Art. 33-b). Any given synod exists to take action and make decisions only during the time it is constituted—currently only for one week. Throughout the rest of the year the Council of Delegates ensures a continuity of denominational leadership over matters that cannot await action by the next synod. This leadership is accomplished in two ways: first, by carrying out or supervising matters that were assigned by a previous synod to the COD or to other denominational committees or staff, and, second, by acting on behalf of synod regarding matters that need decisions or actions before the next synod can meet. All of these matters are subjected to the oversight of the

following synod by way of this report and the upcoming COD Supplement report.

In approving the report of the Structure and Leadership Task Force, Synod 2022 introduced a division of the responsibilities formerly handled by the COD—namely, ecclesiastical responsibilities and organizational responsibilities (*Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 926-31). Ecclesiastical responsibilities are matters related to the assemblies (council, classis, and synod) and Church Order, the execution of synodical mandates through binational agencies and ministries, and denominational partnerships. Organizational responsibilities include organizational policies and planning, budgeting, and country-specific ministry. This division of responsibilities is made clear in a structure in which the full COD handles ecclesiastical matters and in which the Canadian and U.S. ministry boards handle organizational matters. The ministry boards are the legal boards of trustees over the CRCNA and the ReFrame corporations in Canada and the United States. The ministry boards are made up of the COD delegates from their respective nations. This is done to ensure compliance with national laws while also ensuring ecclesiastical unity. These legal entities in Canada and the United States interact via joint ministry agreements to provide organizational governance to ReFrame and to the CRCNA ministries that are shared across the national borders.

The COD provides denominational oversight on behalf of synod throughout the year. The Office of General Secretary (OGS) serves as the primary link between the COD and the denomination's ministries. The OGS is responsible for ensuring that all ministries and legal entities are appropriately implementing synodical decisions and ecclesiastical mandates.

The Council of Delegates met two times since May 2024—in regular meetings in October 2024 and in February 2025. A third regular meeting is scheduled for May 2025, an account of which will come via the COD Supplement report to synod.

More information on the role and responsibilities of the Council of Delegates can be found at crcna.org/welcome/governance/council-delegates.

B. Prayer and spiritual discipline

We rejoice that in recent years the Holy Spirit seems to be increasing the desire for prayer and other practices of spiritual discipline in the hearts of many CRCNA members and leaders. That desire was heard quite clearly in the many listening sessions leading up to the creation of the current ministry plan, and we see signs of it continuing to build throughout the denomination.

The COD has attempted to incorporate prayer as a more intentional part of its governance practices, taking time throughout its meetings to listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to recall the privilege of this “most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 116). In addition, there has been an increasing effort in recent

years to incorporate prayer and worship into the deliberations of synod as a reminder of the fact that we gather first of all because of the salvation we share in Christ, which provides the ground for the work we do as a church. We are grateful for the work of Jon Hoekema, denominational prayer shepherd, and others who support and encourage this vital work.

C. Annual report on diversity efforts by denominational boards

At the instruction of Synod 2013, each CRCNA agency and ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University, and World Renew are asked to submit to the general secretary, “as part of their strategic plan, diversity goals and timelines in their leadership, administrative, and regional ministry teams” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 629). This annual report is on the agenda for the May Council of Delegates meeting and will be reported on in the COD Supplement report.

In addition, the Office of General Secretary regularly reminds and encourages stated clerks and denominational boards to seek ethnic diversity in nominating people to serve on denominational boards and as delegates to synod. We need to be diligent in continuing to increase diversity.

II. Membership matters

A. Current membership

Debbie Karambowich (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Jeff Dykema (Arizona), Hyung-Jun Kim (B.C. North-West), Andre VanRyk (B.C. South-East), John Jansen (California South), Mark VanDyke (Central California), Erik Kamp (Central Plains), Christian Pedersen (Chicago South), Rob Toornstra (Columbia), Jeanne Kallemeyn (Georgetown), Ronald Karelse (Grand Rapids North), Rachel Bouwkamp (Grandville), Thomas Byma (Greater Los Angeles), Joyce Jackson (Hackensack), William Koopmans (Hamilton), Jae Young Kim (Hanmi), Loren Veldhuizen (Heartland), David Spoelma (Holland), Roy Heerema (Hudson), Peter Meerveld (Huron), Robert Drenten (Iakota), Jill Feikema (Illiana), Michael Koetje (Kalamazoo), Jonathan Kim (Ko-Am), William Krahnke (Lake Superior), Eric Van Dyken (Minnkota), Drew Sweetman (Muskegon), Janet deVries (Niagara), Arie Vander Zouwen (North Cascades), Herbert Schreur (Northcentral Iowa), Bonnie Zigterman (Northern Illinois), Jim Winkel (Northern Michigan), Phil Apoll (Ontario Southwest), Douglas Fakkema (Pacific Northwest), Ron VanAuken (Quinte), Tabitha Manuelito (Red Mesa), Mike Johnson (Rocky Mountain), Jesus Bayona (Southeast U.S.), Steven Hull (Thornapple Valley), Michael Irshad (Toronto), Chuck Adams (Wisconsin), Steve Bussis (Yellowstone), Lloyd Hemstreet (Zeeland).

Six at-large members currently serve the COD. They include Greta Luimes, Melissa Van Dyk, Roberta Vriesema, and Henry Eygenraam in Canada and Michael Ten Haken and Christian Sebastia in the United States.

There are currently a number of vacancies on the COD. The COD anticipates presenting nominations to fill the vacancies by way of the COD Supplement report to synod.

B. Officers

1. COD officers: Michael L. Ten Haken, chair; Greta Luimes, vice chair; Christian Sebastia, secretary; Henry Eygenraam, treasurer.
2. Ministry board officers
 - a. CRCNA Canada Ministry Board: Greta Luimes, president; Andre Van Ryk, vice president; Henry Eygenraam, treasurer; Peter Meerveld, secretary.
 - b. CRCNA U.S. Ministry Board: Michael L. Ten Haken, president; Jill Feikema, vice president; Christian Sebastia, secretary; Drew Sweetman, treasurer.
 - c. ReFrame Ministries Canada Ministry Board: Greta Luimes, president; Andre Van Ryk, vice president; Henry Eygenraam, treasurer; Peter Meerveld, secretary.
 - d. ReFrame Ministries U.S. Ministry Board: Michael L. Ten Haken, president; Jill Feikema, vice president; Christian Sebastia, secretary; Drew Sweetman, treasurer.
3. COD Executive Committee: Michael L. Ten Haken, chair; Greta Luimes, vice chair; Henry Eygenraam; Michael Irshad; Michael D. Koetje; and Christian Sebastia. Zachary J. King, Joel Vande Werken, and Shirley DeVries serve ex officio.

C. Retiring members

Concluding service after two terms on the Council of Delegates in June 2025 are the following members:

<i>Classis</i>	<i>Member</i>
Hamilton	Rev. William Koopmans
Kalamazoo	Rev. Michael Koetje
North Cascades	Mr. Arie Vander Zouwen
Southeast U.S.	Mr. Jesus Bayona
Canada at-large	Ms. Greta Luimes

In addition, the following members have opted not to serve a second term or have resigned from the COD in the past year: Debbie Karambowich (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Amy Nydam (Alberta North), Anthony Selvaggio (Atlantic Northeast), Thea Leunk (Grand Rapids East), Jessica Maddox (Grand Rapids South), and Matthew T. Ackerman (Lake Erie).

The COD recommends that synod express its gratitude to these members for their faithful service and their significant contributions to the denomination during their tenure on the Council of Delegates (see Recommendation C).

D. Interim appointments

The COD appointed the following persons as *interim* delegates, in order to fill vacancies that opened since Synod 2024, and recommends these interim

members to synod for appointment to the specific terms as indicated (see Recommendation D):

Classis Eastern Canada

(First term will conclude June 30, 2027, and the nominee will be eligible for reappointment to a second term.)

Rev. Joan DeVries is currently serving as interim senior pastor at Barrhaven Fellowship CRC in Ottawa, Ontario. She earned an M.Div. degree from Calvin Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from McMaster Divinity School. Joan felt a call to pastoral ministry during the mid-1990s and moved with her family to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to pursue studies at Calvin Theological Seminary. She served eight years as a pastor at Clarkson CRC (now Clearview CRC) in Mississauga, Ontario; as an interim pastor at two vacant churches; as dean of students for four years at Tyndale Seminary; and as a specialized transitional minister (STM) at a church in Toronto. After completing her Ph.D., Joan accepted a teaching position at Trinity Western University (TWU) in Langley, British Columbia, in 2018. Because the COVID-19 pandemic affected TWU's enrollment and financial stability, however, the decision was made to shut down the fledgling program in which she was teaching. She then served Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, British Columbia, as an STM. In fall 2023 she and her husband, Frank, moved to Brockville, Ontario.

Grand Rapids South

(First term will conclude June 30, 2027, and the nominee will be eligible for reappointment to a second term.)

Rev. Willem de Vries is the pastor at Moline (Mich.) CRC. He served Ebenezer CRC in Jarvis, Ontario, before moving to Moline CRC, and he has served in various classical roles. He served on the Candidacy Committee, on an oversight committee, and as a church counselor. He has also attended synod twice as a visitor. He has a strong love for the Christian Reformed Church in North America and a strong desire to listen and be attentive to others in conversation.

E. Second terms

The COD recommends the following members for reappointment to a second term of three years (see Recommendation E).

<i>Classis</i>	<i>Member</i>
Canada at-large	Roberta Vriesema
Central Plains	Erik Kamp
Heartland	Loren Veldhuizen
Northcentral Iowa	Herb Schreur
Northern Michigan	Jim Winkel
Rocky Mountain	Mike Johnson
Yellowstone	Steve Bussis

F. Nominee

The COD recommends the following nominee from the classis indicated for appointment to a first term of three years on the Council of Delegates (see Recommendation F):

Classis Kalamazoo

Mr. Jeff Blamer is a member of Westwood CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan. A lifelong educator, Jeff has worked as a principal at Kalamazoo Christian Schools, served on the CSI Board as president for member services, and leads teaching tours to Israel with his wife, Karen. Mr. Blamer has served as a delegate to synod, as an elder, and as a member of the Student Aid Fund committee of Classis Kalamazoo.

III. Program matters

A. Diversity

Synod 2024, in response to multiple overtures, asked the Office of General Secretary to “continue to encourage churches’ and individuals’ growth” in the area of diversity (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 907). The Office of General Secretary, in working with Thrive, has been offering the One Family Conversation at various classes as well as at the October 2024 COD meeting. This conversation aims to support the diversity of leadership at classis, creating a space for ethnic and diaspora leaders to share their experiences as leaders within the CRCNA’s classical and ministry structures.

B. Gather initiative

Synod 2023 directed the general secretary to “work with the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to develop a comprehensive unified strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline and bring about a positive trend of membership growth to our denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976). In partnership with our CRCNA agencies and with the help of funding from a generous donor, the general secretary brought classes together to help address membership decline in our churches. This initiative is called “Gather” (crcna.org/gather) and has been led by Rev. Elaine May of Thrive. At this time of writing, seven of ten gatherings have taken place, including up to 15 people from each invited classis to encounter God together, to be empowered to gather their own congregation and classis in a similar way, to hear examples of God renewing CRC congregations, to return with a helpful imagination for renewal, and to strengthen relationships through fellowship.

C. Global Vision implementation

Synod 2024 approved the recommendations of the Global Vision Team report (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 690-709), which provided vision and advice for churches and classes that are engaging with leaders and congregations outside North America. During the 2024-2025 ministry year, several tasks were completed, including communication of the findings of the Global Vision report to the classes and congregations. The recruitment of a Global Vision

Implementation Team is in process as well. The Office of General Secretary facilitated engagement with leaders of the Venezuelan congregations connected to Classis California South and has been working with our denominational agencies and institutions to strengthen the partnership among ethnic minority leaders, congregations, and denominational ministries. Since many of our denomination's global relationships are moderated by our immigrant CRCNA pastors, denominational leadership staff have intentionally addressed this partnership as a part of strengthening the global connections of the CRCNA.

D. Ministry Plan

Following a directive from Synod 2024, a small team set out to "review the wording and intent of pillar three (Grow in Diversity)" of the *Our Journey* Ministry Plan (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12). The COD received an interim report in February 2025. A full report is expected at the May COD meeting and will be included in the COD Supplement report.

E. Legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary

Synod 2022 tasked the Council of Delegates with the formation of a separate legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 929). Due to implications related to the Global Visioning process, this task was delayed and brought to the COD at its October 2024 meeting. As a result of the work of the Global Vision Team, the lack of issues resulting from the organizational restructuring, and the healthy interdependence between the CRCNA U.S. and CRCNA Canada legal entities, the COD recommends forgoing the creation of a separate legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary (see Recommendation G).

F. Report of the Bible Translations Committee

The Bible Translations Committee reviews Bible translations for possible use in worship by CRCNA congregations. Following the resignations of Amanda Benckhuysen (denominational staff representative) and Kristine Johnson (English-language stylist) from the translations committee, Joel Vande Werken (denominational staff representative) and Susan Medendorp (English-language stylist) were appointed to the committee. The committee reports to the COD annually and is currently chaired by Rev. William Koopmans.

Following up on a request to review the Easy-to-Read Version (ERV) of the Bible, the Bible Translations Committee reports that it does not recommend the ERV for use in general worship and is only able to commend the ERV with reservations for discretionary use in the public reading of Scripture for new believers or children's worship, devotional reading, or in litanies, prayers, or storytelling. The committee's report, presented at the February COD meeting, is available in Appendix C.

G. Ministry Support Services

a. Shared ministry services

The staff of Ministry Support Services (MSS) is responsible for *The Banner*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and a number of professional services that support CRC ministries. These services include our call center, order and subscription processing, distribution, purchasing, design and web services, editorial services, translation, rights and permissions management, and marketing. At any one time, more than 100 projects are in process, and thousands of words are being combined with design elements for publication via paper or pixels. The call center handles more than 10,000 phone calls per year, in addition to processing online orders, email, and live chats on various CRCNA websites.

In the interest of consistent style, branding, and quality presentation, MSS has supported CRC communications staff in creating guides for Brand Standards and Editorial Style.

b. *The Banner*

The Banner currently prints and distributes more than 60,000 copies of its paper version. Website pageviews average about 80,000 per month, and more than 15,000 people have signed up to receive the weekly *Banner* Update email newsletter. Our efforts on social media also help to ensure that *Banner* content is available to anyone in a variety of forms.

The Banner app is available for free download on iPhone and Android devices (thebanner.org/App); monthly, the app is receiving more than 8,000 pageviews.

We are most thankful for a huge show of support from *Banner* readers, as almost 5,000 donors gave approximately \$440,000 for the annual appeal fundraiser in 2024.

As the official magazine of the CRC, *The Banner's* editorial staff follows guidelines provided by Synod 2005 and in its synodical mandate. The COD also provides editorial input into *The Banner's* work by means of a six-member *Banner* Advisory Committee. Three of the advisory committee members are COD members, and three are at-large. The committee is currently chaired by Rev. Mark VanDyke.

At the May 2024 meeting of the COD, a plan was approved to reduce *The Banner's* dependence on ministry shares as a source of revenue (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 624). This directive began in the current fiscal year, FY2024-25, and will continue through FY2026-27, after which *The Banner* will no longer receive ministry-share support. This reduction requires change on many fronts and will likely affect the number of issues produced annually. At the October 2024 and February 2025 COD meetings, *The Banner* was given greater flexibility to accept advertising from a wider pool of advertisers to help increase its revenue goals. This change involved a careful modification of *The Banner's* advertising guidelines so that the magazine may

now include ads from non-CRC organizations whose ministry focus is similar to that of denominational agencies. A number of initiatives are also in process to increase donation revenue, boost ad sales, and address the cost of publication per issue.

c. Faith Alive and Libros Desafio

Synod 2013 approved the dissolution of the Faith Alive Christian Resources board and transitioned critical functions of Faith Alive to MSS. We continue to sell and reprint resources that were already published, support the ongoing development of the *Dwell* Sunday school curriculum and Discover Your Bible series, and publish a small number of new titles as requested by our ministries. Sales of older products continue to decline. Thrive and MSS continue to pour energy into the *Dwell* curriculum, including further development of *Dwell Flex* (for smaller churches and multi-age contexts) and *Dwell Digital* (the online version of our *Dwell* leader materials).

In recent years non-English language publishing and marketing efforts around the world by the denomination has decreased as more attention has been directed toward supporting the non-English needs of our North American churches. In 2024 we sold the assets of Libros Desafio—physical product and intellectual property—to publishers who have an interest and focus similar to those that the CRCNA has had for so many years with this line of publications. Although it's sad to see an end to this aspect of the CRC's publishing history, we're glad to have found capable partners to carry on the work.

Christian Reformed congregations continue to receive a special "CRC discount" in comparison to what churches of other denominations pay. In addition, the CRC Digital Library allows anyone attending a Christian Reformed congregation free access to most Faith Alive titles online. These initiatives aim to help Christian Reformed churches make full use of resources that they helped to publish.

d. The Network

Over the past fifteen years the Network has become one of the CRC's most-visited websites where people involved in their local church can connect—with each other and with denominational staff—about the practical aspects of doing church ministry. Although the half-time community manager now reports into the CRC Communications office, Ministry Support Services staff continue to be involved in the technical aspects of the website. The site receives more than 50,000 pageviews per month, as people across the denomination read, ask questions, and share ideas with each other about their congregation's ministries.

IV. Polity Matters

A. Council of Delegates Governance Handbook updates

The Council of Delegates Governance Handbook has been updated to bring it into compliance with decisions of Synod 2024 regarding the nomination

process and to reflect recent staff changes within the Office of General Secretary. The COD Governance Handbook updates are presented in Appendix A (see Recommendation H).

B. Rules for Synodical Procedure

The Rules for Synodical Procedure document was due for some updates related to the use of technology, the virtual convening session of synod, staffing, and other items. The COD reviewed and revised a number of changes proposed by staff and is submitting them to synod for approval. These changes are presented in Appendix B.

The COD has also recommended further updates to the Rules for Synodical Procedure as a result of shifts in the nature of study committees, the role of the convening church of synod, the duties of officers, and issues of consistency between the Rules for Synodical Procedure and other governance documents. Staff can conduct an in-depth review in the coming year, with the aim of presenting changes to the COD for review and for submission to Synod 2026 for approval (see Recommendation I).

C. Synodical deputy and alternate interim appointments

On behalf of synod, the COD has ratified the following classical appointments of synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies* and presents them for synodical approval (see Recommendation J).

<i>Classis</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Term</i>
Atlantic Northeast	Rev. Michael Saville	Rev. Patrick Guarracino	2027 (1)
Kalamazoo	Rev. Jeff Brower	Rev. Simon Tuin	2027 (1)
Red Mesa	Rev. John Greydanus	Pastor Caleb Dickson	2027 (1)
Minnkota	Rev. Scott Muilenburg	Rev. Joe Steenholdt	2027 (1)
Wisconsin	Rev. Greg Schuringa	Rev. Chadd Huizenga	2027 (1)
Zeeland	Rev. Terry Slachter	Rev. Mark VandeZande	2026 (1)

*Terms of alternate synodical deputies run concurrently with those of the synodical deputies.

The COD Supplement report to synod is expected to include further actions whereby the COD has ratified, on behalf of synod, the classical appointments of synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies.

D. Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee (JCC) hears appeals from a decision made by a council, a classis, or an agency of the Christian Reformed Church if it is alleged that an action violates the Church Order or the agency’s mandate. The procedures followed by the Judicial Code Committee are set forth in Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c. The committee’s members from both Canada and the United States include people with legal expertise, clergy, and nonclergy.

Membership

Synodical regulations (Supplement, Church Order Art. 30-c, Section 8, b) state that the composition of the JCC should reflect the diversity of the denomination and provide balance in expertise among its members (trained in law, ordained as minister of the Word, nonordained/nonlaw background). In addition, terms have been staggered to provide continuity to the work of the committee.

1. Concluding terms

Amy Vander Vliet (nonordained/nonlaw background) and Dexter Young (trained in law) are each completing a second term in 2025 and are not eligible for reappointment. It is recommended that synod express gratitude for their years of service to the denomination (see Recommendation K).

2. Reappointment to a second term

The Council of Delegates recommends the following JCC members for reappointment to a second term of three years: Robert Drenten (minister of the Word) and Sarita Vandernaalt (nonordained/nonlaw background) (see Recommendation L):

3. Interim appointments

The COD appointed the following persons as *interim* delegates and recommends these interim members to synod for appointment to the specific terms as indicated (see Recommendation M):

Minister of the Word (term ending June 2028, eligible for a second term)

Randall Engle is a minister of the Word serving at North Hills CRC in Troy, Michigan. He has received degrees from Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, Luther Seminary, and the University of Wales. He is a professor of religion studies and the director of Christianity studies at Oakland University. He has previously served on the Calvin Alumni Board, Calvin University Board of Trustees, the Choristers Guild, and the American Guild of Organists. He also has experience as a synodical deputy, regional pastor, and chaplain.

Nonordained person with no legal training (term ending June 2028, eligible for a second term)

Jill Friend is an educator from Sioux Center, Iowa, where she attends Covenant CRC. She has served as an elder, leads worship, and has served on various committees at her church as well as serving on the denominational Faith Formation Committee. Her goal is to serve in truth and love with her strengths of grace and encouragement.

Nonordained person with no legal training (term ending June 2028, eligible for a second term)

Justin Snyder attends First CRC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he has served as a shepherding elder, as an administrative elder, and as cochair of the pastor search committee. He is the assistant vice

president of surgical services at Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center in Sioux Center and serves on a number of hospital committees such as the OR Committee (as chair). He is eager to fulfill his calling with wisdom, discernment, and a patient spirit.

The COD anticipates presenting an additional nomination to fill the vacancy of a position for a person trained in law by way of the COD Supplement report to synod.

E. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

By way of its interim appointments process, the COD approved the appointment of Rev. Marno Retief as an interim member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) representing the Canada West region, for a first term ending June 30, 2027, with eligibility to serve a second three-year term. A recommendation regarding this appointment is included in the EIRC report.

F. Limited suspension

Synod 2024 instructed the Office of General Secretary to prioritize the development of resources to help classes and churches navigate the process toward repentance and restoration or toward disaffiliation, and instructed classes to submit a biannual report to the Office of General Secretary and to the Council of Delegates on the progress made (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 887). The Office of General Secretary published a webpage (crcna.org/limitedsuspension) in September 2024 and included a notice about the resources in a communication to pastors and stated clerks. A form was made available to stated clerks for use in reporting by November 1, 2024, and a second report will be due in April 2025. At the time of this writing, 18 classes have responded regarding the work their classes are doing, if applicable, with churches pursuing either restoration or disaffiliation.

G. Church Order updates

1. Recommendations of the Church Order Review Task Force

Synod 2024 received the Church Order Review Task Force Report (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 63-166; *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 853-864) which included a number of proposed changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements as well as recommendations related to the importance of, and translation of, the Church Order. The changes to the Church Order are presented in Appendix D.

- a. The introduction to the Church Order was updated to include a reminder to churches that the Church Order and other polity resources identified in the Church Order Review Task Force report exist to support ministry, give shape to our church community, and foster Spirit-led discernment and transparent conversation about the nature of ordained ministry and the work of building God's kingdom. The following text has been added to the introduction to the Church Order:

On page 7—a new paragraph under the subhead “So, What Is the Church Order?” (para. 3):

Synod 2024, with the adoption of recommendations from the Church Order Review Task Force, reminded churches of the purpose of Church Order (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 853). Church Order and other polity resources exist for the purpose of supporting ministry, giving shape to our church community, and fostering Spirit-led discernment and transparent conversation about the nature of ordained ministry and the work of building God’s kingdom. The Church Order and other polity resources should be used in conjunction with diligent prayer and concerted efforts to deepen relationships for the reign of Christ among his people.

On pages 9-10—a new section following the section titled “Reformed Church Polity”:

Translations and Resources

The CRCNA values the richness in the diversity of languages among its members. The denomination’s Ministry Support Services translates church polity materials into various languages. The *Church Order and Its Supplements* is available both online and in print in English, Korean, and Spanish. The 2013 edition of the Church Order is also available in Chinese, and another update is planned. These resources can be found online at crcna.org/synodresources.

Along with various translations of the Church Order, the CRCNA works with Ministry Support Services and ethnic ministry leaders to produce a variety of translated materials, including Position Statements, *Who We Are and What We Believe*, and the creeds and confessions. More information about translated documents can be found at crcna.org/languages.

Because the introduction to the Church Order has prior synodical approval, these changes are reported here in fulfillment of the instruction of Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 853; *Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 139; see “Church Order” at crcna.org/synodresources).

- b. Appendix D includes the full list of updates to Church Order Articles 12-17 and 42 and their Supplements as proposed by the Church Order Review Task Force. These changes were recommended by Synod 2024 for adoption by Synod 2025 (see Recommendation N).
- c. Synod 2024 instructed the Office of General Secretary to take steps “to address the growing number of Article 17 releases, and to address concerns over the stigma of releases via Article 17” (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 137-39). The Office of General Secretary is working with Thrive on these matters and expects to release resources and materials available online in fall 2025.

- d. Synod 2024 instructed the Council of Delegates to “review Article 84 and its Supplement and propose appropriate updates to synod to bring the process for reinstatement of disciplined pastors into harmony with the procedures for readmission of released pastors” (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 140). The COD approved the following updates to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, subpoints i and j (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~) at its February meeting and proposes them to Synod 2025 for adoption (see Recommendation O):
- i. Former ministers of the Word who desire reinstatement after discipline shall have their requests considered by the~~The~~ council of the church which deposed the minister. If that council judges that the applicant has given sufficient evidence of repentance and can serve the church effectively, it shall request declare the deposed minister eligible to receive a call upon the affirmative judgment approval of the classis which approved the deposition, together with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.
 - j. If approval is given to proceed with the process for readmission, the classis shall notify the Candidacy Committee to guide the applicant through the completion of any requirements imposed by synod subsequent to the original ordination, using the regulations of Supplement, Article 14-e as a guide. A former minister shall not be nominated for a call until the releasing classis and the Candidacy Committee have approved the applicant’s eligibility for call. Upon acceptance of a call, the previously deposed minister shall be reordained.
- kj. [the current text of subpoint j would be unchanged and would become subpoint k]*
- e. Synod 2024 instructed the Council of Delegates “to review any denominational policies for the translation of the Church Order and Its Supplements” (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 139). This is an ongoing project with Ministry Support Services, the Office of General Secretary, and other agencies to balance the need, budget, and resources available. The introduction to the Church Order was edited to highlight the importance of translating polity materials (see “Church Order” at crcna.org/synodresources), and the COD has noted the work that denominational staff continue to do to make important materials available in the languages commonly represented in our churches, while working within the financial and time constraints noted by previous synods (see *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 627-28).

2. Additional Church Order changes

In addition to the proposed Church Order updates identified elsewhere in this report, the COD took note of the following matters:

- a. Synod 2024 approved changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 15 at two different points (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 851-52, 902). The COD Executive Committee worked with the Pensions Committee and Thrive to propose the following changes (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~) (see Recommendation P):

Guidelines for Churches ~~Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment~~ in Conversations with Pastors about "Proper Support"

- ~~1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.~~
 - ~~2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister's family.~~
 - ~~3.1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.~~
 - ~~4.2. The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers' Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church. Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured for ministers who work at least 20 hours per week as long as a ~~if~~ full contribution to the Ministers' Pension Plan is made.~~
 - ~~5.3. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) ~~other than ministry shall be specified~~ shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.~~
 - ~~4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.~~
- b. Following the change to create the new agency Thrive from the various Congregational Ministries, several staff members discovered references to the former ministries (i.e., Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry) throughout the Church Order and related documents. The COD recommends that the Church Order and related documents be updated to reflect the new agency name, Thrive (see Recommendation Q).

Grounds:

- 1) Synod 2023 concluded “the synodical mandates and directives given to the previously separate ministries” that combined to form Thrive (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 956-57).
- 2) The Church Order references these dissolved ministries in various supplements to Church Order articles (Supplement, Article 12-c; Supplement, Article 17-a; Supplement, Article 23-a; Supplement, Article 30-a; Supplement, Article 42-d).

H. Disaffiliation resources

Synod 2024 instructed the Office of General Secretary “to pay particular attention to the needs of disaffiliating churches and of classes who are supporting them to ensure that the proper support is available” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 906). The Office of General Secretary has worked closely with Thrive to update Disaffiliation resources, including the Next Steps discernment process, and the director of ecclesiastical governance has been in communication with churches in the disaffiliation process. The CRCNA Archives has graciously offered to continue holding the historical documents of disaffiliated churches.

I. Classes declaring that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis

In accordance with the instructions of Synod 2007, the general secretary keeps a list of classes that, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis. Although some of these classes have developed their own regulations regarding the permissibility of women officebearers participating in classis meetings, some classes have adopted a decision to declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis. A list of these classes may be obtained by contacting the Office of General Secretary.

J. Convening churches and locations of synod

1. Synod 2026

Synod 2024 approved Calvin University as the host site for Synod 2026. Synod 2026 will join in the celebrations of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in their 150th anniversaries. Second Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Michigan, requested to serve as the convening church of Synod 2026 because of their historical ties to Calvin Theological Seminary. The COD recommends that synod approve its work in securing a convening church for Synod 2026 (see Recommendation R).

2. Synods 2027 and 2028

Following the Synod 2019 decision that the CRCNA’s annual synod meetings take place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for three years in succession followed by a fourth-year meeting in a region elsewhere in North America where CRC congregations are clustered (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 813), the

COD recommends that synod approve its work in securing Calvin University as the host site for Synods 2027 and 2028 (see Recommendation S).

K. Advisers and representatives to Synod 2025

1. Young adult representatives

Since 2009 synod has welcomed the engagement of youth and young adults (18- to 26-year-olds) in the current issues faced by our denomination and has sought to raise up leadership within the church through the appointment of young adult representatives to participate in the deliberations of synod. These individuals bring a valuable and unique perspective to the issues we face as a denomination by listening, engaging delegates during advisory committee meetings, and offering input on matters that arise in plenary.

The COD has appointed the following persons to serve as young adult representatives to synod. We express gratitude for their commitment and gracious willingness to serve the denomination in this way.

Caleb Bosveld	Calvin Schouten	Kyle Vannus
Grace Burns	Hannah den Bak*	Alyssa Koetje
Nathan Stienstra		

*indicates alternate

2. Ethnic advisers

Determination of the need for the appointment of ethnic advisers to synod is based on a rolling three-year average of having more than 25 ethnically diverse delegates appointed to synod. The Council of Delegates appointed the following as ethnic advisers to Synod 2025: Fernando Del Rosario and William Krahnke.* We are grateful for their willingness to offer their unique perspectives to the issues before synod.

* indicates service in this capacity in 2023

L. Publications

1. *Agenda for Synod and Acts of Synod*

Following the Synod 1986 decision to provide churches “not less than four” copies of the *Agenda* and *Acts of Synod* (*Acts of Synod 1986*, pp. 681-82), the Office of General Secretary has provided print copies to those churches who requested them through the church’s annual *Yearbook* survey. Due to steady increases in print and mailing costs as well as the availability of the *Agenda* and *Acts* in digital format, the Office of General Secretary will no longer be providing copies to churches unless specifically requested. Pastors will no longer be able to order free copies of the synodical materials, but will be able to purchase them through Faith Alive (FaithAliveResources.org). Delegates to synod will still be able to request a print version.

2. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*

The *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* is designed as a companion to the CRCNA Church Order, offering commentary and explanation

of guidelines and decisions made by synod over the years. First published in 1995, it has been updated periodically to reflect changes made to the Church Order and Its Supplements. The most recent update was published in 2023. Due to cost concerns, staff have decided to discontinue the production of print copies of this volume. The manual is available for viewing in the CRC Digital Library (crcna.org/DigitalLibrary), and a downloadable version is available through Faith Alive (FaithAliveResources.org).

3. Manual for Synodical Deputies

The *Manual for Synodical Deputies* is distributed to synodical deputies, their alternates, and the stated clerks of classes. The latest revision of the manual was completed in summer 2023. Anyone desiring to access or download a copy of this tool for the classes may do so by way of the stated clerk and synodical deputy webpage at crcna.org/SynodicalDeputies.

V. Financial Matters

A. Finance Matters Advisory Committee

Synod 2024 instructed the Office of General Secretary “to provide a clear mandate to the synodical finance and administration advisory committee” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 901). The COD has approved a mandate for this committee and presents it to synod for information (Appendix E).

B. Consolidated financial statements

The condensed financial statements of the agencies, institutions, and ministries of the CRCNA are shared for information in Appendix F (see Recommendation T).

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Michael L. Ten Haken, chair of the Council of Delegates; Greta Luimes, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Zachary J. King, general secretary; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Council of Delegates, Re-Frame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, Thrive, or other ministries of the CRCNA are discussed.

B. That synod grant all requests for privilege of the floor by the COD, agencies, ministries, educational institutions, standing committees, and study committees of synod contained within the reports to Synod 2025.

C. That synod express gratitude to Matthew Ackerman, Jesus Bayona, Debbie Karambowich, Michael Koetje, William Koopmans, Thea Leunk, Greta Luimes, Jessica Maddox, Amy Nydam, Anthony Selvaggio, and Arie Vander Zouwen for their faithful service and significant contributions to the denomination during their tenure on the Council of Delegates (II, C).

D. That synod, by way of the ballot, appoint Joan DeVries (Eastern Canada) and Willem de Vries (Grand Rapids South), each previously appointed as an interim COD classical delegate, to a modified first term, with eligibility for reappointment to a second three-year term (II, D).

E. That synod, by way of the ballot, reappoint members to a second term (II, E).

F. That synod, by way of the ballot, elect a new member to the COD from the nomination presented to a first term of three years (II, F).

G. That synod approve the COD recommendation to forgo the creation of a separate legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary (III, G).

Grounds:

1. The initial recommendation from the COD to synod (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 929) was made at a time when there were many unknowns.
2. Significant changes to the organizational structure were highly anticipated but not yet implemented.
3. Significant leadership changes were about to take place.
4. The CRCNA was just beginning to consider implications with regard to churches outside of Canada and the U.S. wanting to join CRCNA classes.
5. The concern that not having a separate legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary “could be problematic since it obfuscates the responsibility of synod to clearly direct its ecclesiastical office” has not become manifest while we have been living into the new structure since Synod 2022.
6. The Global Vision Team’s recommendations that have been approved by Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 708-9, 807-9) demonstrate no need for a separate legal entity.
7. The creation of a legal entity is not difficult. Maintaining a legal entity comes with administrative overhead. Eliminating a legal entity is more complicated than creating one. It seems prudent to wait until the need is evident before adding a legal layer of complexity to our environment.
8. There is a healthy interdependence between the CRCNA U.S. and CRCNA Canada legal entities that might be disrupted by the creation of another legal entity in the CRCNA.

H. That synod approve the updates to the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook as presented in Appendix A (IV, A).

I. That synod approve the updates to the Rules for Synodical Procedure as presented in Appendix B and instruct the general secretary to arrange a further review of this document with any proposed updates to be presented to Synod 2026 following input from the COD (IV, B).

Grounds:

1. The updates in Appendix B reflect the implications of decisions that synods have made in recent years, such as the virtual convening session of synod and additional technological changes in the ways synod conducts its business.

2. Synod has granted the Office of General Secretary the authority to review and clarify the use of terms such as *agency, board, office, and ministry* in order to provide clarity about the roles of such entities (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 930).
3. The need for a more thorough review of this document has been identified with regard to shifts in the nature of study committees, the role of the convening church of synod, the duties of officers, and issues of consistency between the Rules for Synodical Procedure and other governance documents, and staff can work on the review in the coming year to suggest necessary changes for review by the COD and approval by synod.

J. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the COD for synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies (IV, C).

K. That synod express gratitude to Amy Vander Vliet and Dexter Young for their years of service to the denomination on the Judicial Code Committee (IV, D, 1).

L. That synod, by way of the ballot, reappoint Robert Drenten and Sarita Vandernaalt each to a second term of three years on the Judicial Code Committee (IV, D, 2).

M. That synod, by way of the ballot, appoint Randall Engle, Jill Friend, and Justin Snyder, previously appointed as interim members, each to a modified first term on the Judicial Code Committee, with eligibility for reappointment to a second three-year term (IV, D, 3).

N. That synod accept the work done to revise the Church Order introduction as fulfilling the instruction of Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 139, 853) and ratify the changes to Church Order Articles 12-17 and 42 and their Supplements as recommended by Synod 2024 and indicated in Appendix D (IV, G, 1, a-b).

Grounds:

1. These proposed changes have been before the churches for discernment as required by Church Order Article 47.
2. The introduction to the Church Order has previous synodical approval (*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 912-15).

O. That synod approve the updates to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84 (IV, G, 1, d).

Ground:

This brings the process for reinstatement of disciplined pastors into harmony with the decisions of Synod 2024 regarding readmission of ministers released via Church Order Article 14 (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 140; *Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 853).

P. That synod approve the updates to Church Order Supplement, Article 15 (IV, G, 2, a).

Grounds:

1. These changes address issues related to financial support and pension considerations identified by the Study of Bivocationality Task Force and by the COD's conversations about pension matters (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 306-8; *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 623-24).
2. This revision harmonizes the two different versions of these changes adopted by Synod 2024 after input from the Pension Fund trustees (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 851-52, 902).

Q. That synod approve updating the Church Order and related documents to reflect the new agency name Thrive (IV, G, 2, b).

Grounds:

1. Synod 2023 concluded the "synodical mandates and directives given to the previously separate ministries" that combined to form Thrive (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 956-57).
2. The Church Order references these dissolved ministries in various supplements to Church Order articles (Supplement, Article 12-c; Supplement, Article 17-a; Supplement, Article 23-a; Supplement, Article 30-a; Supplement, Article 42-d).

R. That synod approve Second Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Michigan, as the convening church of Synod 2026 (IV, J, 1).

S. That synod approve the work of the COD in securing Calvin University as the host site for Synods 2027 and 2028 (IV, J, 2).

T. That synod receive as information the condensed financial statements of the agencies, institutions, and ministries (V, B; Appendix F).

Council of Delegates of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Michael L. Ten Haken, chair

COD Governance Handbook Updates

The following updates to the COD Governance Handbook (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~) are presented here for approval by Synod 2025.

Page 6—Changes to the definition of “Ministry Plan”

Ministry Plan	The CRCNA Ministry Plan adopted by synod is entitled <i>Our Journey 2025</i> . A key feature of the Plan are its calling areas and milestones which are designed to guide and unify the mission and ministry of the CRCNA.
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Page 9—Changes to the CRCNA Ministry Plan section

CRCNA Ministry Plan

Calling Areas

1. Faith Formation

~~*As a community of believers, we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to nurture their faith through all ages and stages of life.*~~

2. Servant Leadership

~~*Understanding that the lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish, we identify, recruit and train leaders to be servants in the Kingdom of God.*~~

3. Global Mission

~~*Called to be witnesses of Christ’s Kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world.*~~

4. Mercy and Justice

~~*Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God.*~~

5. Gospel Proclamation and Worship

~~*Believing that faith comes through the hearing of God’s Word, we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and seek to worship him in all that we do.*~~

Page 11—Changes to the Synodical Governance section

Synodical Governance and CRCNA Organizations

The COD's *synodical governance and oversight* responsibilities of CRCNA synodical, ministry and educational organizations includes the following ecclesial tasks:

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

3. **Ministry Plan, Strategy, and Goals:** Ensure the ministry and educational organizations' ministry strategy and plans and goals are aligned with the CRCNA ministry plan ~~calling areas and~~ milestones. Particular attention is given to the use of joint agreements between administrative, ministry and educational programs and activities that promote collaboration, cooperation, and partnership.

[Point 4 unchanged]

5. **Annual Report to synod:** Provide an annual report to synod that addresses the following topics:

[Subpoints a-b unchanged]

- c. Ministry plan & ministry goals – How the organization is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.

[Subpoints d-e unchanged]

Page 15—Changes to the Staff Attendance section

Staff Attendance

The following leadership staff are invited to attend COD meetings while they meet in regular session:

[Point 1 unchanged]

2. Ministry Agencies:
 - a. ~~Cod~~ Directors of Thrive

[Subpoints b-d unchanged]

3. Office of General Secretary Staff:
 - a. Director of Communications and Marketing
 - b. Director of Ecclesiastical Governance ~~Director of Synodical Services~~
 - c. Coordinator of Synodical Operations

[Point 4 unchanged]

Pages 17-18—Changes to the COD Membership section

2. At-Large Members

The COD Governance Committee, with the assistance of the appropriate Ministry Board and the COD, develops a slate of at-large nominees to serve on the Council of Delegates. When the slate of at-large nominees is approved by the COD, it will be forwarded to synod for appointment. At-large members serve a three-year term as a voting member of the COD. At-large members are eligible for reappointment to a successive three-year term.

The total number of at-large appointments shall range between 2 to 10 members.

- Canada at-large members 6 members
- U.S. at-large members 1 member
- **Total number of at-large members 7 members**

5. Members Unable to Finish a Term

If a classical or at-large member is unable to finish a term, the COD Governance Committee will identify an interim member in collaboration with classis or, in the case of an at-large member, with the appropriate Ministry Board ~~COD~~. The COD will appoint the interim member to serve with the privilege of a vote, until synod elects a new member to fill out the term.

Page 19—Changes to the COD Member Qualifications section

Member Qualifications

[Point 1 unchanged]

2. Confirm agreement with the following COD Membership Policies before being recommended by classis for the COD or, in the case of at-large members, before the COD and its committees vote on membership. Agree with the COD Membership Policies
 - a. COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA.
 - b. COD Code of Conduct for members
 - c. Conflict-of-Interest Policy

[Point 3 unchanged]

Page 20—Changes to the Introduction to Committees section

Introduction to Committees

The Council of Delegates has four types of committees

[Points 1-3 unchanged]

4. Advisory committees: *The Banner* Advisory Committee, ~~and Bible Translations Committee, and~~ The Dignity Team

Executive Committee Charter

2. Membership:

[Subpoints a-d unchanged]

- e. The General Secretary and the Chief Administrative Officer are *ex officio*, non-voting members of the Executive Committee. The Director of Ecclesiastical Governance ~~Synodical Services~~ serves as staff to the Executive Committee.

3. Tasks & Responsibilities:

The Executive Committee serves as a general committee for the COD and as the operating board for the CRCNA synodical organization. In both roles, the Executive Committee has the authority to:

[Subpoints a-d unchanged]

- e. Process any requests for exceptions to the COD Statement of Agreement according to the approved procedure, and to respond to any concerns raised by COD members regarding the COD Statement of Agreement, Conflict of Interest or Code of Conduct.
- f. Provide clarification to any potential COD members as part of the COD member nomination process regarding concerns or questions connected to the COD Statement of Agreement, the Conflict of Interest Policy, or Code of Conduct.

[Subpoints formerly listed as e-h are reordered as g-j.]

6. Oversight: COD Board Policy Oversight: The Executive Committee oversees the following COD policies:

- a. COD Statement of Beliefs Policy
- b. Code of Conduct for COD Members
- ~~b~~c. Staff Right to Comment Policy
- d. Recording of Meetings: Obligation to Inform
- e. Conflict of Interest
- f. Exceptions Policy
- g. Church Membership and Confessional Conformity for Personnel
- h. Policy on COD Approval of Senior Positions in the Office of General Secretary

~~Additional policies will fall under the responsibility of the Executive Committee. At this time COD policies are being reviewed. This work will continue through FY 23-24.~~

7. Leadership & Support:

The General Secretary and the Chief Administrative Officer shall support this committee in a non-voting, *ex officio* capacity. The Director of Ecclesiastical Governance Synodical Services supports this committee in a staff capacity.

Page 25—Changes to the Governance Committee Charter

6. Committee Procedures:

[Subpoints a-e unchanged]

- f. ~~Database: Maintain a list of persons who may serve as COD members in the future.~~

[Subpoints formerly listed as g-h are reordered as f-g.]

7. Oversight:

COD board policy oversight: The Governance Committee oversees the following board policies:

- ~~Conflict of Interest Policy~~
- ~~COD Code of Conduct for Delegates~~
- Delegate Nomination Process Policy
- ~~Recordings of Meetings Policy~~

~~Additional policies will fall under the responsibility of the Governance Committee. At this time COD policies are being reviewed. This work will continue through FY 23-24.~~

8. Leadership & Support:

The General Secretary and the Director of Ecclesiastical Governance Synodical Services shall support this committee in a non-voting, *ex officio* capacity.

Pages 27-28—Changes to the Finance Committee Charter

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

3. Chairperson:

- a. The treasurer of the COD shall serve as the chairperson of the Finance Committee.
- b. ~~The vice chair shall be elected by the committee members.~~ the chair of the Finance Committee of the ministry board not represented by the COD treasurer.
- c. The chair and vice chair shall represent Canada and the U.S.

4. Tasks & Responsibilities:

- a. Policy review and management
 - Review the COD financial policies assigned to the Finance Committee and practices on a regular basis.
- b. Ensure accurate and consolidated financial records
 - Provide an annual consolidated financial report to the COD and synod for the CRCNA organization. This includes US and Canada Ministry Organizations, ReFrame Ministries, World Renew, Calvin University, and Calvin Theological Seminary.
 - Receive regular consolidated financial budget reports at each meeting and review the consolidated budget in May.
 - Ensure that the ministry boards are contracting with an outside firm to conduct the required and necessary financial audits.
 - ~~Serve as the COD audit committee~~
- c. Be a collaborative meeting of the Canada and US Ministry Boards' Finance Committee. Provide guidance and assistance in the development of annual budgets.
 - ~~Collaborate with the US and Canada Ministry Board's Finance Committees.~~
 - Review and advise the use of board-designated funds with input from the COD Ministry Committees as needed.
 - Review the proposed budgets
 - Provide revenue and allocation assumptions to the COD by February.
 - Provide a consolidated annual budget to the COD in May to forward to Synod.
- d. Ministry share system oversight
 - Review and monitor the performance of the ministry share system.
 - Make recommendations to the COD in February regarding ministry share revenue projections and allocations for the upcoming year.
 - Provide guidance to COD members regarding communications to classes and churches related to the ministry share system.

[Subpoint e unchanged]

[Point 5 unchanged]

6. Committee Procedures:

- a. Meetings: The Finance Committee meetings are set by the chairperson. The committee typically meets 4 times per year.

- ~~b. Annual agenda: The Finance Committee develops an annual agenda outlining the meeting schedule and the work that needs to be accomplished.
[Subpoints formerly listed as c-f are reordered as b-e.]~~

7. Oversight:

COD Board Policy Oversight: The Finance Committee oversees the following COD policies:

- a. Investment Policy
- b. Fundraising Ethical Guidelines Policy
- c. Financial Reserves Policy
- d. Cash Holding Policy
- e. Reduction of Program and Staff Policy

~~At this time all policies are under review and updating related to the new structures. This work will continue through FY 23-24.~~

[Points 8-9 unchanged]

Page 30—Changes to the Synodical Services Committee Charter

7. Oversight:

COD board policy oversight: If the Synodical Services Committee was assigned to review one or more COD policies, they will be listed here.

~~At this time all policies are under review and updating related to the new structures. This work will continue through FY 23-24.~~

8. Leadership & Support:

The General Secretary, ~~and~~ the Director of Ecclesiastical Governance Synodical Services shall support this committee in a non-voting, ex officio capacity.

Page 31—Changes to the Ministry Committees

Introduction to Ministry Committees

Ministry Committees provide six *synodical governance and oversight* functions in service to the Council of Delegates. Matters addressed in the ministry and connection committees include:

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

- 3. Ministry Plan, Strategy and Goals:** Ensure the agency strategy and goals are aligned with the CRCNA ministry plan ~~calling areas~~ and milestones. Committees regularly review and reflect on the agency contributions to the ministry plan of the Christian Reformed Church. As synodically mandated agencies, it is expected that the CRC ministry plan would be a significant factor in the vision and implementation of ministry.

[Points 4-5 unchanged]

6. Annual Report to Synod: Provide an annual report to synod that addresses the following topics:

[Subpoint a unchanged]

b. Ministry plan & ministry goals – how the agency is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.

[Subpoints c-e unchanged]

Pages 33-34—Changes to the Thrive Committee Charter

4. Tasks & Responsibilities:

The Committee carries out the following activities:

[Subpoints a-b unchanged]

c. Ministry plan: Ensure the ministry agency is strategically addressing the ~~calling areas and the~~ milestones in the CRCNA Ministry Plan.

[Subpoints d-e unchanged]

f. Annual report to synod: Submit an annual written report to the COD and synod addressing the following topics:

- Mandate & mission – How the agency is fulfilling its mandate and mission.
- Ministry plan & ministry goals – How the organization is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.
- Leadership – Leadership plans and changes in leadership structure.
- Financial – An annual financial overview including a balance sheet, revenue and expenses, and advancement activities.

7. Leadership & Support:

The directors of Thrive ~~U.S. and Canada~~ shall support this committee in a non-voting, *ex officio* capacity.

Page 35—Changes to the ReFrame Committee Charter

4. Authority & Responsibilities:

The committee carries out the following activities:

[Subpoints a-b unchanged]

c. Ministry plan: Ensure the ministry agency is strategically addressing the ~~calling areas and the~~ milestones in the CRCNA Ministry Plan.

[Subpoints d-e unchanged]

f. Annual report to synod: Submit an annual written report to the COD and synod addressing the following topics:

- Mandate & mission – How the agency is fulfilling its mandate and mission.

- Ministry plan & ministry goals – How the organization is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.
- Leadership – Leadership plans and changes in leadership structure.
- Financial – An annual financial overview including a balance sheet, revenue and expenses, and advancement activities.
- Organizational governance updates as appropriate.

Page 37—Changes to the Resonate Global Mission Committee Charter

4. Authority & Responsibilities:

The Committee carries out the following activities:

[Subpoints a-b unchanged]

- c. Ministry plan: Ensure the ministry agency is strategically addressing ~~the calling areas and the~~ milestones in the CRCNA ministry plan.

[Subpoints d-e unchanged]

- f. Annual report to synod: Submit an annual written report to the COD and synod addressing the following topics:
- Mandate & mission – How the agency is fulfilling its mandate and mission.
 - Ministry plan & ministry goals – How the organization is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.
 - Leadership – Leadership plans and changes in leadership structure.
 - Financial – An annual financial overview including a balance sheet, revenue and expenses, and advancement activities.

Pages 40-41—Changes to the Connections Committee Charter

4. Authority & Responsibilities:

[Opening paragraph and subpoints a-d unchanged]

- e. Matters to be discussed in preparation for annual synodical reports: Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and World Renew submit annual reports to synod via its agenda and supplemental agenda (Rules for Synodical Procedure p. 9-12). These annual reports, submitted to the Office of General Secretary, include:
- Mandate & mission – How the agency is fulfilling its mandate and mission.
 - Ministry plan & ministry goals – How the organization is aligned with the ministry plan and its ~~calling areas and~~ milestones.
 - Leadership – Leadership plans and changes in leadership structure.
 - Financial – An annual financial overview including a balance sheet, revenue and expenses, and advancement activities.
 - Organizational governance updates as required and appropriate.

[Closing paragraph unchanged]

7. Leadership & Support:

The General Secretary of the CRCNA, executive co-director(s) of World Renew and the presidents of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary shall support this committee in a non-voting, ex officio capacity. It is expected that the executive co-directors and the presidents (or their designees) would participate as needed.

Page 42—Changes to the Banner Advisory Committee Charter

2. Membership:

[Opening paragraph and first three bullets unchanged]

- Ex officio members without a vote include:
 - The editor-in-chief of *The Banner*
 - The Executive Director-Canada and the U.S. Director of Ministry Operations~~Executive Directors~~ (or their designees)
 - The Chief Administrative Officer of the CRCNA

Page 44—Changes to the Bible Translation Committee Charter

2. Membership:

The COD Governance Committee shall prepare a slate of nominees to serve on the Bible Translations Committee. ~~The COD shall ratify the slate of nominees and recommend to synod for approval.~~ The COD shall act on this slate as recommended by the Governance Committee. The Governance Committee will solicit potential nominees from the Office of General Secretary. Synodical terms of three years are not applicable to the committee. The membership shall include the following representatives:

[The remainder of section 2 here is unchanged.]

Page 49—Changes to the Synodical Organization

CRCNA Synodical Organization:

[Opening paragraph and bullet points unchanged]

~~We are currently working with the Miller Johnson law firm, to develop the bylaws. Once this is complete, the CRCNA synodical organization will be incorporated in the state of Michigan as a non-profit organization. This work has been delayed due to a higher than normal workload in the Office of General Secretary.~~

Proposed Changes to Rules for Synodical Procedure

After reviewing a number of suggested changes to the Rules for Synod Procedure, the Council of Delegates submits the following proposed changes to synod for approval (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~).

Rules for Synodical Procedure

[Table of contents unchanged]

INTRODUCTION

Synod: What It Is and What It Does

What is synod?

[unchanged]

What does synod do?

[unchanged]

A. The functions of synod include, but are not necessarily restricted to, the following primary responsibilities:

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

3. Receive reports from the various denominational agencies, ministries, and institutions and take appropriate action with regard to ~~oversee~~ their mandates, bylaws, and articles of incorporation, relying on the Council of Delegates, as specified in the COD Governance Handbook.

[Points 4-8 unchanged]

9. Review denominational budgets and provide feedback to agencies, ministries, and their boards. Review and approve changes to the ministry-share system and inform CRCNA classes and councils. ~~financial oversight to the agencies and ministries of the denomination through adoption of ministry-share formulas.~~

[Points 10-15 unchanged]

[Part B unchanged]

I. CONDUCTING SYNOD—CONVENING THROUGH ADJOURNING

A. Synod shall convene virtually two weeks prior to the in-person meetings and be constituted as prescribed by the Church Order, Articles 45 and 46, and the decisions of Synods 2000 and 2019. The virtual convening session will include a condensed time of worship and the election of officers.

[Parts B-C unchanged]

D. The minister of the convening church (or in the event of a vacancy, its counselor) shall officiate as president pro tem. The duties shall be:

[Points 1-3 unchanged]

4. The president pro tem shall thereupon ~~request the elected officers to take their places upon the platform and~~ introduce the president and the other officers to the assembly.

E. While synod is in session, its members may not leave the assembly without permission from the chair; neither is it permissible for any member to withdraw from the assembly and return home without the consent of the ~~assembly~~officers.

[Part F unchanged]

G. Synod begins each morning with a time of worship planned by ~~a committee appointed by the program committee of synod and convened by the denominational staff and a committee of delegates appointed by the program committee of synod~~ Worship Ministries Office, with the exception of the final day when synod concludes with worship. The Synod Worship Planning Committee will be composed of a diverse group of staff, delegates, and advisers to synod and make use of the gifts of synod's attendees as much as possible to carry out worship.

(Acts of Synod 2019, p. 803)

H. Prayer is central to worship and ~~shall needs to~~ be an intentional feature of synod's work sessions.

(Acts of Synod 2019, p. 803)

[Part I unchanged]

II. DUTIES OF OFFICERS

[unchanged]

III. DUTIES OF NONDELEGATED SYNODICAL FUNCTIONARIES

A. General Secretary

The general secretary shall:

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

3. Edit and have ~~printed~~ published such official publications the synod or the Council of Delegates shall authorize.

[Point 4 unchanged]

B. Advisers to Synod

[unchanged]

1. Regulations for Advisers to Synod

[Subpoints a-i unchanged]

- j. Appointment of Ethnic and Women Advisers and Young Adult Representatives

The Council of Delegates shall appoint the ethnic and women advisers and young adult representatives each year at its February meeting. Nominations for these adviser positions shall be gathered by the general secretary from suggestions offered by the churches. ~~Nominations for ethnic advisers shall also be suggested by the director of Race Relations.~~

2. Classifications of Advisers to Synod

[Subpoints a-e unchanged]

- f. Agency and institution board representatives: ~~(a) Normally the agency/institution board presidents, and the agency directors,~~ and the presidents of the educational institutions shall have the privilege of access to the advisory committee of synod that deals with the report of the agency or institution they represent. In addition, they shall be granted the privilege of the floor at the plenary session of synod when their respective report is discussed. The presidents of Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University are designated as advisers to synod with respect to issues that affect their respective institutions.

[Subpoints g-h unchanged]

IV. ECUMENICAL DELEGATES AND REPORTERS OF CHURCH PERIODICALS

A. Ecumenical delegates from churches in communion shall be given the privilege of the floor, with the right to speak on matters before synod, and shall also be given the privilege of visiting meetings of advisory committees with the consent of the chairman of the committee.

(Acts of Synod 1975, p. 39)

[Part B unchanged]

V. MATTERS LEGALLY BEFORE SYNOD

[Part A unchanged]

B. Following is a list of matters legally before synod.

[Points 1-2 unchanged]

3. Overtures and Communications to Synod

[Subpoints a-b unchanged]

- c. Assemblies and members should refrain from overtures, appeals, or communications which are repetitious or mere expressions of agreement or disagreement with matters already on the agenda of synod.

The general secretary is authorized to omit such items from the ~~printed~~ published *Agenda*. In such cases they shall merely be

listed and accepted as communications. The senders shall be notified, and their materials shall be given to one of the advisory committees of synod to be received as information. Matters received as information will not ordinarily be mentioned in advisory committee reports or the *Acts of Synod*.

[Points 4-7 unchanged]

8. Late Reports and Overtures

No study reports or recommendations from boards or standing committees which affect doctrinal or ethical statements or Church Order provisions received by the general secretary after September 15 or overtures received after March 15 shall be considered by synod, with the exception of overtures which deal with matters relevant to reports found in the ~~printed~~ published *Agenda*. Any other overture or study report shall be considered only by special decision of synod on the basis of most weighty grounds.

9. The ~~Printed~~ Published *Agenda* and Study Committee Reports

Study committee reports shall be filed with the general secretary on or before September 15, and the general secretary shall distribute them to the churches no later than November 1. The *Agenda* shall be published not later than early April. It shall include reports of standing, study, and special committees; overtures of classes, councils, or individuals; ~~printed~~ published appeals; notices of non-~~printed~~ published appeals; a list of communications; the names of the delegates; and pertinent announcements, with the understanding, however, that the Council of Delegates, upon recommendation of the general secretary, may, for good cause, determine not to print an item or to print an abbreviated version. If an abbreviated version is ~~printed~~ published, the entire item shall be forwarded to the appropriate advisory committee of synod. Items not ~~printed~~ published shall be listed in the *Agenda*. All such material shall be in the hands of the general secretary not later than the following deadlines: September 15 for study committee reports; February 15 for the reports of standing committees and authorized representatives; ten days after conclusion of board meetings for board reports, but not later than March 1; and March 15 for overtures and appeals.

10. Supplementary Reports

The Council of Delegates of the CRCNA, including reports by ReFrame Ministries, and Resonate Global Mission, and Thrive; the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary; the Board of Trustees of Calvin University; the Board of World Renew; the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee; the Historical Committee; and the Candidacy Committee are permitted to file a supplementary report after March 15. These boards and standing committees are expected to incorporate as much of their materials as possible in the ~~printed~~ published *Agenda*, and matters for the supplementary reports must be kept to a minimum.

11. Confidential Matters

Non-~~printed~~published appeals, communications, or other materials legally before synod judged by the general secretary, in consultation with the Program Committee or Council of Delegates, to be confidential in nature, will be distributed only to the advisory committee to which they are assigned. Any disclosure of names in cases where such disclosure is judged to be potentially damaging to their reputation will be removed from the document, and the matter will be dealt with by the advisory committee in executive session.

(Acts of Synod 2013, p. 549; Acts of Synod 2017, p. 641)

[Points 12-13 unchanged]

VI. SYNODICAL COMMITTEES

[Part A unchanged]

B. The Advisory Committees

[Point 1 unchanged]

2. *Organization and rules* governing these committees:

[Subpoints a-f unchanged]

- g. When the report of a committee has been previously distributed to synod in ~~printed~~published form, and the members of synod have had sufficient time to examine it, the first reading of the report is not required. In such case the reporter, when the president calls for the report, shall state that the report has been placed in the hands of synod in ~~printed~~published form and shall move that the report be accepted for consideration.

[Subpoints h-i unchanged]

[Point 3 unchanged]

[The remaining portions of the Rules for Synodical Procedure remain unchanged.]

APPENDIX C

Bible Translations Committee Report: Evaluation of the Easy-to-Read Version

I. Background

In response to a request from the Council of Maranatha CRC (Holland, Mich.), the Council of Delegates directed the standing Bible Translations Committee (BTC) to review the Bible League's Easy-to-Read Version (ERV) "for use in worship." Using the Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation (Addendum A), the BTC diligently reviewed the entire translation and arrived at the following conclusions:

II. Overall summary

The ERV does a good job of avoiding English idioms and “biblish” and rendering the biblical text at a level accessible to the main target audience, described as “those who have a limited experience with English, including children and people who are just learning English.” Nevertheless, the location of this translation well beyond dynamic equivalence militates against its use in applications where greater faithfulness to the original languages or textual precision is necessary, such as those applications listed under II, D, 1-3 in “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation” (i.e., teaching, Bible study, preaching). This translation might be helpful, however, for the applications listed under II, D, 4-7 in the same document (i.e., public reading of Scripture for new believers or children’s worship, devotional reading, and in litanies, prayers, or storytelling). In addition to the BTC’s recommendations regarding the “Purpose of the Translation,”¹ we also note problematic issues regarding the “Characteristics of the Translation.”² These are elaborated upon below.

III. Specific sections of Scripture

The conclusions of the review team are provided in general terms below. For more detailed commentary and examples, see Addendum B.

IV. Law

Sometimes in simplifying the text, the translators, intentionally or otherwise, have lost some of the implied meaning or suggest departures from traditional understanding. These retranslations are often entirely unnecessary and could cause controversy especially when involving well-known passages. At other times, explanatory glosses are inserted that are usually encountered in commentaries rather than in translations. Moreover, interpretive choices are made at times for ambiguous texts, resulting in questionable translations. Finally, often sections of Scripture are translated as blocks instead of as individual verses, making it difficult to reference specific texts.

V. Prophets

Despite the overall success in meeting the translation goals of the ERV, there is one area in particular that provides cause for further reflection. The translations of the Old Testament Prophets do not employ a consistent methodology with respect to the distinction between poetry and prose in the original texts.

VI. Writings

This translation may serve well for devotional use or even public reading of Scripture in contexts where English language skills are limited. Having said this, the ERV is not recommended for preaching, teaching, or Bible study

¹ Section II, D of “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation.”

² Section II, C of “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation.”

because of the way it veers from accurately representing the form and content of the source text.

VII. Gospels/Acts

The ERV has a few positive features, including ease of reading and innovative wording of some passages that aid new reflections on passages. However, the ERV has some significant inadequacies, both additions and omissions, which can potentially lead to doctrinal inaccuracy and error. These include repeatedly diverging from the source language, not translating significant terms of a biblical writer's theology, translating too broadly individual sections and words causing textual and theological ambiguity, deviating from the natural spiritual implications of a text, and differing from the traditional terminology that the church has used in the development of its doctrines and theology. Consequently, these additions and omissions sometimes overlook core teachings and doctrines that Reformed theology professes. Thus, the ERV is recommended to be used as a secondary version for comparison purposes with the NIV or with other versions authorized by the CRCNA, whether for teaching, Bible study, preaching, devotional, or storytelling purposes.

VIII. Epistles/Revelation

The ERV states that it uses simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences because "new readers sometimes struggle with reading older standardized translations of the Bible text because of their unfamiliarity with the Bible." While this is an honorable goal, it is not always achieved or, at least, not achieved as well as in some other translations. The (sometimes) choppy translation, odd word choices, and peculiar turns of phrase would make a new reader "struggle" with this text. Further, there are times when the text adds words and goes beyond the original text.

IX. Concluding recommendation

For the reasons summarized above, and further delineated in the following addenda, the BTC does not recommend the use of the ERV for general worship and is only able to commend it with reservations for discretionary use in the public reading of Scripture for new believers or children's worship, devotional reading, or in litanies, prayers, or storytelling.

Bible Translations Committee

Amanda Benckhuysen (staff convener)

William T. Koopmans (chair)

Benjamin Ribbens

Gabriela Tijerina-Pike

Michael Williams

Gloria Hunt (staff assistant)

ADDENDUM A

Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation

I. Preface

To fulfill its mandate to provide the CRCNA with a “set of criteria” for the consideration and evaluation of English Bible translations to be used in its churches, the Bible Translations Committee [BTC] has developed and offers to the denomination the accompanying criteria.

The criteria address four areas that should be examined when evaluating any Bible translation:

- the qualifications of the translators
- the composition, organization, and methodology of the translation committee
- the characteristics of the translation
- the purpose of the translation

For the first three of these areas, the criteria suggest preferred cases. The committee recognizes, however, that it is unlikely that any translation will fulfill all of the criteria perfectly. Translations may excel in some areas while being deficient in others. Moreover, the criteria have differing weights. For example, the criterion that the translators be recognized experts in their fields is weightier than the criterion that favors larger translation committees over smaller ones.

The fourth area differs from the first three in that it raises as a necessary issue for consideration the purpose for which the translation will be used. For example, a translation that rigidly adheres to the forms and conventions of the original languages may be suitable for academic environments but less suitable for preaching and personal devotions.

The criteria are therefore offered as guidelines that raise a wide variety of factors to be taken into account when considering the adoption and use of a Bible translation. Some factors may be weighted differently in different settings and for different purposes. And according to its mandate, the BTC will continue to review the criteria and make necessary additions and changes as warranted. These revisions will be communicated to the COD for its approval, and suggestions for improvement are welcomed.

II. Criteria

A. *Qualifications of the translators*

Translators reflecting the following criteria are preferred:

- Christians committed to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures
- experts recognized in their academic fields
- leaders in the local church or those involved in the local church

B. *Committee composition, organization, and methodology*

Translation committees reflecting the following criteria are preferred:

1. The committee has a large membership including more than one translator in order to include as many of the following as possible:
 - a. members with knowledge and expertise in the following areas: Old Testament, New Testament, LXX/Septuagint, Rabbinical, Ancient Near East (historical and textual), and Intertestamental Period
 - b. representation of a diversity of genders, ages, ethnicities, world Englishes, life experiences, and Christian traditions.³ Such diversity provides a corrective to conscious or unconscious biases and facilitates a more fulsome perspective on divine revelation; ideally all voices would weigh in on all translation decisions.
2. The committee has ongoing membership with a process for updating and inviting input from scholars, pastors, and laypeople to allow for continuity and understanding of previous decisions.
3. The committee is independent from marketing and funding influences.
4. Decisions are made by a high ratio of approval (for example, a two-thirds vote is of higher value than a majority vote or a decree by chair).

C. Characteristics of the translation⁴

The translation must “remain faithful to the original meaning of the text, but use language that sounds as clear and natural to the modern reader as the Hebrew or Greek did to the original readers.”⁵ Translations reflecting these characteristics are preferred:

1. The translation demonstrates a balance between and an equal commitment to the source language and the target language (English); the translation is written in “meaningful English that is equivalent to its meaning in Hebrew or Greek.”⁶
2. The source languages have been accurately translated into English.
3. The English words, phrases, and clauses are clear.
4. The English words, phrases, and clauses are natural.
5. Choices about English lexicon and usage conventions are broad enough to encompass the needs of the global church.
6. The translation demonstrates a linguistic awareness of the target audience.

³ For example: Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Anglican.

⁴ Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 36–41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

D. Purpose of the translation

Based on the above analysis, translations could be recommended for one or more of the following uses:

1. teaching (more technical/formal)
2. Bible study (more technical/formal)
3. preaching (more aesthetic, rhetorically pleasing)
4. public reading of Scripture (more natural, less technical/formal, especially for new believers unaccustomed to “biblish”)
5. serving specific demographic needs or contexts (for example, basic English services, worship for children, ministry to new Christians)
6. devotional reading (less technical/formal, more emphasis on reading than speaking)
7. litanies, prayers, or storytelling, based on but not intended to replace Scripture reading

ADDENDUM B

Detailed Evaluation of the ERV

I. Law

This translation does a good job of avoiding English idioms and “biblish,” and rendering the biblical text at a level accessible to the main target audience, described as “those who have a limited experience with English, including children and people who are just learning English.” However, sometimes in simplifying the text, the translators, intentionally or otherwise, have lost some of the implied meaning or suggest departures from traditional understanding. These retranslations are often entirely unnecessary and could cause controversy especially when involving well-known passages. For example, in the very first verses of Genesis, the text is reworded and rearranged, evidencing some unnecessary interpretive liberty and/or creative exegesis:

God created the sky and the earth. At first, the earth was completely empty. There was nothing on the earth. . . .

This translation moves the thought of “in the beginning” (here, “at first”) from the terminus a quo of God’s creative work to some point *after* the creation of the heavens and the earth. Also, “formless and empty” becomes “completely empty” —interpreting *tōhû* as an adverb instead of its usual translation as a complementary adjective (e.g., “formless,” “without shape”).

In another example, in Genesis 1:4, “God saw that the light was good” becomes “He saw the light, and he knew that it was good.” This needlessly inserts the verb “knew” into the text where there is no Hebrew verb, and it replaces the subject “God,” expressly mentioned in the Hebrew, with the simple pronoun “he,” reducing the rhetorical effect of the repetition of the divine agency.

In Genesis 6:4, an entire adverbial phrase is removed unnecessarily. “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown” (NIV) becomes “During this time and also later, the Nephilim people lived in the land. They have been famous as powerful soldiers since ancient times.”

At other times, explanatory glosses are inserted that are usually encountered in commentaries rather than translations. For example, consider the expansion (indicated in italics) of the account of Abraham’s servant’s search for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:14):

NIV

“May it be that when I say to a young woman, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too.’ . . .”

ERV

“I am waiting for a special sign to know which is the right one for Isaac. This is the special sign: I will say to the girl, ‘Please put down your jar so that I can drink.’ I will know that she is the right one if she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give water to your camels.’ . . .”

Another example of a commentary-like expansion occurs in Genesis 31:53b:

NIV

So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac.

ERV

Jacob’s father, Isaac, called God “Fear.” So Jacob used that name to make the promise.

Compare also the explanatory expansion in Deuteronomy 19:21:

NIV

Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

ERV

Don’t feel sorry about punishing someone who does wrong. If a life is taken, a life must be paid for it. The rule is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot—the punishment must equal the crime.

Interpretive choices are also made at times for ambiguous texts, resulting in questionable translations. For example, in Noah’s blessing of Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:26-27), the NIV has

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
May God extend Japheth’s territory;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.”

The subject of the verb “live” in the fourth line is not specified in the Hebrew but is certainly implied by the context (the nearest antecedent in both Hebrew and English being “Japheth”). Nevertheless, the ERV has

“May the LORD, the God of Shem, be praised!
 May Canaan be Shem’s slave.
 May God give more land to Japheth.
 May God live in Shem’s tents,
 and may Canaan be their slave.”

For the ERV to supply “God” as the subject of the verb in the fourth line not only goes against almost every other English translation but also raises questions regarding how God could live in Shem’s tents and whether Canaan should be understood to be the slave of God as well as Shem. Apart from the accuracy of such translations, one wonders at the motivation behind them.

Other examples of (over)simplifications or inconsistencies that come at the expense of fuller meaning or result in confusing, unique, or overly interpretive readings include the following:

- “agreement” for “covenant” (which, of course, has far richer connotations than a simple agreement)
- “I have made a special agreement with him” for “I have chosen him” (Gen. 18:19 [NIV], rendering the Hebrew verb “to know”)
- three different translations for the same food (Gen. 25:29, “pot of beans”/“red soup”; Gen. 25:34, “bread and lentil soup”). Something similar happens in Genesis 32:25, where it is unclear in the ERV whether it is Jacob’s leg (Gen. 32:25, 31) or his hip (Gen. 32:32) that is out of joint.
- Jacob knowing and not knowing the same thing in the same verse (Gen. 28:16): “I know that the LORD is in this place, but I did not know he was here....”
- the Israelite foremen passing Aaron and Moses and meeting them at the same time (Ex. 5:20)
- inferred emotions added to the narrative where there is no indication of such in Hebrew. Compare these examples:

<i>NIV</i>	<i>ERV</i>
Genesis 29:14 “You are my own flesh and blood.”	“This is wonderful! You are from my own family!”
Genesis 43:30 Deeply moved at the sight of his brother,	Joseph felt a strong desire to show his brother Benjamin that he loved him.

Exodus 16:7

“Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”

“You have been complaining and complaining about us. Maybe now we can have a little rest.”

- inconsistency in rendering the divine name. At times, it is transliterated as YHWH (e.g., Ex. 3:15); at other times it is translated as LORD (e.g., Ex. 3:16)
- inconsistency in capitalization: “the Meeting Tent” (Ex. 29:10) and “the meeting tent” (Ex. 33:7)
- inconsistency in rendering “ark” as “Box of the Agreement” (e.g., Ex. 31:7), “Box of the Lord’s Agreement” (e.g., Num. 10:33), “Box that holds the Agreement” (e.g., Lev. 16:13), “Holy Box” (e.g., Ex. 37:1), or simply “the Box” (e.g., Deut. 10:5)
- inconsistency in referring to the tabernacle as “the Holy Tent” (e.g., Ex. 26:1), “the Meeting Tent” (e.g., Ex. 39:32), and “the Tent of the Agreement” (e.g., Ex. 38:21)
- inconsistency in translating technical terms (e.g., “covered with white spots” in Ex. 4:6, “leprous” in Lev. 13:45, and “terrible skin disease” in Num. 12:10 to translate the same Hebrew root)
- collective singulars translated as actual singulars vice plurals (e.g., Ex. 15:25–26)
- referring to the breastpiece on which are mounted the twelve stones representing the tribes of Israel, as “the judgment pouch” (e.g., Ex. 25:7)
- At times there is a switch from divine appointment to personal initiative (e.g., Ex. 32:29, “You have been set apart to the LORD today” [NIV]; “Take your role today as special servants of the LORD” [ERV]).
- In a similar vein, human agency is at times lost by the use of an ambiguous passive (e.g., Ex. 34:1, “two more stone tablets like the first two that were broken” [ERV] instead of “two stone tablets like the first ones . . . which you broke” [NIV]).
- The theologically rich “make atonement for” is reduced to “make pure” (e.g., Lev. 17:11).
- reducing “defiled” to “filthy” (e.g., Lev. 18:20, 23), which may suggest to the target audience only physical uncleanness, even though “unclean” is used in Numbers (e.g., 5:1–3).
- “Uncovering a relative’s nakedness” in the NIV (an idiom for dishonoring them) becomes in the ERV (unique among all translations): “having sexual relations with” (e.g., Lev. 20:11, 20, 21).
- rendering Balak’s rebuke of Balaam in Numbers 23:25 as “You didn’t ask for good things to happen to these people [when he had just prophesied good things would indeed happen to them], but you didn’t ask for bad things to happen to them either!” in the ERV (a

unique translation among English versions); whereas the NIV has “Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!”

Often, sections of Scripture are translated instead of individual verses (e.g., Gen. 6:1–4; 36:6–8, 40–43; Num. 7:12–83), making it difficult to reference specific texts.

Despite great simplification in many other areas, at times ancient weights and measures are retained—measurements the intended readers of this translation would not understand. For example, “cubits” in Genesis 6:15 and in Exodus 25:10; “spans” in Exodus 28:16; “shekels” and “gerahs” instead of “ounces” in Exodus 30:13. At other times, however, “feet” is used in place of “cubits” (e.g., Gen. 7:20), “pounds” in place of “talents” (e.g., Ex. 25:39) or “shekels” (e.g., Ex. 30:22), and “cups,” “pints,” and “quarts”/“gallons” instead of “ephahs,” “hins,” and “logs” (e.g., Ex. 29:40–41; Lev. 14:10).

In conclusion, the location of this translation well to the right of dynamic equivalence militates against its use in applications where greater faithfulness to the original languages or textual precision is necessary, such as those applications listed under II, D, 1-3 in “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Translation” (i.e., teaching, Bible study, and preaching). Nevertheless, this translation might be helpful for the applications listed under II, D, 4-7 in the same document (i.e., public or devotional reading of Scripture; accessibility for English-limited audiences; and use in litanies, prayers, or stories referring to, but not replacing, Scripture reading).

II. Prophets

A. Main impressions

The goal of the ERV is to stay true to the original biblical texts while providing a version with shorter sentences and simpler vocabulary. For the Old Testament, the translators have followed the Masoretic text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) (1984), with some augmentation from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In our opinion, the ERV translators of the Major and Minor Prophets have generally succeeded in their goal to provide a translation that is accurate and readable at an easy level.

B. An area of deficiency

Despite the overall success in meeting the translation goals of the ERV, one area in particular provides cause for further reflection. The translations of the Old Testament prophets do not employ a consistent methodology with respect to the distinction between poetry and prose in the original texts. Without turning this into a major point of contention, some observations are warranted.

The distinction between poetry and prose in the Old Testament prophets is a notoriously difficult and long-standing endeavor.⁷ The translators of the ERV cannot be faulted for failing to come with a convincing differentiation between poetry and prose in all the prophets. However, their approach to this important aspect of translation appears to be haphazard. Some of the authors generally follow the lead of *BHS*, and some appear to ignore it completely – while others seem perhaps to either follow the lead of a different translation or their own conclusions without providing rationale.

This topic is not merely an academic one. Distinguishing between poetry and prose and reflecting the results in the physical layout of the text has significant bearing upon the readability and comprehensibility levels of the translation. When poetry is written out as prose, without any recognition in the layout of its poetic character, it is generally more difficult to comprehend. It is surprising, therefore, given the most basic goals of the ERV, that in the Prophets the translators often appear to err on the side of caution, eschewing a poetic layout and simply defaulting to a layout as if the original text were prose. A few illustrations may help to clarify.

Hosea: In *BHS* the text is almost all poetry (except 1:1 and 3:1-4); while in the ERV only about one third of the book is reflected as poetry.

Joel: The text is poetry in its entirety in *BHS*, and is accepted mostly as such by the ERV, except for 1:14-20 and 3:1-8. It is unclear why these sections are not viewed as poetry in the ERV, as they have long been analyzed as such.⁸

Haggai and Malachi: Oddly, there is no recognition of poetry in these books in the ERV. The confusion between poetry and prose in the ERV is not limited to the Minor Prophets, as becomes evident from a close analysis of the Major Prophets.

Isaiah: The ERV seems overly reluctant to recognize poetry in Isaiah. For example, where the NIV recognizes all of 1:2-31 as poetry, in the ERV only 1:2b-3 is presented as such. The layout of the ERV ignores the past century of recognition of poetry in this chapter of Isaiah (see, e.g., *BHS* and older printings such as *Biblia Hebraica Kittel* [*BHK*], 1925, 1937, etc.). Or, to use another example, it is puzzling why the ERV presents Isaiah 13:1-5 as poetry and then switches to a prose layout for the rest of the chapter, again contrary to the recognition of poetry throughout the chapter during the past century of Old Testament scholarship.

Isaiah 13:7-8 is also presented in the ERV as simple prose: “People will lose their courage. Fear will make them weak. Everyone will be afraid. They will stare at each other with shock on their faces. Fear will grip

⁷ See especially R. Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (Oxonii, 1753).

⁸ Note: Joel 3:1-3 ET (= 4:1-3 MT) is already laid out as poetry in *Biblia Hebraica Kittel*. See also Willem van der Meer, *Oude Woorden Worden Nieuw: De Opbouw van het Boek Joël* (Kampen, 1989), pp. 53, 89-90, for a poetic layout and detailed analysis.

them like the pains of a woman in childbirth.” Would it not have been helpful, even in the paraphrase of the ERV, to allow the poetic parallelism to be observed in the layout of these verses? Using the ERV translation, we could envision a presentation of Isaiah 13:7-8 as follows:

People will lose their courage.
Fear will make them weak.
Everyone will be afraid.
They will stare at each other with shock on their faces.
Fear will grip them
like the pains of a woman in childbirth.

This poetic layout would make their text easier to read and comprehend.

Similarly, whereas the text of Isaiah 43-44 has long been recognized as poetry, the ERV presents these chapters as prose and then suddenly switches to poetry at Isaiah 44:21. Additional illustrations could be provided regarding this practice throughout the book of Isaiah.

Jeremiah: The poetry versus prose discrepancy is not nearly as notable in the ERV translation of Jeremiah, which is usually consistent with *BHS* in the recognition of poetry or prose.⁹ The ERV presents Jer. 31:31-34; 48:34-39; 49:19 as prose (consistent with *BHS*), while other translations such as the NIV now render these verses as poetry.¹⁰

Since the Jeremiah translation largely follows the lead of *BHS* regarding what is presented in a poetic format, that raises the question of whether the poetic versus nonpoetic decisions of *BHS* are sustainable in this book. Here too one might ask, “What would best support the concept of readability that is essential to the goals of the ERV?” There are many cases where, for the sake of readability, it would seem to make sense to lean toward poetic versus nonpoetic layout. For example, in the dialogical exchange in the call of Jeremiah (1:4-6), the words of the Lord are presented as poetry, whereas the words of Jeremiah are not:

The LORD’s message came to me:
“Before I made you in your mother’s womb,
I knew you.
Before you were born,
I chose you for a special work.
I chose you to be a prophet* to the nations.”
Then I said, “But, Lord GOD, I don’t know how to speak. I am only a boy.”

⁹ An exception is Jer. 49:19 (poetry in *BHS*, prose in ERV).

¹⁰ In the opposite direction, Jer. 11:17 is poetry in the ERV, while it is laid out as prose in *BHS* (followed as such by the NIV).

This layout shows the parallelism in verse 5 (speech of the Lord) but obscures it in verse 6 (speech of Jeremiah). The parallelism would be more evident in a poetic layout such as the following:

Then I said, "But, Lord GOD,
I don't know how to speak.
I am only a boy."

Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 7 is entirely poetry in *BHS*; only Ezekiel 7:2b-4 is poetry in the ERV.

Ezekiel 12:22b-23b is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 17:22-24 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 21:9b-11, 28b-29 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*; Ezekiel 21:14-22 is poetry in *BHS*, not in the ERV.

Ezekiel 24:6-13 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 27:10 is poetry in *BHS*, not in the ERV.

Ezekiel 28:1-23 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 29:8-9 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 30:7-8, 10-19 is poetry in the ERV, not in *BHS*.

Ezekiel 31:10 is poetry in *BHS*, not in the ERV.

Ezekiel 32:12-15, 18b-28 is poetry in *BHS*, not in the ERV.

Ezekiel 35:9 is poetry in *BHS*, not in the ERV.

Once again, in the book of Ezekiel, absence of good criteria for differentiating poetry and prose does not enhance the readability of the final product.

C. Miscellaneous

A footnote at Isaiah 1:7 refers to Sodom and Gomorrah as foreign nations, even though the text in 1:9 refers to them as cities. As the intent of the footnote is to emphasize that the citizens of these cities were foreigners, the present wording is confusing.

Throughout the Prophets (as in other parts of the ERV Old Testament translation) "Temple" is capitalized when it refers to the temple in Jerusalem, but it is left uncapitalized in Exodus 15:17; 1 Samuel 3:2; 2 Samuel 23:7; 1 Kings 5:5; etc. At times this discrepancy becomes awkward (e.g., in 1 Kings 8:19-20).

Jeremiah 15:10—The ERV inserts a heading here: "Jeremiah Complains to God Again" and then begins the sentence with a capitalized "Mother," creating the impression that Jeremiah here may be referring to God as Mother rather than expressing a lament regarding birth by his earthly mother. Ambiguity is left in the text through the translator's decision not to include the possessive ending "my" (literally in Hebrew "my mother"), and thereby presenting "Mother" as the first word of the sentence in a vocative sense. The resulting ambiguity is not helpful for the reader.

D. Conclusion

The ERV of the Old Testament Prophets generally meets the goal of providing an accurate and readable translation. However, its haphazard treatment of the distinction between poetry and prose frequently misses an opportunity to enhance the easy-to-read experience in these books.

III. Writings

A. Background

The focus of this section is to evaluate the ERV translation of the Old Testament books commonly known as the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles) in light of the approved “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Bible Translation,” point II, C, “Characteristics of the Translation” (Addendum A).

B. Observations about the ERV Translation of the books included in the Writings

1. Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry and the ERV

English poetry has various defining characteristics—rhyme, meter, imagery, form, and literary techniques like alliteration—that distinguish it from prose. The distinction is important because while prose is more straightforward, poetry expresses ideas through figurative language and imagery, a feature that is key to understanding the sense and function of the text. While the defining characteristics of Hebrew poetry are different from that of English poetry, its form, which includes the use of parallelism and repetition, similarly contributes to the overall sense and function of the text.

Trying to capture the conventions of Hebrew literature in English translations is challenging and requires an awareness of and deftness about the way the form contributes to meaning. This is especially true when trying to produce a version of the Bible that is accessible to young or new readers. There is a very real tension between accessibility on the one hand and faithfulness to the form of the source text on the other—a tension that is especially evident in the poetic texts prevalent in the Writings. Depending on the objective and approach of the translation, English Bibles can be found at various points on this spectrum. By way of observation, the ERV seems to lean in the direction of accessibility, prioritizing simplicity of language and clarity of thought over equivalence or precision in relation to the source text. A couple of examples illustrate this approach:

Parallelism

Hebrew poetry is often structured around parallel thoughts and ideas that build on each other in lines that form pairs, triplets, and sometimes quadruplets. Different relationships between the paired lines add to the overall effect and sense of the poetry. While the ERV sometimes preserves this feature in the English translation, at other times it abandons the parallel structure and condenses the text. An example is found in Proverbs 26:4-5:

NIV Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

ERV There is no good way to answer fools when they say something stupid. If you answer them, then you, too, will look like a fool. If you don't answer them, they will think they are smart.

Here the ERV collapses the parallelism, offering more an interpretation of the text rather than a translation. Whereas the NIV maintains the puzzling juxtaposition of these two proverbs, which seems to invite readers to consider the contextual nature of wisdom itself and the need to discern how wisdom is applied in any given situation, the ERV offers a paraphrase that eliminates the tension but also negates any wisdom about how to deal with fools.

Another example is in Psalm 2:2:

NIV The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed. . . .

ERV Their kings and leaders join together
to fight against the LORD and his chosen king^a
[*footnote a*: . . . Or "his anointed one"].

The ERV seeks to bring clarity and brevity by collapsing the parallelism of the first two lines. What is lost however, is the sense of the totality of the opposition of the nations' leaders against the Lord and his anointed, reflected in the parallelism "The kings of the earth rise up/and the rulers band together" (NIV).

Repetition

Repetition of words or phrases is a key feature of Hebrew poetry and prose. The repetition draws the readers' attention to the intended focus of the text. While the ERV is certainly not alone in this, on occasion the ERV seems to resist reflecting the repetition of words of the source text. This is particularly pronounced in Ecclesiastes 1:2:

NIV "Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

ERV Everything is so meaningless. The Teacher says that it is all a waste of time!

2. Translation versus interpretation

While the work of translators is to provide a faithful rendering of the source text, this can be challenging when the text itself is ambiguous or confusing. To try to provide clarity, the ERV regularly translates verses in a way that goes beyond the translation, adding English words and phrases that reduce

ambiguity. This inclination toward adding interpretive glosses to the text proper verges on misrepresenting the biblical text, however. The following examples illustrate this tendency well:

Psalm 8:4

NIV What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

ERV And I wonder, “Why are people so important to you?
Why do you even think about them?
Why do you care so much about humans?
Why do you even notice them?”

Lamentations 3:22b-23

NIV . . . for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;

ERV . . . the LORD’s faithful love never ends.
Every morning he shows it in new ways!

3. Translation of technical and form-specific terms

One feature of the ERV that is particularly odd is the unusual translation of technical terms and the inconsistent translation of proper nouns.

A clear example of this is in Ruth 3:9, which includes the Hebrew word *go’el* to refer to the social role of a kinsman-redeemer or guardian of the family.

NIV “Who are you?” he asked.
“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

ERV Boaz said, “Who are you?”
She said, “I am Ruth, your servant girl. Spread your cover over me. You are my protector.”

The notion that Boaz is a *go’el* is a key concept that provides important context for Ruth’s actions and the events that transpire in chapter 4. The ERV’s “protector” seems to obscure what Ruth is asking of Boaz—that is, to be the kinsman-redeemer for her and Naomi. While this is clarified to some extent in the footnotes, it is unlikely that the footnotes would be read in worship.

Another example is in the way the ERV obscures the difference between the Psalms of Thanksgiving and the Psalms of Praise by translating both the *hiphil* of *yadah* (“to give thanks”) and *hallal* (“to praise”) in key verses with the word “praise.” Psalm 136:1 illustrates this well:

NIV Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
His love endures forever.

ERV Praise the LORD because he is good.
His faithful love will last forever.

C. Assessment

The ERV has many strengths. As its title suggests, it is an easy-to-read version. It uses a limited vocabulary and short sentences, and it often clarifies words and phrases that are ambiguous or hard to understand. In this sense, it is a great translation for those who are new to the faith or new to English as it represents faithfully and clearly the broad contours of God’s redemptive love and purposes for the world. The English words, phrases, and clauses are clear and natural. And in some parts of the Writings, the translation along with the footnotes is really solid. We can well imagine that this translation would serve well for devotional use or even public reading of Scripture in contexts where English language skills are limited. Even so, we would not recommend the ERV for preaching, teaching, or Bible study because of the way it veers from accurately representing the form and content of the source text, as illustrated above.

IV. Gospels/Acts

The following comments address the “Characteristics of the Translation” and the “Purpose of the Translation” presented in sections II, C and D of the approved “Criteria for Choosing or Evaluating a Bible Translation” (Addendum A).

A. Characteristics of the translation

In general, the ERV translation seems to remain faithful to the original meaning of the narratives, and the use of language is understandable. The most clarifying emphasis in the ERV relies on the substitution of pronouns by translating their referents (nouns). In that regard, the translation in general accomplishes the purpose of the title: it is easier to read.

For the purpose of this report, the examples presented here will contribute to the discussion of the recommendation of the ERV translation for CRCNA worship services. The examples here focus on instances where the ERV has inclusions and omissions of terminology conveying crucial theological emphases in the biblical text.

1. Balance and commitment to source language and target language

Sometimes the ERV does not commit to the source language, and the translation loses the original statement that can cause doctrinal error in the interpretation. Examples (in comparison with the Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament [SBL]):

a. Matthew 7:1 (Luke 6:37)

- SBL: Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε·
- NIV: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”
- ERV: “Don’t judge others, and God will not judge you.”

b. Mark 1:7a (2:10; 3:15)

- SBL: καὶ ἐκήρυσσεν λέγων· Ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω μου,

- NIV: And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I . . .”
 - ERV: This is what John told the people: “There is someone coming later who is able to do more than I can. . . .”
- c. Luke 6:38b
- SBL: ὃ γὰρ μέτρον μετρεῖτε ἀντιμετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν.
 - NIV: “For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”
 - ERV: “The way you give to others is the way God will give to you.”
- d. John 1:1
- SBL: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,
 - NIV: In the beginning was the Word . . .
 - ERV: Before the world began, the Word was there.
- e. Acts 2:21
- SBL: καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἐὰν ἐπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.
 - NIV: “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
 - ERV: “And everyone who trusts in the Lord will be saved.”

2. Accuracy of translation

Repeatedly, the ERV does not translate significative terms of the writer’s theology. Examples:

- a. Matthew 5:3 (Luke 6:20)
- SBL: Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
 - NIV: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - ERV: “Great blessings belong to those who know they are spiritually in need. God’s kingdom belongs to them.”
- b. Mark 1:13d
- SBL: καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ.
 - NIV: . . . and angels attended him.
 - ERV: Then angels came and helped him.
- c. Luke 7:2b
- SBL: ὃς ἦν αὐτῷ ἔντιμος.
 - NIV: . . . whom his master valued highly,
 - ERV: The officer loved the servant very much.
- d. John 3:17a
- SBL: οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα κρίνη τὸν κόσμον
 - NIV: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world . . .
 - ERV: God sent his Son into the world. He did not send him to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him.

e. Acts 3:14a

- SBL: ὑμεῖς δὲ τὸν ἅγιον καὶ δίκαιον ἠρνήσασθε
- NIV: You disowned the Holy and Righteous One . . .
- ERV: Jesus was holy and good, but you said you did not want him.

3. Clarity of English words, phrases, and clauses

Sometimes the ERV translates into broader terminology that leads to ambiguous meanings. Examples:

a. Matthew 3:6 (Mark 1:5; 2:15, 3:28)

- SBL: καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.
- NIV: Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
- ERV: They confessed the bad things they had done, and John baptized them in the Jordan.

b. Mark 13:20

- SBL: ἀλλὰ διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς οὓς ἐξελέξατο ἐκολόβωσεν τὰς ἡμέρας.
- NIV: But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.
- ERV: But the Lord will make that time short to help the special people he has chosen.

c. Luke 2:49b

- SBL: οὐκ ᾔδειτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναί με;
- NIV: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"
- ERV: You should have known that I must be where my Father's work is.

d. John 6:35a

- SBL: Εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς "Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς
- NIV: Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life.
- ERV: Then Jesus said, "I am the bread that gives life.

e. Acts 15:19

- SBL: διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν (VPPA) ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν,
- NIV: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.
- ERV: "So I think we should not make things hard for those who have turned to God from among the non-Jewish people.

4. Natural quality of the English words, phrases, and clauses

Repeatedly, the ERV translations are often distanced from the natural spiritual implications. Examples:

a. Matthew 21:32 (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:8)

- SBL: ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ· οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρνοι ἐπίστευσαν αὐτῷ· ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες οὐδὲ μετεμελήθητε ὥστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ.

- NIV: For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.
 - ERV: John came showing you the right way to live, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and prostitutes believed John. You saw that happening, but you would not change. You still refused to believe him.
- b. Mark 1:41a (2:28)
- SBL: καὶ ὀργισθεῖς ·
 - Nestle Greek: καὶ σπλαγχνισθεῖς
 - NIV: Jesus was indignant.
 - ERV: These last words made Jesus angry.
- c. Luke 3:1a
- SBL: Ἐν ἔτει δὲ πεντεκαίδεκάτῳ τῆς ἡγεμονίας Τιβερίου Καίσαρος,
 - NIV: In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar
 - ERV: It was the 15th year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar.
- d. John 17:25
- SBL: Πάτερ δίκαιε,
 - NIV: Righteous Father,
 - ERV: Father, you are the one who always does what is right.
- e. Acts 19:20
- SBL: οὕτως κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἤρξανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν.
 - NIV: In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.
 - ERV: This is how the word of the Lord was spreading in a powerful way, causing more and more people to believe.
5. On meeting the needs of the global church
- a. As covenant theology is significant in Reformed theology and churches, it is relevant to pinpoint the ERV translation of the word for “covenant.”
- Matthew 26:28 (Mark 14:24; Luke 1:72)
- SBL: τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν·
 - NIV: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
 - ERV: This wine is my blood, which will be poured out to forgive the sins of many and begin the new agreement from God to his people.
- b. For the global church, a social status might be drawn from the distinction of quantity instead of quality.
- Mark 2:5a
- SBL: καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν
 - NIV: When Jesus saw their faith,
 - ERV: When Jesus saw how much faith they had,

- c. For the global church, a proper distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and happiness should be clarified.

Luke 10:21a

- SBL: Ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἠγαλλιάσατο τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ
- NIV: At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit,
- ERV: Then the Holy Spirit made Jesus feel very happy.

- d. In a culture of conflicts and troubles, it is helpful to distinguish references.

John 14:1a

- SBL: Μὴ ταρασέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδιά·
- NIV: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.
- ERV: Jesus said, “Don’t be troubled.

- e. In a culture of influencers, being a follower does not convey the meaning of worshiper or belonging with honor.

Acts 11:26 (cf. 26:28)

- SBL: χρηματίσαι τε πρώτως ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς.
- NIV: The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
- ERV: It was in Antioch that the followers of the Lord Jesus were called “Christ-followers” for the first time.

6. On demonstrating linguistic awareness of the target audience

The ERV translation for the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts translates in different ways terms that most local congregations use with familiarity and consistency. If we assume that the audience, or reader, will not be introduced to a local church, then the translation is adequate. However, if we assume that the audience, the reader, is joining a local church, then the version does not fulfill its purpose.

- The ERV translates Greek words and phrases into terms that the local church does not use in the development of its doctrines and theology. For example, the ERV translates words like the following with different connotations than what are commonly used: *sin, demonic possession, will of God, righteousness, righteous, faith, ransom, belief, to believe, authority, hosanna, glory, disciples, and gospel.*
- The absence of this terminology can lead the reader to neglect the reality of the inspiration of these terms.
- The absence of this terminology dilutes the beauty of the spiritual content of the terms that are repeatedly presented in the Holy Scriptures, especially in the Gospels.
- The absence of this terminology conveys the idea that the audience, or reader, cannot learn new vocabulary and are not ready to be taught to understand complex sentences. The criteria used by the translators to decide the importance of a given word or terminology in the context of historical church usage is not provided or discernible (i.e., why, how, and which words or terminology were changed

from traditional church usage as the church has understood the terms for centuries).

B. Purpose of the translation

By studying the ERV with exegetical criteria, we were able to identify some instances of both addition to and omission from the original text. We understand that translation must interpret in order to clarify, or to make an easier reading in the target language. However, the additions and omissions in the ERV sometimes overlook the teachings that as Reformed Christians we confess and profess. Thus, we recommend the ERV for use as a secondary version for comparison purposes with the NIV or other versions approved by the CRCNA, whether for teaching, Bible study, preaching, devotional reading, or storytelling.

V. Epistles/Revelation

A. Overview

The ERV aspires to use “simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences while maintaining the integrity of the original texts.” Here follows what we found in the Epistles and Revelation with regard to these matters.

1. Shorter sentences

The ERV does use shorter sentences, which helps to break the text into short, digestible units; however, there are times when the attempt to have short, simple sentences results in a choppy translation that is not natural and does not flow.

2. Simpler vocabulary

The ERV does lower the vocabulary level and attempts to use words and phrasings that are not distinctively biblical or theological (“biblish”), but we also found that the attempts to use simpler vocabulary sometimes led to arduous and awkward renderings.

3. Integrity of the original texts

Integrity can mean a number of things (e.g., integrity to the form of the original would lead to a formal equivalence approach to interpretation, whereas integrity to the ideas and concepts would lead to a dynamic approach). In order to allow for shorter sentences and simpler vocabulary, the translation is often more dynamic rather than formal, and at times the translation is quite dynamic, even combining multiple verses together (e.g., Rom. 3:25–26 and Heb. 6:4–6) to reorder sentences and clauses. Further, there are times when the translation goes beyond Scripture, adding words or phrases in an attempt to clarify (examples below). These examples push (beyond?) the boundaries of dynamic translation.

4. Differences among sections

We found some the translations of some sections of the ERV to be much better than others. For instance, we thought the translation of Revelation had good flow and rhythm, and we rarely paused over particular word

choices. In contrast, we thought the translation of Hebrews was choppy and peculiar.

B. Examples

1. Choppy translations

Here are three examples of the ERV from Hebrews as compared to the New International Reader's Version (NirV—which has a similar goal in terms of reading level, shorter sentences, and simpler vocabulary).

Hebrews 2:14

ERV: These children are people with physical bodies. So Jesus himself became like them and had the same experiences they have.

NirV: Those children have bodies made out of flesh and blood. So Jesus became human like them in order to die for them.

Hebrews 3:13–14

ERV: But encourage each other every day, while you still have something called “today.” Help each other so that none of you will be fooled by sin and become too hard to change. We have the honor of sharing in all that Christ has if we continue until the end to have the sure faith we had in the beginning.

NirV: But build one another up every day. Do it as long as there is still time. Then none of you will become stubborn. You won't be fooled by sin's tricks. We belong to Christ if we hold tightly to the faith we had at first. But we must hold it tightly until the end.

Hebrews 7:23

ERV: Also, when one of those other priests died, he could not continue being a priest. So there were many of those priests.

NirV: There were many priests in Levi's family line. Death kept them from continuing in office.

2. Peculiar and arduous word choices

Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and are not good enough to share God's divine greatness.” The ERV uses “divine greatness” in place of the more typical “glory.” It may not be clear whether “divine greatness” is simpler, but it is more arduous. Further, the ERV uses the term “glory” elsewhere, so it's not clear why that word is avoided here. This is a peculiar choice that is not consistently made.

Ephesians 1:1: “I am an apostle because that is what God wanted.” The underlined phrase here is more typically translated as “by the will of God.” The NirV uses “just as God planned,” which is a similar but smoother, less arduous translation.

Ephesians 5:26: “He used the telling of the Good News to make the church clean by washing it with water.” The underlined portion is a translation of the Greek word *ῥῆμα*, not *gospel/εὐαγγέλιον*, so it is an

odd choice, and the whole sentence is choppy, especially when compared to the NIrV: “He made her clean by washing her with water and the word.”

Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1 (and elsewhere): Jesus sits “at the right side” instead of “right hand” of God. Is “right hand” too complex of an idea? Isn’t it more natural than “right side”?

Hebrews 4:9: “This shows that the seventh-day rest for God’s people is still to come.” The NIrV reads, “So there is still a Sabbath rest for God’s people.” The NIrV provides a smoother translation, and “seventh-day” in the ERV is not simpler, clearer, or more common language.

Hebrews 5:6: “You are a priest forever — the kind of priest Melchizedek was” (similar rendering in Heb. 7:11, 17). This is often translated as “in the order of Melchizedek.” We are not convinced that “the kind of priest Melchizedek was” is as accurate, and we don’t find it as smooth or natural as the NIrV: “You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek.” The NIrV also avoids “in the order of,” but its construction grammatically connects “just like Melchizedek” to the thing that placed Jesus in that order—he is a priest forever. The ERV’s translation makes that connection ambiguous.

Hebrews 9:4: Instead of ark of the covenant, the ERV uses “the Box of the Agreement.” Further, throughout Hebrews, the word typically translated as “covenant” is translated in the ERV as “agreement.” “Agreement” does not carry the full force of the word “covenant.” While “agreement” is a more common term, “covenant” may be an important part of the vocabulary that a reader needs to learn when reading Scripture. Further, is “Box of the Agreement” any less confusing than “ark of the covenant,” especially given some cultural usage of the phrase “ark of the covenant”?

3. Expansive translations—going beyond the original?

Romans 3:21: “But God has a way to make people right, and it has nothing to do with the law. He has now shown us that new way, which the law and the prophets told us about.” This translation is longer than most, more arduous than most, and makes peculiar choices. The ERV translates “righteousness of God” with “a way to make people right.” This phrase is notoriously difficult to translate, and the ERV makes an interpretive decision that the *righteousness of God* is God’s justifying believers. Even if one agrees, it is not convincing that “a way to make people right” clearly, simply, and succinctly communicates that idea. In order to have short sentences, the ERV expands “apart from the law” to “and it has nothing to do with the law” and “has been made known” to “he has now shown us that new way.” While these translations might initially seem innocuous, the complete importation of “that new way” (which is not in the

text) is not theologically innocuous. Is this a “new way”? How does it relate to those who lived before Jesus (Rom. 3:25)? This addition creates theological problems, and it is not in the original text.

Ephesians 1:7 (similarly 2:13): “by his blood sacrifice.” The original text uses the word for “blood” but not the word for “sacrifice.” The ERV interprets the blood to be a sacrifice and adds the word. Whether you agree with the interpretation or not, it goes beyond the original and adds words that have significant theological import that are not present in the text.

Hebrews 3:19: “So we see that they were not allowed to enter and have God’s rest, because they did not believe.” The Greek text has the word for “enter” but not for “and have God’s rest.” While the rest of Hebrews 3-4 might add that idea (though it is debated how entering for different groups relates to God’s rest), the text does not include “and have God’s rest.”

Hebrews 4:14: “We have a great high priest who has gone to live with God in heaven.” The NIV and NRSV say that the high priest has gone “through the heavens,” which is an accurate translation. The NIRV says “into heaven,” which is simpler and still accurate. We don’t think that the ERV’s “to live with God in heaven” is accurate because it expresses a purpose for which the high priest has gone to heaven, which the text does not do here. Further, we think the ERV has wrongly identified the purpose of Christ’s entering or passing through the heavens that the author of Hebrews is developing, especially with regard to the high priesthood imagery.

4. Error

Hebrews 8:5: “The work that these priests do is really only a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.” It is not the *work* of the priests that is a copy and shadow but the *sanctuary* in which they do the work. This is a mistake.

VI. Conclusion

The ERV states that it uses simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences because “new readers sometimes struggle with reading older standardized translations of Bible text because of their unfamiliarity with the Bible.” While this is an honorable goal, we are not sure that this is achieved or, at least, achieved as well as in some other translations. The (sometimes) choppy translation, odd word choices, and peculiar turns of phrase would also make a new reader “struggle” with this text. Further, there are times when the text adds words and goes beyond the original text.

Recommended Changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements

Synod 2024 recommended changes to the Church Order as found in the Church Order Review Task Force report (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 853-64). (Additions are indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~.) As noted by the task force in its report to synod last year (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 140, Recommendation Q), two of the updates included in the proposed changes to the Church Order originated from the work of groups appointed by earlier synods. Because Synod 2024 has already adopted the changes to the present Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c, section c (see *Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 993; *Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 904) and to Church Order Article 14-d (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 962-66; *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 850-53), which had been proposed by groups other than the Church Order Review Task Force, they do not appear as recommendations here.

Article 12

a. *[unchanged]*

b. A minister of the Word who (1) accepts a position endorsed by the CRC related to ~~enters into the work~~ of missions, chaplaincy, or specialized transitional ministry; or (2) is appointed directly by synod; or (3) accepts an appointment that is ratified by synod shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod to ensure that provisions for accountability to the calling church are in place.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 12

c. A minister of the Word may also serve the church in other positions that relate work which relates directly to the calling of a minister. Such ministers shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, but only after the calling church has demonstrated to the satisfaction of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, that the said work is consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word, that provisions for accountability to the calling church are in place, and that the duties of the position do not conflict with the minister's commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 12-e

[The following proposed Article 12-d has been moved and adapted from the previous Article 13-c.]

de. A minister of the Word may be loaned temporarily by the calling church to serve as pastor of a congregation outside the Christian Reformed Church, provided that the duties of the position do not conflict with the minister's commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church. Such ministers shall also be called in the

~~regular manner by a local church, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with synodical regulations, including the concurring advice of the synodical deputies when necessary. Although the specific duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of doctrine and life rests with the calling church.~~

~~—Cf. Supplement, Article 12~~

Article 13

a. *[unchanged]*

b. A minister of the Word whose ~~position work~~ is with a congregation, institution, or agency other than the calling church shall be supervised by the calling church in cooperation with any other congregations, institutions, or agencies involved. The council of the calling church shall have primary responsibility for supervision of doctrine and life. The congregations, institutions, or agencies, where applicable, shall have primary responsibility for supervision of duties.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 13-b

[Article 13-c has been moved and adapted to become the proposed Article 12-d.]

~~e. A minister of the Word may be loaned temporarily by the calling church to serve as pastor of a congregation outside of the Christian Reformed Church, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with the synodical regulations. Although the specific duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of doctrine and life rests with the calling church.~~

~~—Cf. Supplement, Article 13-e~~

Supplement, Article 12-e

Regulations for the application of Article 12-e of the Church Order to specific tasks and situations:

A. To be “called in the regular manner” means that a minister of the Word, whether called to serve a congregation or to serve in a noncongregational ministry, requires the following (see Church Order Articles 4, 9-10) in addition to the fulfillment of any other synodical regulations or classical approvals:

1. Nomination by the council and election by the congregation
2. An extension of a call by the council
3. Approval of the counselor who acts on behalf of classis
4. Ordination or installation in a public worship service

The requirement for a separate installation service during a CRC worship service is optional in the case of a minister serving on loan to a congregation in another denomination.

Noncongregational positions “consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word” are those in which a minister serves beyond a local CRC congregation to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture under the authority of and as a public representative of the church, in a way that the members of the church may be gathered in and built up in Christ.

B. Positions that do not require concurrence of the synodical deputies

1. Types of ministry positions

a. Positions regulated by Articles 9-10 of the Church Order. This includes congregational positions, whether solo-pastor positions or additional staff ministry positions; or also those of pastors serving multiple CRC congregations or in multiple vocational settings.

b. Positions regulated by Article 12-b of the Church Order. These include positions that have the endorsement of a synodically authorized body, such as those of chaplains, missionaries, and specialized transition ministers endorsed or accredited by the CRC denomination; or positions whose appointees are approved by or ratified by synod itself (such as professors of theology or other CRC executive staff positions requiring ratification by synod). Classis minutes should note that the position is deemed consistent with the ministry of the Word.

c. Calls regulated by Article 8-b of the Church Order and its supplemental rules. These include ministers who participate in the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers between the CRC and the Reformed Church in America. Classis minutes should indicate the concurrence of the sending body (cf. Supplement, Art. 8, D, 7).

2. Prior to calling a minister of the Word to any noncongregational position chaplaincy ministry, the calling church is required to ensure that the minister has secured any necessary endorsements from accrediting institutions within or outside the Christian Reformed Church, and that all synodical regulations have been followed. A Covenant of Joint Supervision shall be mutually agreed to and signed by the minister, the calling church, and the appointing organization (cf. Supplement, Art. 8, Section D; Supplement, Art. 13-b). obtain the endorsement of the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (Acts of Synod 1973, p. 56; amended Acts of Synod 1998, p. 391).

C. Positions that require specific approval of the classis and concurrence of synodical deputies

1. In all other cases of noncongregational positions, tThe calling church shall secure the prior approval of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, for each new ministerial position, by providing classis with the following information:

- a. The description of the official position (purposes, duties, qualifications, etc.) as determined by the calling church in consultation with cooperating agencies as applicable.
 - b. The demonstration that the position will be consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word.
 - c. A Covenant of Joint Supervision that shall be mutually agreed to and signed by the minister, the calling church, and the appointing organization (cf. Supplement, Art. 13-b).~~The evidence that the minister will be directly accountable to the calling church, including an outline of requirements for reporting to the calling church, and supervision by the calling church, in consultation with cooperating agencies as applicable.~~
 - d. When any position having been declared by a classis to be “spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling” . . . becomes vacant, this position shall be reviewed by the classis and synodical deputies in light of Articles 11-14 of the Church Order before another call is issued.
 - e. When a new ministry opportunity can be met only by immediate action, the calling church (and the appropriate denominational agency) may obtain provisional approval from the classical interim committee, subject to subsequent approval by classis with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies. The letter of call must indicate the provisional nature of this call if such approval has not yet been granted. In the event that the provisional approval is not sustained and the minister desires to continue in the position, the minister may be ~~honorably~~ released from office and may be readmitted according to the regulations of the Church Order. (Cf. Article 14-e.)
2. Ministers ~~A minister~~ whose service is requested by a congregation outside the Christian Reformed Church may be loaned temporarily to serve such a church while still retaining ministerial status in the Christian Reformed Church in keeping with the following regulations:
- a. The congregation seeking the services of the Christian Reformed minister recognizes the value of a Reformed witness and allows the minister to serve in a way consistent with the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church, ordinarily articulated through statements of faith in harmony with those of the Christian Reformed denomination. ~~is desirous of the Reformed faith and seriously contemplates affiliation with the Christian Reformed Church or some other Reformed denomination, or is already in a Reformed denomination and seeks to be strengthened in the Reformed faith.~~

~~b. The minister contemplating service in a nondenominational church acknowledges this as an opportunity to encourage such a church to affiliate with either the Christian Reformed Church or a Reformed denomination similar to the Christian Reformed Church.~~

b. The loaning of such ministerial services may be for a period of time not to exceed two years. Extension of not more than two years each may be granted if circumstances warrant, with the approval of classis and the synodical deputies.

c. These regulations also apply when pastors whose credentials are held in the CRC receive a request to serve simultaneously in an additional congregation outside the CRC.

d. If the requested service is in the Reformed Church in America, calls shall be processed in keeping with the regulations for the Orderly Exchange of Ministers (cf. Supplement, Art. 8, D).

D. In all cases, the minister shall be called in the regular manner, and the council and the counselor shall render to classis an account of all matters processed. Classis minutes should reflect the work of the counselor in accordance with Church Order Article 42-c.

E. Where it is possible and feasible, ministers of the Word should ordinarily be called by a local church in close geographic proximity to the congregation, institution, or agency being served, and the pastor's membership should normally reside with the calling church. If the ministry position congregation to be served is in close proximity to a Christian Reformed congregation of another is located in a classis other than that of the calling church, the approval of that classis shall be required, in addition to the approval of the classis of the minister's calling church, and the synodical deputies.

F. Continuation under the Christian Reformed Church Pension Plan shall require that the minister, or the congregation, institution, or agency non-Christian Reformed church which is being served, shall contribute to the ministers' pension fund the amount which is determined annually by the Ministers' Pension Funds committees for ministers serving in noncongregational extraordinary positions outside of our denomination.

G. Supervision of a minister in noncongregational specialized ministry may be transferred, at the request of the minister or of the calling church, to another church. Such a tTransfer of ministerial credentials requires the regular calling process of the local church and must be approved by both councils and classes.

H. If a noncongregational ministry position is eliminated, the minister should be formally released according to the regulations of the Church Order appropriate to the situation.

Supplement, Article 13-b

A. ~~Provisions for cooperative supervision of ministers of the Word working for agencies and institutions not directly under the authority of the synod of the CRCNA are to be formulated and processed according to the regulations contained in Church Order Supplement, Article 12-c and the provisions regarding chaplains adopted by Synod 1998 (see Acts of Synod 1998, pp. 391-92, 457-60). When the position of a minister of the Word is with other than the calling church, the position shall be regulated by a Covenant of Joint Supervision as approved by the minister, the calling church, and the appointing organization, with concurrence of the classis. Any changes to the status of the Covenant of Joint Supervision, as soon as they are known, shall be submitted to all parties for review and concurrence.~~

B. Situations requiring a change in status of a CRC minister in a noncongregational setting

1. If any council, agency, or institution of the CRC involved in the cooperative supervision of a minister of the Word learns about significant deviation in doctrine, life, or duties, it shall officially inform in writing its partner(s) in that supervision about such deviation before any action is taken that affects that minister's status and future. A similar communication officially informing its partner(s) in supervision is expected from an agency or institution when a minister's status is altered at a time of downsizing or position elimination.
2. ~~Should a the minister serving a non-CRC congregation or noncongregational ministry become subject to discipline, the supervising institution non-Christian Reformed congregation which is being served shall have the right to suspend the minister from service-serving that church, but suspension from office and deposition may be applied only by the calling church council that is part of the Christian Reformed Church. A similar communication is requested when a minister's status is altered, whether due to a change in the job description or at a time of downsizing or position elimination.~~
3. In all cases of discipline or other changes in status regarding a ministry position, the minister should be formally released from the call or issued a new call according to the appropriate provisions of the Church Order.

C. The church visitors of classis shall inquire annually into the supervision of the calling church toward said minister(s) as well as the reporting of said minister(s) to the calling church. The church visitors shall inform classis of departure from the approved provisions for supervision and reporting.

D. All pastors serving in noncongregational positions remain bound to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by

one's signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.

Article 14

a. A minister of the Word shall not leave the call ~~the congregation~~ with which the minister is connected for another position ~~church~~ without the consent of the council which issued the call.

b. *[unchanged]*

c. A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, may not forsake the office. A minister may, however, be released from office to enter upon a nonministerial vocation for such valid ~~weighty~~ reasons as shall receive the approval of the classis with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-c

d. *[unchanged]*

e. A former minister of the Word who was released from office may be declared eligible for call upon approval of the classis by which such action was taken, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies. The classis, in the presence of the deputies, shall conduct an interview that examines the circumstances surrounding the release and the renewed desire to serve in ministry, and shall ensure that all synodical regulations have been met. Upon acceptance of a call, the person shall be reordained.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-e

Article 16

A minister who for valid reasons desires a temporary leave of absence from service to the congregation must have the approval of the council, which shall continue to have supervision over the minister. A council may also, in consultation with the minister, initiate the process of granting a temporary leave of absence when it believes that the situation warrants such an arrangement. In all cases of a temporary leave of absence the intention shall be that the minister shall return to service in that congregation.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 16

Article 17

a. Ministers who are neither eligible for retirement nor worthy of discipline may for valid ~~weighty~~ reasons be released from active ministerial service in a position to which they have been called by a congregation, through action initiated by themselves, by a council, or jointly. Such release shall be given only with the approval of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with synodical regulations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 17-a

b. *[unchanged]*

c. A minister of the Word who has been released from active ministerial service ~~in a congregation~~ shall be eligible for call for a period of two years, after which time the classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, shall declare the minister to be released from the ministerial office. For valid ~~weighty~~ reasons the classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, may extend the eligibility for call on a yearly basis.

d. *[unchanged]*

Article 42-b

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of office-bearers chosen for their experience and counsel. Team composition shall include a minister of the Word and at least one other office-bearer. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are ~~free~~ to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

— Cf. Supplement, Article 42-b

Supplement, Article 8, D, 7

7. Approval for extended service must be done in consultation with and with the concurrence of the sending body. (In the CRC, the sending body is the calling church council; in the RCA, it is the classis holding the pastor's membership.) The minister remains accountable to the sending body for continuation of ministerial status. In the event of termination of a call, the polity of the calling church shall be followed, in consultation with the sending church and in accordance with synodically established procedures.

(Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 564-65)

Supplement, Article 14-b, a-b

Changes are proposed to sections a and b; sections c and d of Supplement, Article 14-b would remain unchanged.

a. ~~Synod directed the churches and classes dealing with ministers who depart from the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) in order to seek ordination in the ministry of the Word in another church to take note of the statement made by Synod 1978 that "Synod has instructed "all our churches and classes that in all cases of resignation a proper resolution of dismissal must be adopted with the concurring advice of synodical deputies." and to realize that this~~ This resolution statement allows for a

broad degree of flexibility in responding to such situations (cf. *Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 73).

- b. In making such a resolution, Synod directed the churches and classes should take into account the manner and spirit in which a minister has acted during the time leading up to and including departure from office when determining what action to take. (Some situations may require a deposition; others may require only a simple release from office.)

Supplement, Article 14-e

Process for reentry into CRC ministry after a release from office via Article 14 or 17:

1. A former minister who was released through the provisions of Article 14-b, 14-c, or 14-d or Article 17-c or 17-d and desires readmission to CRCNA ministry should be interviewed by the classis in which the original action was taken. The interview should examine the following:

- a. the circumstances surrounding the release
- b. the applicant's theological and ministerial journey since the release
- c. the sense of call and renewed commitment to service in the CRC

The classis, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, shall then make a decision regarding whether to endorse the request to begin the process for readmission.

2. If approval is given to proceed, the classis shall notify the Candidacy Committee to guide the applicant through the completion of any requirements for ministry imposed by synod subsequent to the original ordination. If the applicant has served in ministry outside the CRC, the Candidacy Committee should also receive and review recommendations from the church and regional body last served by the minister.
3. The Candidacy Committee shall notify the releasing classis once all requirements are complete and favorable recommendations have been received.
4. Upon completion of all requirements, the releasing classis shall declare the former minister eligible for call. A former minister shall not be nominated for a call until the releasing classis and the Candidacy Committee have approved the applicant's eligibility for call. Eligibility for call shall be for a period of two years. An individual who has not received and accepted a call within that time and who desires to continue eligibility for call, must request an extension through the classis that approved the request for eligibility for call.

5. The ordination and installation of a former minister who has been declared eligible for call shall require the approval of the calling church's classis counselor or the calling church's classis interim committee, which shall see that all synodical requirements have been met.

6. The provisions of Supplement, Article 84 related to reinstatement of ministers who have been deposed also apply to ministers who resign under discipline or to avoid discipline and later seek reordination by way of Article 14-e.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 866)

Supplement, Article 16

A council may initiate the process of granting a leave of absence only after seeking the advice of the church visitors, who should inform the classis of the situation when a written report is provided to the assembly (Church Order Art. 42-b). An initial leave of absence should be granted for no more than six weeks, with any extension of this time requiring additional advice of the church visitors. In no case may a leave of absence initiated by the council extend for a period of longer than twelve weeks.

Supplement, Article 17-a

A new section a is proposed; the current sections a and b would become sections b and c, respectively, and their content would remain unchanged, except as where indicated in subsection c, 2. The current *Note* at the end of Supplement, Article 17-a would be moved to section a, 4, as shown.

Provisions regulating release from ministerial service in a congregation

a. General Provisions

- 1) All Article 17 separations, even those requested by a pastor or those jointly initiated by a pastor and council, are formally a request of the calling council and shall be handled as such by the classis.
- 2) Pastors, churches, and classes are encouraged to take note of denominational resources available that provide assistance in the process of Article 17 separations, and to call upon outside resources or mediators when necessary (in addition to the involvement of classis representatives).
- 3) In all situations, councils and pastors shall utilize a formal separation agreement that identifies the publicly stated reason(s) for the separation, the effective date of the separation, the financial arrangements agreed upon by all parties, and other relevant information. This document shall be submitted to classis for its approval when the council formally requests the Article 17 separation. If the pastor and council disagree on specific matters, the

areas of disagreement shall be clearly identified, and classis shall adjudicate those matters separately.

- 4) Classis minutes will concisely record the grounds for the separation—for example, family situation, conflict, continuing education, church closure, etc. Article 17 separations will be processed according to the guidelines set forth by synod and the appropriate denominational agencies. Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding “release from ministerial service” adopted by Synod 2024 (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 859-64) and Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 392-96) as amended by Synod 2010 (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 915-16).
- 5) Releases from calls issued jointly between a CRC council and a congregation in another denomination should be processed in accordance with the principles established by Synod 2024 (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 859-64).
- 6) If a separation does occur, it is important to recognize that there are continuing needs. The members of the congregation require continued support, opportunity to grieve, and guidance for future planning. The separated pastor and his/her family should not be forgotten as they leave the congregation and seek another call. The congregation and classis should covenant to provide continuing ministry and care for them, assisting in any way possible to encourage personal healing and further opportunities for ministry.

ba. [unchanged]

cb. [unchanged] . . .

- 2) In conjunction with the church council, the committee shall secure interim pastoral leadership, preferably a specialized interim pastor, and set goals. (~~Thrive Pastor Church Relations~~ is able to assist with securing pastoral leadership.)
- 3) [unchanged] . . .

~~Note: Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding “release from ministerial service” adopted by Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 392-96) and as amended by Synod 2010 (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 915-16).~~

Mandate for the Finance and Administration Advisory Committee of Synod

I. Background

For decades, an advisory committee of synod has reviewed finances. The advisory committee of synod that is given this task is often assigned additional tasks. This mandate addresses only financial oversight.

The finances of the denomination and its related agencies, institutions, and entities are complex. Because each entity has legal entities in one or more jurisdictions, real oversight and decision making happen at the level of those boards and the Council of Delegates (see Church Order Supplement, Art. 45, section a).

II. Purpose

The finance advisory committee of synod is tasked with reviewing the financial health of the CRCNA organization.

III. Tasks and responsibilities

- a. Receives for information the consolidated financial records.

Prior to being presented at synod, these reports have been received and reviewed by the Finance Committee of the COD and the finance committees of the ministry boards (the legal entities responsible to the governments of their respective jurisdictions). These boards include the U.S. and Canada ministry boards, the ReFrame Ministries boards, the World Renew boards, the Calvin University board, the Calvin Theological Seminary board, the Canada and U.S. Ministers' Pension boards, and the U.S. Loan Fund board.

- b. Receives for information reports on adherence to policies.

The COD Finance Committee is responsible for ensuring that proper policies are in place and that the policies are being followed. If policy changes have been recommended or if policies are not being followed, the COD is to report this as information to this committee.

In cases of significant changes to policy or significant deviations from policy, the COD may request that synod make changes. Such changes would come to synod as recommendations from the COD.

- c. Receives for information the annual budgets for the fiscal year that begins in July following synod.

Prior to being presented at synod, the budgets have been received and reviewed by the Finance Committee of the COD. Prior to going to the COD, the budgets are reviewed by the boards of the legal entities listed above.

- d. Ministry share system oversight

Reviews and monitors the performance of the ministry share system.

- Makes recommendations to the COD regarding ministry share revenues, projections, and budget process for the upcoming year, if needed.
- e. **Ministers' Pension Plans**
Reviews the reports from the Ministers' Pension Plans. Recommendations can be made to synod regarding the pension plans; however, the Pension Trustees are the final decision makers when it comes to matters involving the pensions.¹
 - f. This committee may also be assigned additional responsibilities based on the specific work that comes to synod in any given year.

¹ The Rules for Synodical Procedure (section VII, Pension Matters at Synod) states:
That synod defer action on overtures, minority reports, and motions from the floor of synod that involve substantive matters concerning the denomination's retirement plans until advised by the U.S. and Canadian pension trustees. The same is requested for actions that may be initiated by synod's advisory committee on finance or by any other of synod's advisory committees that is at variance with recommendations made by the pension trustees or is independent of any action recommended by them. Advice to synod will be in the form of a memorandum or other materials directed to synod's advisory committee on finance, which is the committee normally designated for processing matters related to the denomination's benefit plans. *(Acts of Synod 2004, pp. 623-24)*

APPENDIX F**Condensed Financial Statements of the
Agencies, Institutions, and Ministries****Schedule 1****THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA**

Agency: Calvin Theological Seminary

Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 2,349	\$ 504	\$ 609
Investments	\$ 58,491	\$ 68,328	\$ 74,912
Other	\$ 18,067	\$ 21,905	\$ 17,758
Total Assets	\$ 78,907	\$ 90,737	\$ 93,279
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 690	\$ 254	\$ 542
Other Payables	\$ 1,279	\$ 6,135	\$ 2,537
Total Payables	\$ 1,969	\$ 6,389	\$ 3,079
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 57,530	\$ 83,215	\$ 88,887
Unrestricted	\$ 19,408	\$ 1,133	\$ 1,313
Total Net Assets	\$ 76,938	\$ 84,348	\$ 90,200
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 78,907	\$ 90,737	\$ 93,279

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Calvin Theological Seminary
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual	Fiscal 24-25 Budget	
INCOME:					
Ministry Share	\$ 1,920	\$ 1,603	\$ 1,374	\$ 1,015	
% of Total Income	28.7%	24.7%	19.0%	13.8%	
Other Gift Income:					
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 1,848	\$ 1,753	\$ 1,615	\$ 1,825	
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ 128	\$ 150	\$ 150	
Total Gift Income	\$ 1,848	\$ 1,881	\$ 1,765	\$ 1,975	
% of Total Income	27.6%	29.0%	24.4%	26.8%	
Other Income:					
Tuition/Sales	\$ 1,898	\$ 1,839	\$ 2,095	\$ 2,230	
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Investment Income	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 1,022	\$ 1,157	\$ 2,006	\$ 2,158	
Total Other Income	\$ 2,920	\$ 2,996	\$ 4,101	\$ 4,388	
% of Total Income	43.7%	46.2%	56.6%	59.5%	
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 6,688	\$ 6,480	\$ 7,240	\$ 7,378	
EXPENSES					
Program Services:					
Education	\$ 4,904	\$ 2,657	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,234	
Domestic Ministries	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 99	\$ 97	
International	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 109	\$ -	
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Other	\$ -	\$ 625	\$ 355	\$ 362	
Total Program Service	\$ 4,904	\$ 3,282	\$ 5,363	\$ 4,693	
% of Total \$	68.3%	44.0%	72.7%	62.4%	
Support Services:					
Management & General	\$ 1,330	\$ 3,003	\$ 957	\$ 1,871	
Plant Operations	\$ 463	\$ 604	\$ 542	\$ 432	
Fund-raising	\$ 480	\$ 575	\$ 518	\$ 525	
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Total Support Service	\$ 2,273	\$ 4,182	\$ 2,017	\$ 2,828	
% of Total Expenditures	31.7%	56.0%	27.3%	37.6%	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 7,177	\$ 7,464	\$ 7,380	\$ 7,521	
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (489)	\$ (984)	\$ (140)	\$ (143)	
Total Program Service FTE's	32	29	26	30	Estimate
Total Support Service FTE's	16	14	14	15	Estimate
TOTAL FTE's	48	43	40	45	

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Calvin University
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	21-22 Actual	22-23 Actual	23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 3,624	\$ 38,892	\$ 19,367
Investments	\$ 354,149	\$ 335,717	\$ 347,070
Other	\$ 225,129	\$ 226,976	\$ 254,479
Total Assets	\$ 582,902	\$ 601,585	\$ 620,916
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 2,967	\$ 4,287	\$ 10,948
Other Payables	\$ 128,545	\$ 119,823	\$ 114,712
Total Payables	\$ 131,512	\$ 124,110	\$ 125,660
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 176,642	\$ 304,395	\$ 322,497
Unrestricted	\$ 274,748	\$ 173,080	\$ 172,759
Total Net Assets	\$ 451,390	\$ 477,475	\$ 495,256
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 582,902	\$ 601,585	\$ 620,916

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Calvin University
 Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual	Fiscal 24-25 Budget
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ 1,801	\$ 1,442	\$ 914	\$ 804
% of Total Income	2.0%	1.7%	1.0%	0.8%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 7,052	\$ 3,292	\$ 3,780	\$ 3,908
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	\$ 7,052	\$ 3,292	\$ 3,780	\$ 3,908
% of Total Income	8.0%	3.8%	4.2%	4.1%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ 73,199	\$ 70,455	\$ 70,429	\$ 78,507
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income				
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 6,004	\$ 10,462	\$ 15,042	\$ 11,562
Total Other Income	\$ 79,203	\$ 80,917	\$ 85,471	\$ 90,069
% of Total Income	89.9%	94.5%	94.8%	95.0%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 88,056	\$ 85,651	\$ 90,165	\$ 94,781
EXPENSES				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ 67,694	\$ 76,264	\$ 75,130	\$ 81,694
Domestic Ministries	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Interenational	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 67,694	\$ 76,264	\$ 75,130	\$ 81,694
% of Total Expenditures	81.3%	82.8%	78.5%	81.5%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 2,713	\$ 2,890	\$ 3,400	\$ 2,999
Fund-raising	\$ 2,137	\$ 1,163	\$ 2,863	\$ 2,931
Plant Operations	\$ 8,133	\$ 9,060	\$ 9,998	\$ 8,004
Debt Service	\$ 2,600	\$ 2,774	\$ 4,274	\$ 4,563
Total Support Service	\$ 15,583	\$ 15,887	\$ 20,535	\$ 18,497
% of Total Expenditures	18.7%	17.2%	21.5%	18.5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 83,277	\$ 92,151	\$ 95,665	\$ 100,191
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 4,779	\$ (6,500)	\$ (5,500)	\$ (5,410)
Total Program Service FTE's	479	503	546	-
Total Support Service FTE's	120	126	135	-
TOTAL FTE's	599	629	681	-

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Grants
Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ -	\$ 1,155	\$ 3,221
Investments	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Assets	\$ 2,618	\$ 1,155	\$ 3,221
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 2,618	\$ 1,115	\$ 3,221
Unrestricted			
Total Net Assets	\$ 2,618	\$ 1,115	\$ 3,221
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 2,618	\$ 1,115	\$ 3,221

These assets are shown separately because they can only be used for specific programs in Thrive ministries and if not used for that intent would have to be returned to the granting agency.

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Grants
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @ .7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @ .7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @ .7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @ .75
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 43	\$ 154	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	\$ 43	\$ 154	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	6.3%	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ 348	\$ 338	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 291	\$ -	\$ 2,273	\$ 1,200
Total Other Income	\$ 639	\$ 338	\$ 2,273	\$ 1,200
% of Total Income				
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 682	\$ 492	\$ 2,273	\$ 1,200
EXPENSES:				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,104	\$ 890	\$ 3,548
International	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,104	\$ 890	\$ 3,548
% of Total Expenditures				
Support Services:				
Management & General	-	-	-	-
Plant Operations	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	-	-	-	-
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total \$	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,104	\$ 890	\$ 3,548
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (1,318)	\$ (612)	\$ 1,383	\$ (2,348)
Total Program Service FTEs	2	1	-	6
Total Support Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
TOTAL FTEs	2	1	-	6

These FTE's come from various different ministries and add up to 6 full time equivalents working on these specific grant projects.

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
SUMMARY OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURES (in 000s of U.S.\$)
CALENDAR YEAR ENDING IN 2024

	Ministry Share	Employer Contrib.	Participant Contrib.	Investment Earnings	Total Income	Distributions	Management General	Total Expenses	Planned Net Revenue (Expense)
Ministers Pension Fund Canada	0.0%	883 3.8%	- 0.0%	22,542 96.2%	23,425 100.0%	5,355 87.6%	760 12.4%	6,115 100.0%	17,310
Ministers Pension Fund US	0.0%	4,498 10.5%	- 0.0%	38,155 89.5%	42,653 100.0%	11,427 88.8%	1,442 11.2%	12,869 100.0%	29,784
Special Assistance Fund Canada	0.0%	1,893 97.6%	- 0.0%	46 2.4%	1,939 100.0%	1,830 100.0%	- 0.0%	1,830 100.0%	109
Special Assistance Fund US	0.0%	2 40.0%	- 0.0%	3 60.0%	5 100.0%	121 98.4%	2 1.6%	123 100.0%	(118)
Total	0.00%	7,276 10.70%	- 0.00%	60,746 89.30%	68,022 100.00%	18,733 89.5%	2,204 10.5%	20,937 100.0%	47,085

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH-Combined Canada and US
SUMMARY OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURES (in 000s of U.S.\$)
FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

Denominational Ministries	Ministry Share	Gift Income	Other Income	Total Income	Program Services	Support Services	Total Expenses	Planned Net Revenue (Expense)
Calvin Theological Seminary*	1,374 19.0%	1,765 24.4%	4,101 56.6%	7,240 100.0%	5,363 72.7%	2,017 27.3%	7,380 100.0%	(140)
Calvin University*	914 1.0%	3,780 4.2%	85,471 94.8%	90,165 100.0%	75,130 78.5%	20,535 21.5%	95,665 100.0%	(5,500)
Loan Fund*	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	743 100.0%	743 100.0%	245 56.5%	189 43.5%	434 100.0%	309
Ministry Board	2,367 69.5%	212 6.2%	827 24.3%	3,406 100.0%	1,780 34.6%	3,369 65.4%	5,149 100.0%	(1,743)
Office of General Secretary	2,454 73.4%	449 13.4%	439 13.1%	3,342 100.0%	2,892 72.3%	1,110 27.7%	4,002 100.0%	(660)
Resonate Global Missions	3,152 17.4%	12,742 70.3%	2,234 12.3%	18,128 100.0%	17,652 80.7%	4,226 19.3%	21,878 100.0%	(3,750)
ReFrame Ministries	1,552 20.5%	4,850 64.2%	1,157 15.3%	7,559 100.0%	4,853 69.1%	2,173 30.9%	7,026 100.0%	533
Thrive	4,237 83.6%	661 13.0%	170 3.4%	5,068 100.0%	2,682 73.4%	974 26.6%	3,656 100.0%	1,412
World Renew	- 0.0%	22,381 61.7%	13,881 38.3%	36,262 100.0%	31,999 79.9%	8,041 20.1%	40,040 100.0%	(3,778)
Total	13,683 8.12%	46,628 27.67%	108,196 64.21%	168,507 100.00%	140,816 78.2%	39,265 21.8%	180,081 100.0%	(11,574)

* denotes US only operations

- 1) This sheet is divided into two sections. The first four columns on the left are income, the three columns to the right are expenses with the difference between the income less the expense is shown in the right-most column.
- 2) The numbers in the right-most column with parenthesis represent more expenses than income. Note these represent planned spend down of prior year funds.
- 3) The percentage represent the amount of the total income or total of the expense.
- 4) Ministry Board includes the income and expenses of the Canadian Ministries for 1,550,000

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Loan Fund
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 9,263	\$ 3,982	\$ 1,474
Investments	\$ -	\$ 3,500	\$ 4,174
Other	\$ 10,806	\$ 9,783	\$ 10,015
Total Assets	\$ 20,069	\$ 17,265	\$ 15,663
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 36	\$ 15	\$ 20
Other Payables	\$ 14,355	\$ 11,500	\$ 9,379
Total Payables	\$ 14,391	\$ 11,515	\$ 9,399
Net Assets			
Board Designated	\$ 450	\$ 450	\$ 650
Unrestricted	\$ 5,228	\$ 5,300	\$ 5,614
Total Net Assets	\$ 5,678	\$ 5,750	\$ 6,264
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 20,069	\$ 17,265	\$ 15,663

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Loan Fund
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual	Fiscal 24-25 Budget
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Agency Services				
Investment Income	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 164
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 718	\$ 551	\$ 743	\$ 580
Total Other Income	\$ 718	\$ 551	\$ 743	\$ 744
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 718	\$ 551	\$ 743	\$ 744
EXPENSES:				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
International	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ 321	\$ 261	\$ 245	\$ 306
Total Program Service	\$ 321	\$ 261	\$ 245	\$ 306
% of Total Expenditures	44.1%	54.5%	56.5%	46.9%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 407	\$ 218	\$ 189	\$ 347
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	\$ 407	\$ 218	\$ 189	\$ 347
% of Total Expenditures	55.9%	45.5%	43.5%	53.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 728	\$ 479	\$ 434	\$ 653
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (10)	\$ 72	\$ 309	\$ 91
Total Program Service FTEs				
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	2	2
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	2	2

Schedule 1

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Agency: Office of General Secretary, Thrive, Ministry Board

Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 8,699	\$ 7,503	\$ 4,800
Investments	\$ (932)	\$ (876)	\$ 84
Other	8,319	6,485	9,245
Total Assets	\$ 16,086	\$ 13,112	\$ 14,129
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 226	\$ 516	\$ 506
Other Payables	\$ 2,363	\$ 2,614	\$ 2,772
Total Payables	\$ 2,589	\$ 3,130	\$ 3,278
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 215	\$ 175	\$ 956
Unrestricted	\$ 13,282	\$ 9,807	\$ 9,895
Total Net Assets	\$ 13,497	\$ 9,982	\$ 10,851
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 16,086	\$ 13,112	\$ 14,129

This reflects the balance sheet of Office of General Secretary, Thrive, Canadian Ministries and the Ministry Boards

See the Grants balance sheet to see the additional resources that the CRC has with Grant funds.

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Ministry Board
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @.7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @.75
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,367	\$ 3,156
% of Total Income	69.5%	81.1%
Other Gift Income:		
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 173	\$ -
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ 39	\$ -
Total Gift Income	<u>\$ 212</u>	<u>\$ -</u>
% of Total Income	6.2%	0.0%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 678	\$ 737
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ -	\$ -
Grants/Misellaneous	\$ 149	\$ -
Total Other Income	<u>\$ 827</u>	<u>\$ 737</u>
% of Total Income	24.3%	18.9%
TOTAL INCOME	<u><u>\$ 3,406</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 3,893</u></u>
EXPENSES:		
Program Services:		
Education	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 1,780	\$ 1,943
International	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	<u>\$ 1,780</u>	<u>\$ 1,943</u>
% of Total Expenditures	34.6%	45.0%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 2,757	\$ 1,638
Fund-raising	\$ 602	\$ 736
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	<u>\$ 3,359</u>	<u>\$ 2,374</u>
% of Total Expenditures	65.4%	55.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u><u>\$ 5,139</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 4,317</u></u>
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	<u><u>\$ (1,733)</u></u>	<u><u>\$ (424)</u></u>
Total Program Service FTE's	18	18
Total Support Service FTE's	6	7
TOTAL FTE's	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

This includes the Canadian Ministries expenses and budget
See Office of General Secretary and Thrive for the rest
of the Income and Expenses of the CRC.

Ministry Share								
Allocation Summary								
rev Dec 2, 2024								
Ministry Share			0.75					
Allocation Summary			Budget			Budget		
Fiscal 2024-2025	Budget	Budget		Budget		Budget		
		Combined (US\$)		CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
CRC Office of General Secretary	3,413,500	20.8%	820,000	615,000	12.6%	2,798,500	24.3%	
CRC Ministry Board	3,155,500	19.3%	2,130,000	1,597,500	32.8%	1,558,000	13.5%	
Thrive (Congregational Ministries)	4,100,000	25.0%	1,200,000	900,000	18.5%	3,200,000	27.8%	
ReFrame Ministries	1,206,000	7.4%	520,000	390,000	8.0%	816,000	7.1%	
Resonate Global Missions	2,600,000	15.9%	1,310,000	982,500	20.2%	1,617,500	14.1%	
Calvin University	800,000	4.9%	0	0	0.0%	800,000	7.0%	
Calvin Seminary	1,100,000	6.7%	520,000	390,000	8.0%	710,000	6.2%	
MPF Special Assistance Fund	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
	16,375,000	100.0%	6,500,000	4,875,000	100.0%	11,500,000	100.0%	
Ministry Share			0.7371					
Allocation Summary			Actual			Actual		
Fiscal 2023-2024	Actual	Actual		Actual		Actual		
		Combined (US\$)		CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
CRC Office of General Secretary	2,452,253	15.5%	629,980	464,358	10.0%	1,987,895	17.7%	
CRC Ministry Board	2,071,522	13.1%	1,835,384	1,352,862	29.3%	718,660	6.4%	
Thrive (Congregational Ministries)	4,233,271	26.7%	1,159,504	854,670	18.5%	3,378,601	30.1%	
ReFrame Ministries	1,549,472	9.8%	694,972	512,264	11.1%	1,037,208	9.2%	
Resonate Global Missions	3,147,913	19.9%	1,388,390	1,023,382	22.1%	2,124,531	18.9%	
Calvin University	967,128	6.1%	1,242	915	0.0%	966,213	8.6%	
Calvin Seminary	1,418,918	9.0%	565,308	416,689	9.0%	1,002,229	8.9%	
MPF Special Assistance Fund	5,834	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	5,834	0.1%	
	15,846,311	100.0%	6,274,780	4,625,140	100.0%	11,221,171	100.0%	
Ministry Share			0.7462					
Allocation Summary			Actual			Actual		
Fiscal 2022-2023	Actual	Actual		Actual		Actual		
		Combined (US\$)		CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
CRC Office of General Secretary	2,952,188	16.7%	971,891	725,268	15.4%	2,226,920	17.9%	
Congregational & Justice Ministries	5,383,605	30.4%	2,080,723	1,552,727	32.9%	3,830,878	30.7%	
Raise Up	253,329	1.4%	0	0	0.0%	253,329	2.0%	
ReFrame Ministries	1,969,279	11.1%	773,000	576,847	12.2%	1,392,432	11.2%	
Resonate Global Missions	3,494,842	19.7%	1,778,204	1,326,974	28.1%	2,167,867	17.4%	
Special Assistance Fund	9,423	0.1%	6,396	4,773	0.1%	4,650	0.0%	
Calvin University	1,447,568	8.2%	11,597	8,654	0.2%	1,438,914	11.5%	
Calvin Seminary	1,675,263	9.4%	704,090	525,423	11.1%	1,149,841	9.2%	
	17,185,497	96.9%	6,325,902	4,720,666	100.0%	12,464,831	100.0%	
Ministry Share			0.7430					
Allocation Summary			Budget			Budget		
Fiscal 2022-2023	Approved	Budget		Budget		Budget		
		Combined (US\$)		CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
CRC Office of General Secretary	3,100,000	17.5%	1,040,000	772,720	15.5%	2,268,000	18.3%	
Congregational & Justice Ministries	5,586,400	31.5%	2,253,000	1,673,979	33.6%	3,784,000	30.5%	
ReFrame Ministries	1,990,400	11.2%	808,000	600,344	12.1%	1,344,000	10.8%	
Resonate Global Missions	3,865,000	21.8%	1,855,000	1,378,265	27.7%	2,381,000	19.2%	
Calvin University	1,500,000	8.5%	0	0	0.0%	1,500,000	12.1%	
Calvin Seminary	1,688,792	9.5%	744,000	552,792	11.1%	1,136,000	9.2%	
	17,730,592	100.0%	6,700,000	4,978,100	100.0%	12,413,000	100.0%	

Ministry Share		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Allocation Summary		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Fiscal 2021-2022	Actual	Combined (US\$)	CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
Synodical Administrative Services	2,658,498	13.9%	1,100,259	869,817	15.3%	1,788,681	13.4%
Congregational & Justice Ministries	5,228,207	27.4%	2,216,452	1,752,232	30.9%	3,475,975	25.9%
ReFrame Ministries	2,181,920	11.4%	894,434	707,101	12.5%	1,474,819	11.0%
Resonate Global Missions	5,229,081	27.4%	2,071,164	1,637,373	28.9%	3,591,708	26.8%
Calvin University	1,849,437	9.7%	61,269	48,437	0.9%	1,801,000	13.4%
Calvin Seminary	1,920,527	10.1%	833,932	659,271	11.6%	1,262,721	9.4%
	19,067,670	100.0%	7,177,510	5,674,231	100.0%	13,394,904	100.00%
0.7906							
Ministry Share		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Allocation Summary		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Fiscal 2020-2021	Actual	Combined (US\$)	CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
Synodical Administrative Services	2,714,540	12.5%	1,071,169	824,479	13.9%	1,890,061	12.0%
Congregational & Justice Ministries	4,964,581	22.9%	1,996,991	1,537,084	25.8%	3,427,497	21.8%
ReFrame Ministries	2,708,409	12.5%	1,081,983	832,802	14.0%	1,875,607	12.0%
Resonate Global Missions	6,605,154	30.5%	2,652,763	2,041,832	34.3%	4,563,322	29.1%
Calvin University	2,435,870	11.3%	43,575	33,540	0.6%	2,402,330	15.3%
Calvin Seminary	2,208,366	10.2%	883,170	679,776	11.4%	1,528,590	9.7%
	21,636,920	100.0%	7,729,651	5,949,512	100.0%	15,687,407	100.00%
0.7697							
Ministry Share		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Allocation Summary		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Fiscal 2019-2020	Actual	Combined (US\$)	CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
Synodical Administrative Services	2,299,599	11.2%	877,056	675,070	12.4%	1,624,529	10.7%
Congregational & Justice Ministries	4,848,785	23.5%	1,852,110	1,425,569	26.2%	3,423,216	22.6%
ReFrame Ministries	2,637,669	12.8%	1,001,722	771,025	14.2%	1,866,644	12.3%
Resonate Global Missions	6,409,566	31.1%	2,446,087	1,882,753	34.7%	4,526,813	29.8%
Calvin University	2,269,602	11.0%	65,743	50,602	0.9%	2,219,000	14.6%
Calvin Seminary	2,143,152	10.4%	816,070	628,129	10.6%	1,515,023	10.0%
	20,608,374	100.0%	7,058,788	5,433,149	98.92%	15,175,225	100.00%
0.7426							
Ministry Share		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Allocation Summary		Actual		Actual		Actual	
Fiscal 2018-2019	Actual	Combined (US\$)	CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)		
Synodical Administrative Services	2,315,976	10.8%	878,056	675,840	11.9%	1,640,136	10.3%
Congregational & Justice Ministries	4,994,906	23.2%	1,879,176	1,446,402	25.5%	3,548,504	22.4%
ReFrame Ministries	2,814,657	13.1%	1,065,620	820,208	14.5%	1,994,449	12.6%
Resonate Global Missions	6,840,220	31.8%	2,581,966	1,987,339	35.1%	4,852,881	30.6%
Calvin University	2,292,002	10.6%	92,450	71,159	1.2%	2,220,843	14.0%
Calvin Seminary	2,276,738	10.6%	864,537	665,434	11.2%	1,611,304	10.2%
	21,534,498	100.0%	7,361,805	5,666,381	99.38%	15,868,117	100.00%
0.7511							

Ministry Share	Actual		CDA (Cdn\$)	CDA (US\$)	USA (US\$)	Actual
	2017-2018	Actual				
Synodical Administrative Services	2,549,209	11.4%	865,771	666,384	1,882,825	11.3%
Congregational & Justice Ministries	5,063,082	22.6%	1,931,027	1,486,311	3,576,771	21.5%
ReFrame Ministries	2,903,645	12.9%	1,090,246	839,162	2,064,483	12.4%
Resonate Global Missions	7,080,634	31.6%	2,670,277	2,055,312	5,025,322	30.2%
Calvin University	2,427,773	10.8%	109,332	84,153	2,343,620	14.1%
Calvin Seminary	2,405,000	10.7%	885,637	681,675	1,723,325	10.4%
	22,429,344	100.0%	7,552,290	5,812,998	16,616,346	100.00%

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 2,566	\$ 225	\$ 359
Investments	\$ 73,405	\$ 82,207	\$ 94,835
Other	\$ 81	\$ 205	\$ 53
Total Assets	\$ 76,052	\$ 82,637	\$ 95,247
Liabilities			
Trade Payables		\$ 440	\$ 89
Other Payables	\$ 262	\$ 203	\$ -
Total Payables	\$ 262	\$ 643	\$ 89
Net Assets			
Donor Designated			
Unrestricted	\$ 75,791	\$ 81,994	\$ 95,158
Total Net Assets	\$ 75,791	\$ 81,994	\$ 95,158
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 76,053	\$ 82,637	\$ 95,247

Schedule 2

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - Canada (Canadian dollars)

Balance Sheet (000s)

	MPF 2022 Actual	MPF 2023 Actual	MPF 2024 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Employer Contributions	\$ 597	\$ -	\$ 883
Participant Contributions	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings	\$ (8,443)	\$ 10,634	\$ 22,542
TOTAL ADDITIONS	(7,846)	10,634	23,425
DEDUCTIONS:			
Distributions	\$ 3,186	\$ 3,388	\$ 5,355
Management & General	\$ 895	\$ 1,107	\$ 760
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 4,081	\$ 4,495	\$ 6,115
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION)	\$ (11,927)	\$ 6,139	\$ 17,310
TOTAL FTE's	1	1	1

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - (US) (MPF-US)
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 4,863	\$ 5,181	\$ 4,541
Investments	\$ 111,698	\$ 120,135	\$ 122,685
Other	\$ 944	\$ 346	\$ 193
Total Assets	\$ 117,505	\$ 125,662	\$ 127,419
Liabilities			
Trade Payables			\$ 26
Other Payables	\$ 236	\$ 16	\$ -
Total Payables	\$ 236	\$ 16	\$ 26
Net Assets			
Donor Designated Unrestricted	\$ 117,269	\$ 125,646	\$ 127,393
Total Net Assets	\$ 117,269	\$ 125,646	\$ 127,393
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	\$ 117,505	\$ 125,662	\$ 127,419

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Ministers Pension Plan - (US) (MPF-US)
 Additions and Deductions (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Employer Contributions	\$ 4,701	\$ 4,516	\$ 4,498
Participant Contributions	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings	\$ (18,046)	\$ 18,035	\$ 38,155
TOTAL ADDITIONS	<u>(13,345)</u>	<u>22,551</u>	<u>42,653</u>
DEDUCTIONS:			
Distributions	\$ 10,718	\$ 11,213	\$ 11,427
Management & General	\$ 1,090	\$ 1,837	\$ 1,442
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	<u>\$ 11,808</u>	<u>\$ 13,050</u>	<u>\$ 12,869</u>
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION)	<u>\$ (25,153)</u>	<u>\$ 9,501</u>	<u>\$ 29,784</u>
TOTAL FTE's	2	2	2

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Office of General Secretary
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @ .7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @ .7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @ .7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @ .75
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ 2,658	\$ 3,107	\$ 2,454	\$ 3,414
% of Total Income	69.1%	75.1%	73.4%	77.9%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 595	\$ 463	\$ 448	\$ 501
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1	\$ -
Total Gift Income	\$ 595	\$ 463	\$ 449	\$ 501
% of Total Income	15.5%	11.2%	13.4%	11.4%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ 336	\$ 435	\$ 299	\$ 337
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ 17	\$ -	\$ 6	\$ -
Grants/Misellaneous	\$ 243	\$ 132	\$ 134	\$ 132
Total Other Income	\$ 596	\$ 567	\$ 439	\$ 469
% of Total Income	15.5%	13.7%	13.1%	10.7%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 3,849	\$ 4,137	\$ 3,342	\$ 4,384
EXPENSES:				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 3,751	\$ 3,725	\$ 2,892	\$ 3,189
International	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 3,751	\$ 3,725	\$ 2,892	\$ 3,189
% of Total Expenditures	83.1%	75.4%	72.3%	72.9%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 765	\$ 1,216	\$ 1,110	\$ 1,185
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	\$ 765	\$ 1,216	\$ 1,110	\$ 1,185
% of Total Expenditures	16.9%	24.6%	27.7%	27.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 4,516	\$ 4,941	\$ 4,002	\$ 4,374
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (667)	\$ (804)	\$ (660)	\$ 10
Total Program Service FTE's	7	6	6	6
Total Support Service FTE's	18	11	11	11
TOTAL FTE's	25	17	17	17

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

See the Ministry Board Schedule 1 for the Balance Sheet for the CRC without Resonate.

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: ReFrame Ministries
Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 4,170	\$ 3,758	\$ 3,459
Investments	\$ 8,563	\$ 9,264	\$11,248
Other	\$ 727	\$ 1,294	\$ (31)
Total Assets	\$13,460	\$ 14,316	\$14,676
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 67	\$ 116	\$ 129
Other Payables	\$ 631	\$ 509	\$ 429
Total Payables	\$ 698	\$ 625	\$ 558
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 1,637	\$ 1,767	\$ 1,944
Unrestricted	\$11,125	\$ 11,924	\$12,174
Total Net Assets	12,762	13,691	14,118
Total Liabilites and Net Assets	\$13,460	\$ 14,316	\$14,676

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: ReFrame Ministries
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @.7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @.7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @.7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @.7500
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	2,182	1,969	1,552	1,205
% of Total Income	30.4%	23.7%	20.5%	20.8%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 3,422	\$ 3,399	\$ 2,980	\$ 3,635
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ 2,246	\$ 2,203	\$ 1,870	\$ 400
Total Gift Income	\$ 5,668	\$ 5,602	\$ 4,850	\$ 4,035
% of Total Income	78.9%	67.5%	64.2%	69.6%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 7	\$ -
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ (704)	\$ 599	\$ 1,109	\$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 36	\$ 125	\$ 41	\$ 560
Total Other Income	\$ (668)	\$ 724	\$ 1,157	\$ 560
% of Total Income	-9.3%	8.7%	15.3%	9.7%
TOTAL INCOME	7,182	8,295	7,559	5,800
EXPENSES				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 2,294	\$ 2,476	\$ 2,140	\$ 2,764
International	\$ 2,498	\$ 2,754	\$ 2,713	\$ 2,661
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 4,792	\$ 5,230	\$ 4,853	\$ 5,425
% of Total Expenditures	67.5%	69.7%	69.1%	68.7%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 906	\$ 985	\$ 938	\$ 1,004
Fund-raising	\$ 1,404	\$ 1,291	\$ 1,235	\$ 1,466
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	\$ 2,310	\$ 2,276	\$ 2,173	\$ 2,470
% of Total Expenditures	32.5%	30.3%	30.9%	31.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 7,102	\$ 7,506	\$ 7,026	\$ 7,895
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 80	\$ 789	\$ 533	\$ (2,095)
Total Program Service FTE's	24	21	20	20
Total Support Service FTE's	6	14	8	8
TOTAL FTE's	30	35	28	28

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Resonate Global Mission
Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 6,024	\$ 5,850	\$ 4,590
Investments	\$ 16,822	\$ 15,821	\$ 13,377
Other	\$ 414	\$ 2	\$ (523)
Total Assets	\$ 23,260	\$ 21,673	\$ 17,444
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 644	\$ 680	\$ 976
Other Payables	\$ 1,688	\$ 1,347	\$ 1,483
Total Payables	\$ 2,332	\$ 2,027	\$ 2,459
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 4,495	\$ 8,738	\$ 4,700
Unrestricted	\$ 16,433	\$ 10,908	\$ 10,285
Total Net Assets	\$ 20,928	\$ 19,646	\$ 14,985
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 23,260	\$ 21,673	\$ 17,444

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Resonate Global Mission
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @.7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @.7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @.7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @.75
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	5,229	3,748	3,152	2,588
% of Total Income	30.2%	18.2%	17.4%	14.4%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 11,859	\$ 12,719	\$ 11,091	\$ 12,987
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ 1,124	\$ 1,952	\$ 1,651	\$ 1,297
Total Gift Income	\$ 12,983	\$ 14,671	\$ 12,742	\$ 14,284
% of Total Income	75.1%	71.2%	70.3%	79.2%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ 470	\$ 277	\$ 322	\$ 201
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ (1,521)	\$ 1,587	\$ 1,756	\$ 953
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 125	\$ 317	\$ 156	\$ -
Total Other Income	\$ (926)	\$ 2,181	\$ 2,234	\$ 1,154
% of Total Income	-5.4%	10.6%	12.3%	6.4%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 17,286	\$ 20,600	\$ 18,128	\$ 18,026
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 4,688	\$ 5,033	\$ 6,434	\$ 7,861
International	\$ 10,258	\$ 11,474	\$ 11,218	\$ 9,984
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 14,946	\$ 16,507	\$ 17,652	\$ 17,845
% of Total Expenditures	76%	76%	81%	78%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 2,476	\$ 3,144	\$ 2,331	\$ 2,610
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Fund-raising	\$ 2,343	\$ 2,012	\$ 1,895	\$ 2,513
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service \$	\$ 4,819	\$ 5,156	\$ 4,226	\$ 5,123
% of Total \$	24.4%	23.8%	19.3%	22.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 19,765	\$ 21,663	\$ 21,878	\$ 22,968
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (2,479)	\$ (1,063)	\$ (3,750)	\$ (4,942)
Total Program Service FTEs	72	74	83	83
Total Support Service FTEs	27	24	21	21
	99	98	104	104

Schedule 1

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Agency: Special Assistance Fund - Canada (Canadian dollars) (SAF-CA)

Balance Sheet (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 396	\$ 1,700	\$ 1,893
Investments	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (1,506)
Total Assets	\$ 396	\$ 1,700	\$ 387
Liabilities			
Trade Payables			
Other Payables	\$ -	\$ 1	\$ -
Total Payables	\$ -	\$ 1	\$ -
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Unrestricted	\$ 396	\$ 1,699	\$ 387
Total Net Assets	\$ 396	\$ 1,699	\$ 387
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 396	\$ 1,700	\$ 387

Schedule 2

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Agency: Special Assistance Fund - Canada (Canadian dollars) (SAF-CA)

Additions and Deductions (000s)

	SAF 2022 Actual	SAF 2023 Actual	SAF 2024 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Employer Contributions	\$ 6	\$ 2,078	\$ 1,893
Participant Contributions	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings	\$ 16	\$ 31	\$ 46
TOTAL ADDITIONS	22	2,109	1,939
DEDUCTIONS:			
Distributions*	\$ 34	\$ 741	\$ 1,830
Management & General	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 34	\$ 741	\$ 1,830
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION)	\$ (12)	\$ 1,368	\$ 109

TOTAL FTE's - - -

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

* Includes distributions back to CRC Canada for prior years support of 703,000

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: Special Assistance Fund - (US) (SAF-US)
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 186	\$ 170	\$ 85
Investments	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ 36	\$ 35	\$ -
Total Assets	\$ 222	\$ 205	\$ 85
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Payables	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Unrestricted	\$ 222	\$ 205	\$ 85
Total Net Assets	\$ 222	\$ 205	\$ 85
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 222	\$ 205	\$ 85

Schedule 2

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Agency: Special Assistance Fund - (US)

Additions and Deductions (000s)

	Year 2022 Actual	Year 2023 Actual	Year 2024 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Employer Contributions	9	9	2
Participant Contributions			
Investment Earnings	\$ -	\$ 13	\$ 3
TOTAL ADDITIONS	<u>9</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>5</u>
DEDUCTIONS:			
Distributions	87	109	121
Management & General	\$ 1	\$ 2	\$ 2
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	<u>\$ 88</u>	<u>\$ 111</u>	<u>\$ 123</u>
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTION)	<u>\$ (79)</u>	<u>\$ (89)</u>	<u>\$ (118)</u>

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: Thrive
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @ .7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @ .7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @ .7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @ .75
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ 5,228	\$ 5,383	\$ 4,237	\$ 4,090
% of Total Income	74.2%	72.4%	83.6%	86.4%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 759	\$ 681	\$ 554	\$ 603
Disaster Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ 7	\$ 56	\$ 107	\$ -
Total Gift Income	\$ 766	\$ 737	\$ 661	\$ 603
% of Total Income	10.9%	9.9%	13.0%	12.7%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ 906	\$ 878	\$ 68	\$ -
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Income	\$ 2	\$ 11	\$ 43	\$ -
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ 147	\$ 429	\$ 59	\$ 40
Total Other Income	\$ 1,055	\$ 1,318	\$ 170	\$ 40
% of Total Income	15.0%	17.7%	3.4%	0.8%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 7,049	\$ 7,438	\$ 5,068	\$ 4,733
EXPENSES:				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Domestic Ministries	\$ 6,225	\$ 5,705	\$ 2,682	\$ 2,983
International	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Disaster	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service	\$ 6,225	\$ 5,705	\$ 2,682	\$ 2,983
% of Total Expenditures	90.8%	84.5%	73.4%	63.2%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 192	\$ 609	\$ 974	\$ 1,737
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Fund-raising	\$ 436	\$ 441	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service	\$ 628	\$ 1,050	\$ 974	\$ 1,737
% of Total Expenditures	9.2%	15.5%	26.6%	36.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 6,853	\$ 6,755	\$ 3,656	\$ 4,720
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 196	\$ 683	\$ 1,412	\$ 13
Total Program Service FTE's	24	17	18	28
Total Support Service FTE's	-	1	1	2
TOTAL FTE's	24	18	19	30

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

See the Ministry Board Schedule 1 for the total Balance Sheet for the CRC without Resonate.

Schedule 1
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
 Agency: World Renew
 Balance Sheet (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual	Fiscal 22-23 Actual	Fiscal 23-24 Actual
Assets			
Cash	\$ 15,095	\$ 24,000	\$ 11,396
Investments	\$ 20,197	\$ 26,501	\$ 16,062
Other	\$ 8,122	\$ 7,888	\$ 12,144
Total Assets	\$ 43,414	\$ 58,389	\$ 39,602
Liabilities			
Trade Payables	\$ 1,860	\$ 1,721	\$ 2,317
Other Payables	\$ 3,000	\$ 2,668	\$ 1,866
Total Payables	\$ 4,860	\$ 4,389	\$ 4,183
Net Assets			
Donor Designated	\$ 16,627	\$ 15,354	\$ 11,408
Unrestricted	\$ 21,927	\$ 38,646	\$ 24,011
Total Net Assets	\$ 38,554	\$ 54,000	\$ 35,419
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 43,414	\$ 58,389	\$ 39,602

Schedule 2
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Agency: World Renew
Operating Budget (000s)

	Fiscal 21-22 Actual @.7760	Fiscal 22-23 Actual @.7430	Fiscal 23-24 Actual @.7371	Fiscal 24-25 Budget @.75
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income				
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 15,941	\$ 14,581	\$ 14,405	\$ 19,721
Disaster Gifts	\$ 20,122	\$ 6,486	\$ 3,507	\$ 6,784
Estate Gifts	\$ 5,650	\$ 5,690	\$ 4,469	\$ 3,419
Total Gift Income	\$ 41,713	\$ 26,757	\$ 22,381	\$ 29,924
% of Total Income	101.5%	60.8%	61.7%	69.8%
Other Income:				
Tuition/Sales	\$ -	\$ 51	\$ 48	\$ -
Agency Services	\$ -	\$ 81	\$ 91	\$ -
Investment Income			\$ -	\$ 967
Grants/Miscellaneous	\$ (636)	\$ 17,120	\$ 13,742	\$ 11,967
Total Other Income	\$ (636)	\$ 17,252	\$ 13,881	\$ 12,934
% of Total Income	-1.5%	39.2%	38.3%	30.2%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 41,077	\$ 44,009	\$ 36,262	\$ 42,858
EXPENSES:				
Program Services:				
Education	\$ 1,890	\$ 1,997	\$ 3,026	\$ 2,504
Domestic Ministries	\$ 253	\$ 270	\$ 12,974	\$ 353
International	\$ 12,015	\$ 12,769	\$ 241	\$ 16,309
Disaster	\$ 16,728	\$ 20,495	\$ 15,368	\$ 13,876
Other	\$ -	\$ 265	\$ 390	\$ 536
Total Program Service	\$ 30,886	\$ 35,796	\$ 31,999	\$ 33,578
% of Total Expenditures	82.5%	82.6%	79.9%	78.8%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 2,384	\$ 3,288	\$ 3,697	\$ 4,469
Plant Operations		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Fund-raising	\$ 4,170	\$ 4,088	\$ 4,216	\$ 4,515
Debt Service		\$ 164	\$ 128	\$ 70
Total Support Service \$	\$ 6,554	\$ 7,540	\$ 8,041	\$ 9,054
% of Total Expenditures	17.5%	17.4%	20.1%	21.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 37,440	\$ 43,336	\$ 40,040	\$ 42,632
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 3,637	\$ 673	\$ (3,778)	\$ 226
Total Program Service FTEs	89	68	82	77
Total Support Service FTEs	31	45	53	53
TOTAL FTEs	120	113	135	130

FTE= Full time equivalent employees

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA						
Investment Policy Review						
Canada Investment Summary (IN CDN\$)						
As of December 31, 2024						
	CRCNA Ministries	CRCNA Resonate Global Mission	MPF Canada	ReFrame Ministries	World Renew	TOTAL
Categories Specified by Investment Policy:						
A. SHORT TERM CASH						
Bank Balance	5,842,285	4,895,855	3,902,514	2,013,481	10,533,350	16,449,345
Money Market	2,193,001	-	-	-	-	-
CDs	-	-	-	-	-	-
B. EXCESS SEASONAL FUND						
Fixed Income Mutual Funds	-	-	-	-	-	-
C. INTERMEDIATE-TERM FUNDS						
CRCNA LLC Liquidity Fund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fixed Income Mutual Funds	10,161,060	-	10,161,060	-	2,000,000	12,161,060
D. LONG-TERM FUNDS						
CRCNA LLC Balanced Fund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Publicly traded common, preferred, and convertible preferred stock	-	-	76,475,653	-	-	76,475,653
Equity mutual funds	-	-	-	-	-	-
U.S. treasuries or Canadian govt bonds	11,074,991	-	12,957,461	-	-	12,957,461
Publicly traded bonds and notes (investment grade, at least A-rated)	7,563,041	-	-	-	-	-
Bond mutual funds	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bank overdraft accounts	(29,962,773)	-	-	-	-	-
Real Estate	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Alternatives	-	-	-	-	-	-
Private equity/hedge funds	-	-	-	-	-	-
Life Insurance cash value	-	-	-	-	-	-
E. FUNDS HELD FOR SPECIFIC DENOMINATIONAL PROGRAMS (i.e., Barnabus Foundation, grants)						
Beneficial Interest	-	358,570	-	-	-	-
Interagency Investments (Obligations):						
Loans to CRCNA (Denom. Services)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$ 6,871,605.00	\$ 5,254,425.00	\$ 103,496,688.05	\$ 2,013,481.00	\$ 12,533,350.00	\$ 118,043,519.05

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA										
Investment Policy Review										
US Investment Summary (in US\$)										
As of December 31, 2024										
	CRCNA Ministries	CRCNA Resonate Global Mission	MPF US	ReFrame Ministries	World Renew	Calvin University	Calvin Seminary	Loan Fund	TOTAL	
Categories Specified by Investment Policy:										
A. SHORT TERM CASH										
Bank Balance	13,449,722	(1,655,371)	1,112,761	775,933	5,471,054		3,478,000	222,000	11,059,748	
Money Market	1,723,845	-	3,421,216	-	-	31,921,574	\$ 2,548,498	4,274,000	46,562,901	
CDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
B. EXCESS SEASONAL FUND										
Fixed Income Mutual Funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,946,111	-	6,946,111	
C. INTERMEDIATE-TERM FUNDS										
CRCNA LLC Liquidity Fund	3,483	3,465,962	-	1,978,700	5,349,184	-	-	-	7,327,884	
Fixed Income Mutual Funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
D. LONG-TERM FUNDS										
CRCNA LLC Balanced Fund	122,660	9,405,872	-	6,096,175	8,234,624	-	-	-	14,330,799	
Publicly traded common, preferred, and convertible preferred stock	-	-	81,603,756	113,425	-	-	-	-	81,603,756	
Equity mutual funds	-	449,330	-	-	-	143,650,595	-	-	113,425	
U.S. treasuries or Canadian govt bonds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	143,650,595	
Publicly traded bonds and notes (investment grade, at least A-rated)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Bond mutual funds	-	-	-	-	-	97,002,490	12,519,871	-	109,522,361	
CIBC / TAL overdraft accounts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Real Estate	-	-	12,004,882	-	-	-	-	-	12,004,882	
Common stock - non-listed	-	-	-	-	-	6,655,605	39,856,997	-	-	
Other Alternatives	-	-	9,938,003	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Private equity/hedge funds	-	-	18,369,742	-	-	53,903,916	8,008,246	-	80,281,904	
Life Insurance cash value	31,501	138,869	-	700,697	-	-	-	-	700,697	
E. FUNDS HELD FOR SPECIFIC DENOMINATIONAL PROGRAMS (i.e., Barnabus Foundation, grants)										
Beneficial Interest	-	31,691	-	1,614,742	4,885,572	-	-	-	6,500,314	
Interagency Investments (Obligations):										
Loans to CRCNA (Denom. Services)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	\$ 15,331,211	\$ 11,836,853	\$ 126,450,360	\$ 11,279,872	\$ 23,940,434	\$ 333,134,180	\$ 73,357,723	\$ 4,496,000	\$ 520,605,377	

REPORTS OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

The Council of Delegates of the CRCNA submits a *unified* report to synod composed of ministry updates provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The various reports here are presented in alphabetical order by agency, institution, or ministry name. Supplementary reports will be provided as well, if necessary, before synod meets.

Much of the material here supplies significant background for decisions that synod will be asked to make. The content also provides the transparency necessary to enhance our life together as a denomination.

Together these reports present the story of how God is blessing and guiding our work through the agencies, institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church as we covenant together. As you read the material that follows, I encourage you to respond with gratitude for what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, transforming lives and communities worldwide, by means of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Zachary J. King
General Secretary of the CRCNA

Calvin Theological Seminary

I. Introduction – Mission statement

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees presents this report to Synod 2025 with gratitude to God for his provision in the past year. The seminary has experienced God’s faithfulness and looks toward the future with hope and anticipation.

Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) has been involved in the training, teaching, and formation of students for ministry for 149 years since 1876 and was the very first agency or institution developed by the Christian Reformed Church. As God so leads, we look forward to a 150th-anniversary celebration of God’s faithfulness and for affirming the tie between church and seminary.

Mission statement: As a learning community in the Reformed Christian tradition that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ, Calvin Theological Seminary exists to serve the Christian Reformed Church in North America and wider constituencies by preparing individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word and by offering Reformed theological scholarship and counsel.

II. Highlights from the past ministry year

A. Building and program updates

We continue to be grateful for our fully remodeled building facility featuring updated technology and collaborative learning spaces that serve residential students, online students, and students in “flex” learning situations, where both residential and online students meet in the same classroom.

We are grateful as well for the investment made many years ago in an online delivery system of education as we mark moving into a second decade of providing “distance” learning. More than ever, a Calvin Theological Seminary education is just a “click” away.

One of our key projects in progress this year is the construction of our new 46-apartment student housing project designed with current and future students in mind. We are seeing more second-career students and students with children enroll at CTS. As a result, we are planning to have 20 three-bedroom, 19 two-bedroom, and seven one-bedroom apartments. We are grateful for funding support for over 50 percent of the estimated cost of completing this project. The location of this new building is right next to our campus at 3300 Burton Street SE in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Lord willing, we anticipate a “move-in” date by the end of October.

B. Enrollment

Fall 2024 brought us 76 entering students, totaling over 343 degree-seeking students in all programs, with auditors and nondegree students bringing the total census up to 385.

This includes 14 new international students who have come from Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, and South Korea. Under the leadership of Dr. Gabriela Tijerina-Pike, our Latino Ministry also enrolled 12 new students in the master of arts in leadership formation program for a total of 45 enrolled in that course of study. Additionally, through the efforts of our Canadian Church Relations liaison Shawn Brix, in collaboration with the admissions office, CTS has seen a record number of 17 new Canadian students enroll within the past six months.

C. New staff

Calvin Theological Seminary has been blessed by a number of incoming staff members who have felt called to serve our community, and we would like to highlight two of these:

Phillip Palacios, our first-ever full-time director of communications, is serving to fulfill our need to tell the CTS story in more and better ways. Phillip comes to CTS with a great deal of communications/marketing experience in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Trained in film and media at Compass College (now a part of Calvin University), Phillip comes with many years of experience in video and film production, having led integrated communication campaigns on multiple media platforms and having worked in creative strategy and production for organizations like Our Daily Bread Ministries and IDEOLOGY Productions.

We also give thanks to have been blessed with faithful registrars for nearly fifty years—first by John Vander Lugt and then by Joan Beelen, who has recently retired—and we are pleased to have Scott DeYoung serving as our new director of academic services and registrar. Scott earned a bachelor of arts degree in English at Cornerstone University and a master's degree in English from Grand Valley State University, and he has taken courses at Calvin Seminary as well. Scott has served in the field of education for over 20 years, first as an English teacher at Calvin Christian High School in Grandville, Michigan, and then as director of outdoor education at Camp Roger in Rockford, Michigan. He brings skills and experience in leadership, curriculum development, scheduling, database management, and strategic planning.

D. New master of arts degree program

Calvin Theological Seminary's new master of arts in clinical mental health counseling (MCMHC) launched in fall 2023. This professional and theologically grounded degree offers coursework in religious and theological foundations, clinical counseling, and clinical practice. Graduates of the program could consider using their knowledge and gifts by serving in clinical mental health therapy, clinical mental health counseling, addiction counseling, behavior counseling, or other mental health roles.

The director of this program, Dr. Danjuma Gibson, has noted that the goal of this program is “to train students who will be competent and skilled in the ethical integration of Christian faith, spirituality, and counseling in a

way that promotes healing and shalom in the lives of individuals and communities.” To learn more about this program, please contact Dr. Gibson at dgg085@calvinseminary.edu.

E. Curriculum revision

CTS recently completed its master of arts and master of divinity curriculum revision.

The curriculum revision has identified outcomes aligned with the understanding that Calvin Theological Seminary seeks to form graduates who will discern, together with those they serve, answers to the following questions:

- What is our ministry CONTEXT?
- How does the GOSPEL engage our context?
- What is God CALLING us to in this context?
- What is the PERSON and role of a servant leader in this context?

These program goals are intimately and necessarily connected because every ministry situation occurs in a particular CONTEXT where the GOSPEL of God’s redemptive activity is communicated, where God is CALLING people to participate in his mission, and where God is forming the PERSON and role of a servant leader.

F. Strategic plan

In May 2024 the CTS Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan and set out goals to help guide us into the next 150 years of service to the church. We distill this plan into four major themes:

Compelling invitation—We focus intentionally on our Reformed heritage and identity not only through scholarship but also in student formation and societal engagement. We want to share our distinctiveness in bold, creative, and clear ways that are compellingly invitational and winsome.

Holistic learning journeys—We focus on serving students, ensuring the best learning experiences and mentorships by not only equipping staff and faculty appropriately and adequately but also meeting student expectations for contextual curriculum and multifaceted learning opportunities.

Organizational excellence—We foster an ethos of organizational excellence where trust, accountability, respect, and mutuality around a shared vision are embodied, where individual and collective contributions are valued and celebrated, and where everyone who comes into contact with CTS will experience purpose, fulfillment, care, and ultimately a communal experience of our unity in Christ.

Cultivating abundance—With gratitude to God for his providence, we are encouraged by and appreciate a community of generous supporters through whom our student body will continue to grow and expand, and

through whom the mission of CTS is realized. We will promote this missional invitation to ensure a solid fiscal base for the ongoing work of Reformed theological education, formation, and scholarship.

G. The Forum platform

As a tool by which to meet the goals of the strategic plan, we recently developed and launched The Forum platform (theforum.calvinseminary.edu), a website that serves as the intersection of faith, culture, and Scripture. With this platform the seminary continues to respond to the needs of the global church, upholding the authority of Scripture, the centrality of Christ in the world's story, and the world's desperate need for God's grace. We seek to serve the church by building on the foundation of *The Forum* magazine. We invite responses and reflections from all who pursue their call while wrestling with the enduring questions of mercy, justice, faith, and formation.

CTS plans to continue publishing *The Forum* magazine in print and digital formats. On The Forum platform we'll provide additional content from our partners that includes video teaching series, event invitations, free webinars, and opportunities to attend retreats. The platform is for people working in church ministry, seeking to live out their faith in their daily life, pursuing answers to vexing questions, or simply pursuing a deeper knowledge of God.

III. Response to Synod 2024's request regarding gravamina policies

Synod 2024 made the following request:

That synod instruct the boards of denominational agencies and institutions to review and revise, as needed, their gravamina policies (e.g., exceptions) related to the decision of Synod 2024 and report on their actions to Synod 2025. *(Acts of Synod 2024, p. 880)*

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees can report that CTS has not had gravamina policies or a process of noting "exceptions" since the separation into two boards for Calvin College (now Calvin University) and Calvin Theological Seminary, approved by synod in 1991.

The CTS Board of Trustees also wishes to note the prior response of Calvin Theological Seminary to Synod 2024 addressing the confessional commitment of CTS faculty. Here is what was included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024* from Calvin Theological Seminary:

At Synod 2023, Advisory Committee 8 in its majority report presented the following recommendation: "That synod encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to clarify its position on synod's decision regarding the confessional status on same-sex marriage by December 2023" (*Acts of Synod 2023, p. 1037*).

While this item was among many others deferred to Synod 2024, the topic had already been considered by the CTS faculty and the CTS Board of Trustees before being presented at Synod 2023.

At its business meeting on February 3, 2023, the Calvin Theological Seminary faculty had approved the following statement:

A Statement on Our Confessional Commitment by the CTS Faculty

Since 1876, Calvin Theological Seminary has been the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Its teaching faculty have been interviewed and approved by synod, and its faculty have served the church in numerous capacities, including service as advisors to synod.

As CTS faculty committed to the Covenant for Officebearers, we profess the teachings of Scripture summarized by the Reformed confessions as interpreted by the decisions of synod. We commit to teaching, preaching, counseling, and writing within these covenantal bounds, whether in the classroom, church, or beyond.

We hold a variety of opinions and ideas on many matters, including past and possible future decisions of synod, and we are encouraged to express these views via official channels such as through overtures or communications from the congregations and classes to which we belong, through raising thoughtful questions for the church to ponder in future deliberations, or through theological conversations as a faculty, with the understanding that such communications will not undermine our good standing with one another as faculty.

CTS Faculty Minute #9354: The faculty reviewed and discussed the “Statement on Our Confessional Commitment by the CTS Faculty.” A motion was made and seconded to approve the Statement and share it with the Board of Trustees for information. *Adopted.*

At the CTS Board of Trustees meeting on October 27, 2023, the board again reviewed and approved the above statement. The board then proceeded to adopt the statement as its own and directed that this statement should be included in its Calvin Theological Seminary report to Synod 2024.

We believe that these actions and this statement are in keeping with the request to clarify the ongoing confessional commitment of both the CTS faculty and the CTS Board of Trustees. *(Agenda for Synod 2024, p. 226)*

That belief was affirmed by Synod 2024 when it adopted the following in plenary session:

That synod take note of the “Statement on Our Confessional Commitment by the CTS Faculty” from the Calvin Theological Seminary report (*Agenda for Synod 2024, p. 226*) serving as a good faith response to the deferred instruction of the 2023 Advisory Committee 8E report (majority), C, 11. *(Acts of Synod 2024, p. 809)*

IV. Reflecting on Our Calling

Over the past number of years, the Calvin Theological Seminary faculty, with input and final approval from the seminary’s Board of Trustees, produced a “Vision Frame” document that includes our mission statement (*What are we doing?*) and continues as follows:

Values—Why are we doing it?

- *Reformed theology*—All our teaching and formation grow from a shared understanding of God’s Word as articulated in the Reformed confessions.
- *The church*—We are formed by and serve the church, God’s agent of hope for the world.
- *Cultural context*—We give our students tools to sow the gospel in a multicultural world. We challenge one another to have hearts that engage the broader world God so loves.
- *The whole person*—We cultivate meaningful relationships with our students to foster personal and spiritual growth throughout our learning community.

Strategy—How are we doing it?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit,

- we are known for academic excellence and scholarship.
- we provide innovative learning environments.
- we pursue synergy with our graduates and other ministry leaders.
- we nurture a community of hospitality.
- we enrich the student experience through vital partnership.

Measures—When are we successful?

When graduates of Calvin Theological Seminary

- preach and teach the Bible (*message*).
- grow in their pastoral identity (*person*).
- discern and engage ministry contexts (*context*).
- cultivate and lead communities of disciples (*goal*).
- equip the church to renew communities for the glory of God (*purpose*).

A scan of this material shows significant convergence with the ministry priorities of the Christian Reformed Church in North America:

Faith Formation—Calvin Theological Seminary seeks to train disciples who become the trainers of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Servant Leadership—Calvin Theological Seminary is seeking to identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God. From resident and online education programs followed by continuing education programs and resources, Calvin Theological Seminary is training leaders.

Global Mission—the world is at our doorstep. Every year around 25 different nations are represented in the student body of Calvin Theological Seminary. (This past year nearly 50 percent of our degree-seeking students came from outside the U.S. and Canada.) The training for global mission takes place not just in classrooms but also over lunch in the Student Center.

Mercy and Justice—Calvin Theological Seminary trains students through cross-cultural internships and exposure to environments that help form

the hearts of Christian disciples. For example, experience with prison ministry through Calvin Theological Seminary has led students to witness the need for ministry to prisoners and to understand the structures of society that need to be addressed.

Gospel Proclamation and Worship—Along with the priority of Servant Leadership this is probably our leading edge within the CRC ministry priorities. Our core degree is the master of divinity (M.Div.) degree, which helps to form preachers and teachers of the gospel.

V. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey* (Ministry Plan)

A. Vocational Formation Office update

Making and maintaining connections with churches is a foundational component of education for Calvin Theological Seminary. Whether this involves church-based internships or assignments related to the local church environment, the local church is the key partner for nurturing, developing, and training students.

In fall 2017, Calvin Theological Seminary set up a new way for M.A. and M.Div. students to fulfill a significant part of their contextual learning requirements. From early on in their program, students are placed in a church or ministry organization where they serve for two years, concurrent with their course work, through internship hours coordinated with churches during the ministry year. The office of Vocational Formation—led by director Geoff Vandermolen, associate director Jessica Rowland, administrative coordinator Chris Wright, and administrative coordinator Jennifer DeJong—continues to develop partnerships to help bridge the classroom and the church. The following organizations and churches are part of this concurrent, contextual learning approach:

- Ada Community Church, Ada, Michigan
- Brookside CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Cascade Fellowship CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Christ Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Church of the Servant, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Creston CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Encounter Church, Kentwood, Michigan
- Faith on 44th Church, Kentwood, Michigan
- First CRC, Grand Haven, Michigan
- Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California
- Hahn-In CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Hope Pregnancy and Family Support Centre, Brantford, Ontario
- Iglesia Todas Las Naciones, Hudsonville, Michigan
- Inwood CRC, Inwood, Iowa
- Living Water Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Madison Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Maranatha CRC, Cambridge, Ontario
- Mountainview CRC, Grimsby, Ontario

Partners Worldwide, Grand Rapids, Michigan
ReFrame Media, Grand Rapids, Michigan
River Rock Church, Rockford, Michigan
Second CRC, Grand Haven, Michigan
Seymour CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Shawnee Park CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Sussex CRC, Sussex, New Jersey
Woodlawn CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Because internship hours may now occur during concurrent internships throughout the academic year, we have opened a new way of connecting students to churches for summer service. We appreciate the churches and organizations that have served as “additional” places of formation, including these cross-cultural and international sites:

Borculo CRC, Zeeland, Michigan
Way Church, St. Paul, Minnesota
Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services (Clinical Pastoral Education),
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Seed Church, Port Washington, New York
Tears of Eden, St. Louis, Missouri
Albuquerque Chinese Christian Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Dominican Republic ministry with Resonate Global Mission
HELP Pregnancy Aid, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Mepkin Abbey, Moncks Corner, South Carolina

We are grateful for partnerships with congregations and pastors in the training of our students. Five of our eleven formation group leaders are pastors, and the other six are seminary faculty/administration members. We appreciate the support of the church and alumni for their encouragement to expand our offerings for academic and ministry leadership for local churches and the global church.

We also continue to welcome the opportunity to connect our students with churches in need of summer ministry leadership as a result of pastoral vacancies, sabbaticals, and new ministry initiatives. Please contact the Vocational Formation office for more information about this process (vocational-formation@calvinseminary.edu or calvinseminary.edu/church-resources).

B. Center for Excellence in Preaching – “Compelling Preaching Initiative”
Calvin Theological Seminary also offers continuing education opportunities throughout the year that are open to pastors and lay leaders alike. Many of these opportunities are presented through the Center for Excellence in Preaching (CEP) led by director Rev. Scott Hoezee. The CEP continues to serve as one of the premier Reformed preaching sites in North America (cepreaching.org). In 2024 the CEP marked the twentieth anniversary of its founding.

In 2024 the CEP completed the second year of a five-year grant program as part of Lilly Endowment, Inc.’s “Compelling Preaching Initiative.” In its

first year the program focused on English-speaking pastors, and in 2024 under the leadership of Latino Ministries director Gabriela Tijerina-Pike, the grant program included Spanish-speaking pastors as well. Both parts of the grant program focused on peer learning groups.

The English part of the program last year included 17 highly ecumenical groups in which 150 pastors met throughout the U.S. and Canada. The Spanish part of the program included five peer learning groups with a total of 81 participants. The assigned topic for 2024 in the English-speaking groups was, perhaps not surprisingly, to seek out strategies and ideas to help preachers navigate the highly charged partisan political environment in which we now live. In January and February of 2025 the social research firm DataWise surveyed the English peer learning group participants and their congregations to discover what had been learned in the previous year. The Latino groups in 2024 discussed the fundamentals of preaching, what makes it compelling, and preaching in an age of skepticism.

Additionally, in April 2024 as part of the “Compelling Preaching Initiative” (CPI) the CEP hosted an ecumenical gathering of thirteen pastors and five consultants, all of whom had been identified as outstanding preachers. The colloquy met for a day and a half and generated rich conversations on a range of topics related to preaching and how to help preachers surmount the many challenges they face in the twenty-first century. In April 2025 we anticipate gathering as many of our peer group leaders as can travel to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to report on and share what has been happening in their peer learning groups thus far in the CPI program. In 2025 our peer groups will continue and will focus on themes related to preaching and trauma. The Latino peer groups will again focus on a variety of themes related to the preaching craft.

Since 2005 the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary has provided busy preachers with the resources they need to create and deliver fresh, compelling, and vibrant sermons from God’s Word. The CEP strives to spark every pastor’s creativity in engaging with God’s Word, inspiring them to produce lively sermons of power and beauty. The CEP offers weekly, quarterly, and liturgical season resources, including weekly contributions by a team of writers and translators. Every week new sermon commentaries are made available in English, Spanish, and Korean. Monthly traffic to the CEP website has risen dramatically in the past several years. In 2024 the website surpassed 2 million page views, and the monthly number of different visitors to the site is consistently now upwards of 94,000 users per month. We are grateful for the international reputation of the CEP.

C. Lilly “Pathways for Tomorrow – Next Steps” initiative

The “Next Steps” initiative at Calvin Theological Seminary consists of three programs designed to equip and support adult learning, particularly Latino/a pastors, commissioned pastors, and ministry leaders, by providing

accessible and flexible theological education. Our overarching goal is to support the lifelong learning and formation of ministry leaders while they navigate their callings.

Through our Empower program, students can earn a certificate or a master of arts degree in a competency-based format. With the support of a mentor team, students complete a customized learning process in which they develop and demonstrate competencies for ministry. This flexible format is ideally suited to supporting the contextualized learning needs and goals of commissioned pastors across the CRCNA. CTS is actively seeking partnerships with classes to support the learning and credentialing of commissioned pastors.

The Empower program is designed to make ministry training more collaborative, flexible, integrated, and accessible. During our pilot phase, enrollment was initially limited to students participating through contextualized partnerships with the Grand Valley State University Campus Ministry (Grand Rapids, Mich.) and with Sunlight Community Church (Port St. Lucie, Fla.). Students work with a CTS faculty mentor and two partner mentors to complete learning experiences that develop competence—head, hands, and heart—for ministry.

We have now developed a “standard path” as we move into making this competency-based theological education (CBTE) opportunity available to interested students. To learn more about CBTE as well as our new Lifelong Learning initiative, please contact Dr. Aaron Einfeld (ame084@calvinseminary.edu).

Our online master of arts degree in leadership formation focuses on making theological education accessible to Spanish-speaking leaders and is delivered entirely in Spanish. With partnerships in Latin America and the U.S., the program is aimed at addressing unique ministry challenges and opportunities in these contexts.

Additionally, we are expanding our nondegree lifelong learning offerings, including workshops, retreats, and cohort-based experiences. These offerings are designed to support ministry leaders in their biblical and theological learning, mental health, ongoing personal discipleship, and leadership growth.

D. Lilly Endowment – “Thriving Congregations Initiative” grant

Calvin Seminary’s Institute for Mission, Church, and Culture received a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. in 2024 to help establish the “Ancient Practices for Missional Churches” initiative through 2028. The aim of the initiative is to encourage the flourishing of congregations, helping them deepen their relationship with God, enhance their connections to each other, and contribute to the vitality of their communities and the world. The “Executive Summary” in the grant proposal included the following remarks:

Calvin Theological Seminary has observed that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches are struggling because their rhythms of gathering and scattering have been disrupted, discipleship has become increasingly disembodied, and many people are feeling disconnected from or disenchanted with organized religion.

We see these challenges as opportunities to help congregants deepen their connection to God in the company of others, recenter the mission of the local church on the priesthood of all believers, and deepen their understanding of how their daily life and work connect to the mission of God.

To establish these pathways to congregational thriving, we want to implement an Ancient Practices for Missional Churches initiative that will directly engage ministry leaders and congregants. The initiative will center on four key activities:

1. **Retreats focusing on spiritual formation:** Pastors and ministry leaders will learn about the psalms and ancient Christian spiritual practices of formation and engage in experiential learning activities. Immersion in these spiritual formation riches of the Christian tradition will provide opportunities for innovation in their ministry context.
2. **Seminars focusing on the priesthood of all believers:** Congregations will learn a biblical/theological vision for the church centered on the priesthood of all believers, hear examples of historical and contemporary exemplars of this way of being the church on mission, and engage in practices of collaborating that cultivate and sustain this partnership between pastors and congregants.
3. **Consultations:** Seminary professors and staff will listen to the wisdom, challenges, and needs of pastors and churches. The focus of these consultations will be on ministries of the local church that connect with equipping the priesthood of believers, spiritual formation, and cultural analysis and engagement. In these consultations, participants will help us establish a research agenda and assist in compiling and creating best resources and practices for congregations.
4. **Resource curation and creation:** We will identify and synthesize leading theological and ministry frameworks for direct instruction in three areas: spiritual formation, the priesthood of all believers, and cultural understanding for flourishing. We will curate or create resources that offer an experiential approach to learning the habits, practices, and dispositions for each of the three areas. We will also compile stories of historical and contemporary exemplars of each of the three areas.

All program activities will be facilitated by the Calvin Theological Seminary's Institute for Mission, Church, and Culture (IMCC), which

has extensive experience in equipping pastors and ministry leaders, coaching and collaborating with pastors and staff to host workshops in their congregations, and curating and creating actionable ministry resources. The director of the IMCC is Dr. Cory Willson, who holds the Jake and Betsy Tuls Professor of Missiology, World Christianity, and Public Theology endowed chair at the seminary.

E. Canadian Church Relations Liaison – Rev. Shawn Brix

In January 2020, Calvin Theological Seminary called Rev. Shawn Brix as its first Canadian church relations liaison (CCRL), a “pastor-ambassador” who builds and strengthens bridges between Calvin Theological Seminary and Canadian churches and ministries. This position is a part of the seminary's strong commitment to serving churches in Canada, and it reflects our desire to imagine and build new partnerships and initiatives. This connecting, listening, and serving role is helping Calvin Theological Seminary be more present and available to serve leaders and churches in Canada. Rev. Brix has served congregations in Acton, Burlington, and Peterborough, Ontario.

Rev. Brix has been a key encourager and staff support, coming alongside donors in the development of a new initiative whereby tuition for Canadian students will be at par between Canadian and U.S. dollars. We are grateful for this opportunity to remove one of the key barriers for Canadian students in their discernment about attending Calvin Seminary.

VI. Additional program and ministry highlights

A. Faculty interviews and updates

The Calvin Theological Seminary faculty and Board of Trustees has interviewed and now recommends that synod interview and approve the appointment of Dr. Jessica Joustra to a teaching position in systematic theology to begin in the summer of 2026. This position will fill an opening due to the upcoming retirement of Dr. Mary Vanden Berg in July 2025. We anticipate being able to fill teaching needs until Dr. Joustra is able to join Calvin Theological Seminary by the following summer.

At the time of this writing, a faculty search in the area of Old Testament and systematic theology is under way. Dr. Ronald Feenstra has provided notice of his plans to retire in July 2026. We anticipate providing an update by way of our supplemental report to Synod 2025.

B. Missional Training Center (MTC)

This past year, the Calvin Seminary Faculty and Board of Trustees formalized a partnership with the Missional Training Center (MTC), which provides Reformed theological education in Phoenix, Arizona.

The MTC is an outgrowth of the Surge Network, a network of more than a 100 churches in the Phoenix area working together to train laypeople to be effective witnesses. Ten years ago the Surge Network started MTC to provide more in-depth leadership training through a master of arts degree in missional theology. Dr. Michael Goheen became the founding professor

and is now MTC's director of theological education. Dr. Goheen served previously on the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary as well as at Dordt University and Redeemer University and is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Fifty-three students are enrolled at MTC. For more information about MTC, see missionaltraining.org.

This partnership strengthens both CTS and MTC. For example, MTC's missional curriculum and supporting churches will assist CTS and the CRCNA in their ongoing efforts to equip pastors and laypeople for effective witness in the world. The partnership will also expand the visibility of CTS in new churches and to potential students interested in Reformed education. MTC will be an extension site of CTS, and CTS's accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools will extend to MTC's program. The partnership has received approval by the Association of Theological Schools.

C. Doctor of Ministry program

The doctor of ministry program at CTS continues to develop with programming, coursework, and student research toward effective ministry praxis throughout a plurality of contexts. In 2024 our first program graduate, Dr. Colin Watson, received his degree and made a public presentation of his dissertation, titled "Leading in White Spaces: The Experience of African American Pastors as Leaders in the CRCNA."

- crcna.org/news-and-events/news/colin-watson-earns-first-dmin-calvin-seminary
- youtube.com/watch?v=AePCaxULI-U

For more information on the Doctor of Ministry program, please visit calvinseminary.edu/program/doctor-of-ministry.

D. Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) in partnership with Calvin University

On September 8, 2015, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary were blessed to open prison doors by beginning classes at Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan, as part of the Calvin Prison Initiative. Twenty new students from within the prison system came together to begin a five-year bachelor's degree program accredited through Calvin University.

A total of 93 students are now enrolled in the program. This program began in response to a request from the State of Michigan and is a coordinated effort of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. It is our hope that this program will be used by God to transform not only the students in the classroom but also the prison system as these students are deployed within it. In addition, we testify that professors and students at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary are changed and affected by their involvement in the lives of students at Handlon.

To date, 77 students have earned bachelor's degrees, and 121 students have earned associate degrees in faith and community leadership. Program graduates serve prison communities across Michigan from Muskegon to Jackson

as peer mentors, providing leadership to faith communities behind bars, supporting academic programs as tutors and teaching assistants, and leading life skills and addiction recovery classes for fellow prisoners.

VII. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Julius Medenblik, president; Dr. Margaret Mwenda, chief operating officer; Dr. Yudha Thianto, chief academic officer; Scott DeYoung, director of academic services and registrar; Rev. Geoff Vandermolen, director of vocational formation; Robert Knoor, director of development; Rev. Jeff Sajdak, dean of students; and Sarah Chun, dean of international students and scholar services.

VIII. Faculty

The seminary faculty continues to serve the church in numerous ways. Although preparing students for various forms of ministry continues to be central to their work, members of the faculty also provide education and counsel to many local congregations and broader assemblies, preach regularly, publish scholarly books and articles, participate in significant conferences, and in various ways seek to stay attuned to developments in ministries in the Christian Reformed Church and the church of Christ worldwide.

IX. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary session online in October 2024 and via conference call in February 2025. It plans to hold an in-person/flex plenary session in May 2025.

The board officers are Dave Morren, chair; Scott Greenway, vice-chair; and Susan Keesen, secretary.

Trustee Sue Imig (Region 5) is completing her first term on the board and is eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term. The board recommends that synod reappoint her to an additional three-year term.

Trustee Hessel Kielstra (at-large) is completing a second term on the board and is eligible for reappointment for a third three-year term. The board recommends that synod reappoint him for an additional three-year term.

Trustee E. Alan van der Woerd (Region 1) is completing a first term on the board and is eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term. The board recommends that synod appoint him for an additional three-year term.

Trustee Mark Verbruggen (Region 4) is completing a first term on the board and is eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term. The board recommends that synod appoint him for an additional three-year term.

Trustee Kristin (Kris) Vos (Region 12) is completing a first term on the board and is eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term. The board recommends that synod appoint him for an additional three-year term.

Completing a first term on the board are Louise Boutin (Region 3) and James Jones (At-Large). We are grateful for their service to the seminary and the church. Completing a second term on the board is David Morren (Region 11 at-large). We are grateful for his service and wise counsel to the seminary and the church.

Synod has approved that Calvin Theological Seminary is permitted to present a single nomination for an at-large trustee position and where a region has multiple trustee positions. The CTS Board of Trustees hopes to present such nominees by way of the supplemental report to Synod 2025.

X. Students—Fall 2024

The composition of the seminary's student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics from fall 2024 indicate the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

A. Denominational affiliation

- Christian Reformed: 143 (37%)
- Presbyterian: 84
- RCA: 8
- Other Reformed: 16
- Pentecostal: 6
- Other/None listed: 30

B. Geographical information

- U.S. students: 214 (56%)
- Canadian students: 33 (9%)
- Korean: 50 (13%)
- Chile: 11 (3%)
- Mexico: 16 (4%)
- Nigeria: 5 (1.3%)
- Chinese: 6 (1.6%)
- Other: 50 (13%)

Total countries represented: 30—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, India, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nigeria, New Zealand, Peru, South Korea, Taiwan, Uganda, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela

C. Student body

Male students: 262 (68%)

Female students: 123 (32%)

D. Programs and students enrolled

- M.Div.: 78
- Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy: 18
- M.A. (English): 80 (includes 53 students in MA in Missional Theology – MTC)

- M.A. (Spanish): 45
- M.T.S.: 20
- Th.M.: 25
- Ph.D.: 42
- D.Min.: 21
- Hybrid/Distance Learning: 57 (this number does not reflect residential students who also take a hybrid/distance class)
- English Certificate: 9
- CBTE Certificate: 7
- Non-degree seeking: 2

Finally, we want to acknowledge and give thanks for ongoing, faithful support from the Christian Reformed Church as a denomination and from individuals, churches, and classes. We are blessed by this community that continues to care for and encourage us—board members, faculty, staff, and students.

XI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dave Morren, chair, and Julius Medenblik, president, when seminary matters are presented.

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the election and reappointment of trustees from the slates of nominees presented.

C. That synod interview the faculty candidates presented by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees for approval of their appointments.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees
Susan Keesen, secretary

Calvin University

I. A message from the president

To our brothers and sisters—our ministry partners—in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, *thank you* for the many ways you are supporting the flourishing of Calvin University. As an academically excellent Christ-centered community of higher education, Calvin is uniquely positioned for teaching, learning, and scholarship through a Reformed lens, and we are grateful to partner with you in these endeavors.

Every year we graduate students to live out the love, grace, and truth of Jesus Christ in every sector of society and every corner of the world. In this way, our alumni are sent out and commissioned to partner in the renewing work of the Christian Reformed Church.

In this era of Calvin’s history, the denomination and the university have an opportunity to come together, reimagining the ways we serve and support each other moving forward. This requires leveraging the strengths of each institution in ways that prepare the next generation of the church. I believe a shared plan will drive us toward success promoting the thriving of both Calvin and the denomination to serve our community effectively.

II. Executive summary

A. Overview

The 2024 calendar year at Calvin University marked exciting developments, including new programs, facilities, and achievements as we approach our shared 150th anniversary with Calvin Theological Seminary. Notably, the year highlighted the university’s mission of fostering renewal through the stories of students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Expanded offerings: Calvin introduced two degree-completion programs, an aerospace concentration in engineering, and the Wayfinder program. Additionally, the appointment of the university’s first dean of graduate studies reflects our commitment to enhancing graduate education.

Increased enrollment: The university welcomed its largest incoming class in a decade, with total enrollment exceeding 3,600 students, including nearly 20 percent international and first-generation students.

New facilities: Investments were made in creating new athletic, community, and academic spaces, including a state-of-the-art soccer stadium, football building, cadaver lab and related academic spaces, three completely renovated library floors along with a renovation of part of the lower level of Hiemenga Hall, and major lighting upgrades to Gezon Auditorium and the Lab Theatre.

Recognition of faculty: Calvin was recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as the best university for undergraduate teaching in its category, and faculty garnered accolades for research achievements.

Arts investments: Enhancements to the theatre program and the return of the music education program highlight Calvin’s renewed focus on the arts.

Launch of football program and marching band: Calvin completed its inaugural football season and launched a marching band, enhancing student enrollment, campus engagement, and community building.

Student achievements: Students thrived through integrated faith and learning across 100+ majors and programs. Three students received Goldwater scholarships, and two students earned Fulbright scholarships for overseas study.

Strengthened partnerships: Milestones included Calvin’s collaboration with Umm Al-Jimal, which became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a new partnership with Baylor University for physical therapy education.

Environmental stewardship: The university reinforced its commitment to sustainability, exemplified by new renewable-energy geothermal systems in the soccer stadium and football buildings, a student analysis of a possible solar farm, and the recognition of Plaster Creek Stewards as a sustainable business honoree.

B. Board of Trustees response to Synod 2024

Please see the Appendix to this report for the Calvin University Board of Trustees response to the request of Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 882-83).

III. State of the university

A. Enrollment growth

Calvin’s total enrollment now exceeds 3,600 students—a mark it hasn’t hit since 2018. The increase is in part a result of the university’s experiencing its second straight year of double-digit-percentage growth in its incoming first-year class enrollment.

In 2024-2025 Calvin welcomed 1,232 new students, which represents the largest incoming class in the past decade. The class includes 1,131 undergraduate and 101 graduate learners from hundreds of high schools, dozens of U.S. states, and almost every continent. The new class also demonstrated university growth in first-generation students, students coming from outside of the United States, student-athletes, students from the CRCNA, students from the state of Michigan, and more.

Calvin continues to reach a greater diversity of learners, both ethnically and geographically. For the fifth straight year, the percentage of African American students at Calvin increased, and this year more than 18 percent of Calvin’s student body is Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). An additional 13.5 percent of students originate from outside the United States, making this the fourth straight year of such enrollment growth.

B. Local and global engagement

Each year, Calvin is living more deeply into its vision by engaging with local and global neighbors for mutual flourishing. Calvin's vision explicitly states that we want to come alongside groups of all different Christian traditions from across the world and ask how we can be a trusted partner with them to promote faithful learning. Therefore we are strengthening Calvin's connections in Kent County, Michigan, in greater Michigan, and around the country, continent, and globe.

School of Continuing Education and Graduate Studies: We are excited to announce the new Master of Social Work degree, which we will launch in fall 2025. Our graduate school also launched Wayfinder, a signature program of eight free college credits in the humanities as an entry point into higher education for adult learners who face powerful social and economic barriers to higher education. Wayfinder exemplifies Calvin's broader steps into adult learning, which now include a range of noncredit professional micro-credentials and, in fall 2025, will include two new undergraduate programs intended for adult degree completion.

We know that engaging the community means we must listen thoughtfully and humbly. We have been supported in this work by several community-based teams, including the President's Community Advisory Council and the 07 Advisory Council, both of which bring regional leaders together to provide care, insight, and accountability.

Ionia County (neighboring county): Students in the Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) want you to know how grateful they are for the opportunity to be a part of Calvin University. For our students, this opportunity provides not simply a degree, although that is significant. It also represents a significant turning point in their lives. Through their study, the students in this program wholeheartedly embrace the opportunity to learn, to think deeply, and to act justly. Repeatedly CPI students share how transformative their education is for their lives as they learn to be servant leaders inside and outside of prison.

This academic year, we welcomed our 10th cohort of CPI students. They began their educational journey in June with a robust student orientation created and led by CPI alumni at the Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. This is just one of the ways our CPI grads are a part of changing the prison context in which they live. A number of these graduates have been sent out to four other correctional facilities to help with academic tutoring, leading classes on substance abuse or mental health, or serving in religious ministry.

This spring Calvin will host the second Conference on Higher Education in Prison, bringing together 150 guests from Michigan schools and the Michigan Department of Corrections. The focus of this year's conference is on building learning communities.

Globally: Calvin continues its enduring relationships based on memoranda of understanding with Christian universities in Indonesia, Honduras, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Korea. These relationships provide promising opportunities for global partnerships and educational exchange.

In the 2024 calendar year, alumni around the world gathered at over 60 events in 33 different cities on three continents. Additionally, we've seen an engagement boost with our young alumni networks in Grand Rapids and Chicago meeting quarterly. The profound impact of Calvin alumni spans every corner of Canada, the United States, and the globe as they follow God's calling to make a difference in a diverse array of fields and sectors worldwide.

C. Finances

Calvin University is dedicated to effective resource management, particularly regarding finances. We appreciate the ongoing support of our denomination, donors, and grants that significantly contribute to our mission. Despite a steady and significant decline in financial support from the CRCNA, Calvin has found ways to broaden the base of financial support to continue delivering a Christ-centered, academically excellent educational experience affecting the lives of thousands of students from all over the world.

In 2024, Calvin launched a multiyear comprehensive campaign, *Strengthening our Path Forward*. This campaign aims to enhance academic programs, create new outdoor athletic facilities, centralize food services to a new single dining hall, and create community spaces for students. It also focuses on providing holistic support for students, fostering an engaged community, and effectively managing our important resources and infrastructure. We welcome support for this campaign from all members of the denomination.

IV. Student experience

A. Faith, worship, and church partnerships

Calvin University is animated by a Reformed Christian faith that seeks understanding and promotes the welfare of the city and the healing of the world. In doing so, our educational community reflects the CRCNA's ministry priorities: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship.

The mission of the Calvin community intersects with local churches throughout the year via student and faculty scholarship; centers and institutes; service partnerships; and personal church attendance and engagement by students, faculty, and staff.

We continually seek to connect with other CRCNA ministries and churches, including through our popular student Church Fair each fall, church directory, newly created interactive church map, and partnerships with local CRCNA churches that sponsor communion for our LOFT services.

Our commitment to the historic Reformed faith and active faith formation is lived out through campus living and learning. Faith formation is provided

by all faculty, staff, and administrators in all that they do in their interaction with students. Campus Ministries oversees worship, Bible studies, pastoral care, and more for our campus community. Programming such as LOFT, chapel, and dorm worship services bring us together and point us to God in meaningful ways. Student Worship Apprentices and other students on our chapel teams plan 75 worship services per semester for their peers and for faculty and staff. This year's programming also featured two silent retreats, a campus-wide day of prayer, and multiple student-led prayer and worship gatherings, including an annual International Worship Night planned by the Center for Intercultural Student Development.

Student Barnabas leaders serve on teams in eight contexts on campus (in six residence halls, in the on-campus apartments, and in Outdoor Recreation) and disciple students in their faith through Bible study, worship, and community events. They are led by a group of upperclass students who serve as Discipleship Assistants. Our campus-wide Bible studies continue to see positive engagement with 25-35 study groups officially registered with Campus Ministries each semester. The book of Daniel was the focus for this past fall in weekly studies and in chapel messages.

One way Calvin students live out their faith is through service-learning. This year's StreetFest event had 98 percent attendance by incoming students, serving at 45 area nonprofits. Ten blood drives and 60 ongoing service opportunities offer meaningful community engagement throughout the year. Students and mentors are also set to embark on three spring break trips, partnering with World Renew in spring 2025.

B. Student engagement

Student engagement continues to be a hallmark of the Calvin experience. The university offers a variety of ways in which students can live wholeheartedly inside and outside the classroom.

Calvin saw an increase of student organizations from 46 last year to 53 this year. The university had 92 orientation leaders apply last year for 25 positions, an increase of 12 applications. Data shows that students are engaged and informed about campus happenings, with 93 percent of students reporting they are extremely, very, or somewhat informed about what's happening on campus and 97 percent of respondents agreeing they belong at Calvin. Residence Life has been working to rebuild a strong sense of community in the halls since the COVID-19 pandemic. Each residence-hall floor now offers floor dinners twice a week, weekly floor events, and monthly outings. Each building also offers weekly all-building social events.

As another example of student engagement, Calvin Cohorts are designed to be *intentional, interdisciplinary communities* that will give students a space to flourish alongside peers, staff, and faculty with similar passions from all different fields. Students in a Cohort will encounter tangible opportunities to live out Calvin's mission to *think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal* in the world. Currently 197 students at Calvin

are part of or have been part of a cohort. This year's cohorts are the Arts Collective, the Ministry Leadership Cohort, and the Common Good Collective.

Students also experienced vocational development through the Career Center's digital engagement and events over the past year. The virtual career center saw 2,046 active users. Career coaching appointments reached 796, serving 582 distinct students and alumni, surpassing the previous year's total. The employer relations team coordinated three career fairs—in engineering and computing, health, and international education—hosting 105 employers and 301 students. Additionally, 45 recruitment opportunities, including networking mixers and employer office hours, connected students with 34 employers. The inaugural West Michigan International Student Career Conference attracted 200 international students, including 17 from Calvin, offering valuable resources for career preparation.

The Center for Intercultural Student Development welcomed 1,160 attendees to the UnLearn Week and the International Education Week, as well as more than 100 attendees for each of these events: International Student Association Committee Dinner, Ambassadors Dinner, and Black Student Union Kickoff.

The Center for Counseling and Wellness provides Calvin students with free resources to help them flourish during their college experience. The center acts as a central point for mental health services both on campus and in the community, offering weekly group therapy sessions, workshops on coping skills, short-term individual therapy, peer-listening opportunities, therapeutic digital resources, and referrals for off-campus treatment. Additionally, the center has free self-help materials available on campus, including a wellness room and a light-box lending program.

Our off-campus programs represent a vital component of our students' education, emphasizing faith-infused learning and engagement. These programs include semester-long experiences in various locations, such as Washington D.C., Peru, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, and Hungary. Additionally we offer short-term programs during the January and May terms, with destinations including Hollywood, Mexico, Germany, Nepal, and Kenya. These immersive experiences enhance students' academic journeys and broaden their cultural understandings. We also have partnerships with other institutions that provide further off-campus opportunities, enriching the overall educational experience and fostering personal and academic growth.

C. Scholarship

Calvin has long been a leader in scholarship among Christian institutions. By all measures, our faculty continue to excel in this area.

Grant funding at Calvin serves as a vital resource that can significantly enhance various aspects of academic and community engagement. It has the potential to strengthen scholarly pursuits, improve institutional facilities,

bolster outreach initiatives within the community, and foster meaningful partnerships.

This support can also expand the range of opportunities available to undergraduate students, enriching their educational experiences.

As of January 15, 2025, Calvin is supported by \$45,189,047 through 64 active grant awards supporting 73 faculty and staff. Examples of faculty supporting research, infrastructure, and programs with current awards include the following:

- Adejoke Ayoola (School of Health): Workforce Enhancements, \$1,000,000 from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity
- Keith Grasman (Biology): Effects of Pollution on Great Lakes Colonial Waterbirds, \$238,298 from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Nathan Sunukjian (Mathematics and Statistics): Workshops in Geometric Topology, \$40,000 from the National Science Foundation
- Calvin University faculty and other campus leaders collaborate on research, scholarship, and art that advances our understanding of ourselves and God's creation. The following are just a few examples of presentations, publications, and productions by and featuring Calvin faculty:
 - The *Behind Our Walls* film by alumnus Nate Roels features the thought leadership of Professor Todd Cioffi of the Calvin Prison Initiative.
 - *Reconciliation in a Michigan Watershed*, a new book by David Warners, biology professor, and Gail Gunst Heffner, emeritus professor, explores the work of the Plaster Creek Stewards.
 - *A Day of Worship: Adoring God in Every Moment*, a book published in Korean by Sam Ha, theological librarian at the Hekman Library and curator for the H. Henry Meeter Center, focuses on how each moment of life, mundane and special, can be a form of worship before God.
 - Lisa Sung, professor of music traveled to Vietnam in May 2024 as part of a John Stites Jazz Award and grant for an international tour.

D. Arts

The arts at Calvin University contribute to recruiting and retaining students, building the arts community on campus and beyond, and enriching the student experience.

The Center Art Gallery welcomes students, faculty, staff, and visitors through its doors to explore God's world through art. In the past year we've hosted the following exhibitions in our Center Art Gallery: *Typography*: An exhibition of Calvin Graphic Design Students; *Calvin's Architectural*

History featuring the work of William Fyfe; and *Inhabiting* by Jennifer Boes (alumna) and Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk (professor emeritus).

As of spring 2025, the university is home to students gifted and engaged in the arts, including the following:

- 11 studio art majors
- 12 art education majors
- 16 BFA in art students
- 31 BFA in graphic design students
- 5 general music majors
- 11 music education majors
- 41 music majors with composition emphasis
- 2 music majors with performance emphasis
- 21 music minors
- 18 theatre minors

Writing also provides an opportunity to embrace faith and the arts. The Craft of Writing and creative writing courses emphasizing nonfiction, poetry, fiction, and writing for children and young adults are just a few examples of classes that embrace the art of writing in God's world.

Founded in 1968, *Dialogue* is an arts and writing magazine of undergraduate creative work that is submitted, curated, and published by Calvin students. *Dialogue* publishes student work in six categories: prose, poetry, photography, visual art, music, and film.

The Calvin Center for Faith and Writing (CCFW) maintains its significant contribution to the world of letters through events large and small. Over three days in April 2024, 2,200 people gathered on Calvin's campus for the biennial Festival of Faith and Writing. Featuring 68 speakers and a robust gathering of publishers and other exhibitors, the program included authors such as Yaa Gyasi, author of best-selling novels, such as *Homegoing*; Tracy K. Smith, former U.S. poet laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner; and Anthony Doerr, another best-selling author and Pulitzer Prize winner. After a cancellation in 2020 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and a virtual "headliners-online" Festival in 2022, it was a joy to welcome attendees and authors alike back to Calvin's campus for the 2024 festival. The Center for Faith and Writing, of course, is more than the festival. For example, in October 2024 the CCFW partnered with the Calvin Student Activities Office (SAO) to present a screening and discussion of *Wildcat*, a film about Flannery O'Connor, and in March 2025 the CCFW will partner with Baker/Brazos Press for the West Michigan launch of Beth Allison Barr's new book, *Becoming the Pastor's Wife*.

The music department was energized by the relaunch of the Bachelor of Music Education degree in fall 2024, a professional program that prepares students for PK-12 teaching certification in Michigan; the implementation of marching band; and the continuing strength of instrumental ensembles (Symphonic Band, Wind Ensemble, Orchestra, Jazz Band, Marching Band,

and Pep Band) and choral ensembles (Capella, Campus Choir, Women's Chorale, Oratorio Chorus, and Gospel Choir).

In spring 2025, Capella will engage in a weekend tour of the Midwest, while Wind Ensemble will take on a week-long tour in Florida. Choral ensembles will be highlighted in a mini-masterworks program, and other ensembles will visit area venues such as schools, churches, and retirement homes.

Calvin's music faculty have solid partnerships with other arts organizations, including the Grand Rapids Symphony and Grand Rapids Youth Choruses. In October we served as the host site for the state conference of the Michigan Music Teachers Association.

The 2024-2025 academic year is the 91st season of the Calvin Theatre Company, and we have produced over 350 productions since its inception. The theme and faith focus for this year is "Important Questions" based on 1 Peter 3:15: "In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." Calvin anticipates the return of musical theatre in April 2026 as part of the university's 150th anniversary.

E. Athletics

Calvin athletics enrich the experiences of student-athletes and our entire community through a commitment to wellness and excellence. Calvin is a top-ranked school in NCAA Division III, a highly competitive division with over 400 member universities, allowing students to be true student-athletes. Calvin has finished in the top 30 in the Learfield Director's Cup all-sports standings in every year but one in the cup's 29-year history.

Calvin is blessed to recruit and retain excellent coaches and athletes and to invest in them athletically, academically, and spiritually. Calvin student-athletes continue athletic traditions of Bible study, mentorship, and team and leadership retreats year after year.

This past September, Calvin competed in its first-ever football season and was highly competitive despite not having an on-campus field on which to host games. In addition, Calvin unveiled a new, 880-seat state-of-the-art soccer stadium in early October, which has provided a first-class competitive and training environment for its men's and women's soccer and men's and women's lacrosse teams. The facility also served as a first-class venue for fans and supporters attending contests there.

During the spring, Calvin unveiled its new outdoor performance track and field facility on the east end of the campus. Calvin hosted the 2024 MIAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships, where several conference records were set.

Meanwhile, Calvin continues to support its women's and men's teams across the board. We had numerous MIAA Championship teams in the

2024 calendar year, including men's basketball, men's swimming and diving, men's tennis, women's soccer, and men's and women's cross country. The men's basketball and men's swimming and diving teams both posted Top 10 national finishes in March 2024, with the men's swimming and diving team finishing seventh place for the highest finish in program history.

V. Board matters

A. Board officers

Board officers for the 2024-2025 year are Bruce Los, chair; Perrin Rynders, vice chair; Gene Miyamoto, secretary; and Dirk Pruis, treasurer (Calvin's vice president for finance and chief financial officer).

B. Board membership

1. Region 2

Rosanne Lopers-Sweetman will be completing her second term. The board presents the following nominee to the classes in Region 2 for approval at their spring classis meetings:

John Valk is a member of Fredericton (N.B.) Christian Reformed Church. He served as an elder at his previous church. He is a retired professor of World View Studies at the University of New Brunswick and has many years of experience within the academic community. He served on an organization promoting Christian Literacy in Canada and served as a campus chaplain. He comes from a family of many Calvin alumni.

Additional board membership updates will be included in the Calvin University supplemental report to synod.

2. New trustees

At the October 2024 board meeting we welcomed four new trustees after their confirmation by Synod 2024:

Brian Boomsma of Schererville, Indiana, is the president and CEO of Dutch Farms. He attends Faith Church in Dyer, Indiana, where he currently serves on the church council and vision team. His prior board service includes membership on the Highland Christian School board and Foundation Board. He also served as both an elder and deacon at First Christian Reformed Church in Highland, Indiana. He attended Calvin College in the 1970s.

Shirley Hoogstra of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is recently retired as president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities in Washington, D.C. She attends Encounter Christian Reformed Church at the Fulton Heights location. She served previously on the Calvin Board of Trustees in the late 1990s. She currently serves on the boards of The Trinity Forum and the National Association of Evangelicals. She earned a bachelor of science degree from Calvin College in 1978 and a juris doctor degree from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 1986.

Rev. Tyler Wagenmaker of Hudsonville, Michigan, is the pastor at Beaverdam (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church. He served as a battalion

chaplain in the United States Army (veteran of Iraq conflict). He represented Classis Zeeland on the oversight team of Grand Valley State University Campus Ministry and recently completed service on the Council of Delegates. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in secondary education from Calvin College in 1996 and a master of divinity degree from Calvin Theological Seminary in 2000.

James Zwiers of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is recently retired from his role as executive vice president at Wolverine Worldwide, Inc. He attends Cascade Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, where he has served as a member of council. He currently serves as a board member and on the executive committee of Grand Action 2.0. Prior board experience includes service on the boards of Art Prize, the Outdoor Industry Association, and the Outdoor Foundation. He earned a bachelor of science degree in accountancy from Calvin College in 1990 and a juris doctor degree from the University of Michigan Law School in 1995.

VI. Recommendations

That synod, by way of the ballot, elect new members, reappoint members for subsequent terms, and ratify the result of the Region 2 classis election for membership on the Calvin University Board of Trustees.

Calvin University
Gregory Elzinga, president

APPENDIX

The Calvin University Board of Trustees Response to Synod

*A Special Report of the Calvin University Board of Trustees
Presented to Synod 2025*

*Supported by the Calvin University Confessional Commitment and
Academic Freedom Committee*

Executive summary

This special report, presented to Synod 2025 by the Calvin University Board of Trustees, is offered in the context of the longstanding covenantal partnership between Calvin University and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). In response to Synod 2024's request, we clarify differences between the university's approach to confessional differences and the approach newly outlined in Church Order. We also seek to align our framework for confessional subscription and differences with that of the CRCNA while respecting the distinct spheres and roles of the church and the university.

Key points include:

Acknowledgement of Partnership: We value the deep and enduring relationship between Calvin University and the CRCNA.

Renewed Assurances and Commitments: We reaffirm that the denomination's confessional standards and interpretations are the standards and interpretations of the university. Our policies and practices require trustees and employees to align personal and professional conduct with those standards and interpretations.

Requirements for Trustee Alignment: We will ensure that the majority of trustees are convictionally aligned with synod's confessional expectations while allowing for measured flexibility in trustee selection to maintain governance sustainability and effectiveness. The Board has directed its Trustee-ship Committee to ensure that all new trustee nominations follow this structure, while allowing current trustees to complete their existing terms under the previous guidelines.

Developmental Approaches to Confessional Subscription and Differences for Faculty: We will implement an updated developmental framework for confessional subscription and differences that aligns more closely with Church Order while attending to differences between the university and the church. Rationales for and details of the following updates are featured in the report and its appendix.

Developmental practices of confessional subscription

- Requirement of annual active reaffirmation of confessional commitments.
- Development of an initial three-year onboarding period during which a faculty member need only affirm the ecumenical creeds.
- Revision of confessional difficulties as two- to three-year periods of discernment and mentoring.
- Permission of some indefinite exceptions only after at least six years of service (the typical timeline to tenure) and a period of discernment and mentoring that would feature serious theological study and prayerful consideration, after which ongoing service at the university would still require alignment of personal and professional conduct (including, but not limited to, teaching, scholarship, advocacy, and public pronouncements, as well as advising, guiding, and mentoring students).

Processes for confessional differences

- Discontinuation of templates for expressions of confessional difficulties.
- Consideration of any difficulty on an individualized, case-by-case basis, including the following criteria:
 - the quality of the gravamen, especially its biblical engagement and grounding in confessional logics;
 - the individual's role in the university; and

- the individual’s record of aligning personal and professional conduct to the university’s position and expectations.
- Appointment of at least one trustee to join the university’s Professional Status Committee deliberations about difficulties, per the expectations established in the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*.

Invitations for Collaboration and Celebration: In order to continue building trust, we invite the engagement and strengthening of existing communication and collaboration channels. In recognition of our covenant partnership, we invite participation in the university’s 150th anniversary celebrations in 2026. We would be especially honored to welcome denominational partners at our special worship service on March 29, 2026, where we will express our gratitude for 150 years of God’s faithfulness.

This report reflects Calvin University’s deep and ongoing commitment to its Reformed identity and its partnership with the CRCNA. By implementing a structured and tiered model for trustee alignment, enhanced policies and practices for faculty confessional subscription, and trust-building initiatives, the university seeks to honor synod’s concerns while preserving its mission and governance integrity. We invite Synod 2025 to support this approach, ensuring a future rooted in our shared faith, academic excellence, and denominational partnership.

I. Preamble

With appreciation for the partnership between Calvin University and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and in response to the request of Synod 2024, the Board of Trustees of Calvin University presents this special report to Synod 2025.

In 2024, synod asked the Board of Trustees (a) to clarify differences between the university’s longstanding approach to confessional difficulties and the approach recently outlined in Church Order and (b) as needed and appropriate, to revise related policies and practices in ways that align with the CRCNA and build trust between the university and the denomination’s churches, all while (c) acknowledging key differences between the church and a university, including tenure and academic freedom.

We gratefully receive the constructive feedback from Synod 2024 on our confessional subscription expectations. We appreciate that Synod 2024 noted both our historic and ongoing “efforts to be faithful to the Reformed confessions in the context of academic inquiry” and Synod 2014’s commendation of the university’s approach to confessional subscription as “faithful and honoring synod’s own prior work on confessional subscription.”¹ We believe that some modifications to our existing framework for subscription and differences will align our policies and practices with Church Order while respecting the distinctions synod acknowledged between the university and the church. We remain wholeheartedly committed to this alignment and believe this report reflects Calvin’s long history of honoring both

its academic mission and its denominational relationship with constructive, good-faith responses to synodical invitations. The report:

- **Acknowledges the significance** of the deep and enduring partnership between the Christian Reformed Church of North America and Calvin University.
- **Renews assurances** that the denomination's confessional standards and synodical interpretations of those standards are the university's standards and interpretations.
- **Renews commitments** to ensure that university policies and practices continue to promote personal and professional conduct aligned with those standards and interpretations.
- **Updates approaches** to confessional subscription for trustees and faculty that enhance alignment, transparency, and accountability.

It also includes two invitations:

- **To engage and strengthen our channels for communication and collaboration.**
- **To join the celebration of our 150th anniversary in 2026**, which will be an appropriate moment to recognize our long partnership, common commitments, and shared hopes.

We believe that this response honors both the CRCNA's ecclesial ministry and Calvin's academic identity. These commitments – from the importance of the denominational relationship and our commitment to its standards, to our conduct expectations and our understanding of the relationship between our mission and confessional subscription – flow from our deepest Reformed Christian convictions. We take seriously what it means to be Reformed, drawing strength from each of the three strands – the doctrinalist (confessionalist), devotionalist (pietist), and transformationalist (Kuyperian) strands – that have shaped the tradition and animated its congregations and communities.² We invite synod to join us in further strengthening those convictions and the university's confessional identity through patient, trusting, long-term investment in the approach outlined here, and we look forward to opportunities to improve as we implement it.

II. Partnering with the Christian Reformed Church in North America

Universities and churches occupy different spheres, each with a distinctive purpose and ethos. Universities emphasize forming students, producing knowledge, and serving broader communities and publics while the church emphasizes the ministry of the Word, sacraments, discipline, and evangelism. Despite these differences, Christian churches have a centuries-long legacy of partnership with the academy. Christian institutions of higher learning have long been founded and supported to serve the church and its broader communities by producing, synthesizing, and disseminating knowledge and understanding from distinctly Christian perspectives and in distinctly Christian ways.

The CRCNA and Calvin University share in this legacy of enriching relationships between the church and the academy. They have been and remain complementary in their witness and their contributions to life and faith, and they aspire to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.³ Indeed, Calvin University's *Expanded Statement of Mission* describes the two as belonging together in *covenantal* partnership, an enduring relationship marked by a "mutual pledge of fidelity, service, and support."⁴

We see many reasons to value both this legacy and the ongoing covenantal partnership, including the following:

- With Abraham Kuyper, we share the conviction that "Living by the Reformed principles is concentrated most intensively in the institutional churches, and therefore a university is to be congratulated if it has a connection with these churches such that those churches support it in confessing and upholding God's word according to its purest interpretation."⁵
- The Christian Reformed Church and Calvin University share distinctive theological commitments that unite them not only in their pursuit of the hope and knowledge of God, but also in a shared regard for higher learning. Historically, their shared commitment to shaping Christian engagement with and throughout the academic disciplines, and for a wide range of vocations, reflects their understanding that there is indeed "not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not call out: 'Mine!'"⁶ These shared convictions and mutual regard have historically made these institutions two legs of the three-legged stool of home, church, and school – each playing its own role and also partnering with the others to nurture the faith and shape the next generation.
- Calvin's relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America brings additional depth and substantial clarity to its educational mission. In keeping with the purpose to which the church devoted the university, we engage in teaching, scholarship, and character formation that are thoroughly rooted in and expressive of Reformed Christian doctrine.
- A strong and faithful university partners with the church by equipping its members for effective engagement with diverse aspects of God's creation and their communities. As the university has grown in its scope to encompass instruction in the liberal arts and an array of professional disciplines, it has grounded its graduates in their various callings and in continuity with faith in Christ Jesus, thereby offering shalom to the broader culture and leavening congregations in the church universal with members and officebearers who are diverse, mature, and insightful in their participation and leadership.

Altogether, Calvin University's work strengthens the Christian Reformed Church, even as the Christian Reformed Church's long ministry grounds Calvin University.

We recognize that – despite their complementarity and long, shared story – neither the university nor the church has perfectly, completely, or consistently leaned into this partnership. As our *Expanded Statement of Mission* notes, to emphasize this “covenantal relationship is not to suggest that the relationship is therefore always harmonious. Church and college are both, after all, human institutions and have at times exhibited the fallenness of their humanity in uncongenial ways.”⁷ Sadly, each partner has occasionally failed to trust the other and to engage in ways that earn the other's trust.

We are committed to renewal of this unique partnership, which has been generative for a university and denomination devoted to cultural engagement and transformation.⁸ In this season, we aim to restore trust, center our shared values and goals, practice mutual accountability, and honor each other. We invite the denomination to support the university in a spirit of generosity and trust, pray for it regularly, engage with it frequently, lean on its expertise for insights, and endorse it wholeheartedly as an orthodox Christian university and manifestation of God's good work in the world.

III. Affirming the standards and interpretations of the denomination

Like our relationship to the church, our relationship to the denomination's standards is a foundational distinctive of the university. Because both Calvin and the CRCNA have been committed to the university's unique purpose and mission, including the university's “responsibility to its broadened constituency and its changing educational mandate,”⁹ Calvin has taken and still takes the position that the denomination's confessional standards and synodical interpretations of those confessional standards are the standards and interpretations of the university as an institution. All employees and trustees are expected to support the university's commitment to those standards and interpretations.

Anchoring on the standards and interpretations of the CRCNA supports the functioning of the university. In particular, Calvin is able to structure, inform, and fulfill its educational commitments and mission by drawing on the theological positions of the denomination. Calvin's positive articulation of the roles of women in ministry and leadership, its celebration of racial and ethnic diversity as a display of God's intended design and kingdom purposes,¹⁰ its commitments to care for God's creation, and its policies and practices related to the Sabbath are among the examples of the university's efforts to reflect and enact its commitments to the standards it shares with the CRCNA. These flow from our theological and ecclesiastical identity, serve the university's distinct educational purpose and mission, and reflect enduring institutional commitments.

Recently, synod has clarified the status of its teachings and expectations of alignment on human sexuality. Specifically, synod clarified the classification of the denomination's interpretation of "unchastity" and its implications for sexuality and marriage. The university shares the denomination's understanding. Sexual difference and sexuality are good gifts from God. They should be honored in the ways that he intends but, as with all of God's good gifts, are often distorted by sinful impulses. Specifically:

- With the denomination, the university understands scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism to reserve sexual relations only for the context of marriage between one man and one woman. We take this to reflect one aspect of God's beautiful design for human flourishing.
- With the denomination, the university holds that, along with pornography and sexual violence, sexual relations outside of the marriage between one man and one woman – including premarital sex, extramarital sex, and non-heterosexual sex – are sinful and contrary to God's design for human flourishing. The seventh commandment, which is understood to forbid all these practices, expresses God's care for us, helps us to order our loves and lives rightly toward him, and protects and enhances social goods important to our communities.
- With the denomination – and in light of synod's interest in, care for, and instructions on this issue – the university takes seriously its calling to provide opportunities for learning, growth, discipleship, service, and community to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation.

IV. Committing to aligned conduct

Calvin University expects all employees and trustees to align personal and professional conduct with denominational standards and synodical interpretations.¹¹ Aligned conduct (including, but not limited to, teaching, scholarship, advocacy, and public pronouncements, as well as advising, guiding, and mentoring students) is part of honoring the denominational relationship and shaping the way the next generation lives out its faith. Modeling a faithful life – even modeling teachability and submission in the midst of disagreement – is an important aspect of this work. For that reason, all faculty, staff, and trustees – whether or not they are teaching faculty – have a role in shaping our students and are expected to embrace related conduct expectations with grace and humility.¹²

Because the university's Articles of Incorporation require it to offer an education "entirely in accord with the doctrinal standards" of the CRCNA, many of its alignment expectations include scholarship and teaching.¹³ Students should be taught and mentored in ways that are consistent with the denomination's standards and synodical interpretations; at the same time, at an educational institution, teaching and learning require students to understand differing perspectives. This means that authentic and sympathetic

representations of confessional teachings rest alongside fair, honest, rigorous, and respectful treatment of very different, and sometimes incompatible, positions. We believe that this approach to teaching and learning – resting as it does on a deep and accurate understanding of, and good-faith engagement with, many positions – is also an expression of our Reformed Christian faith. Still, in all circumstances, employees are expected not to advocate positions that directly contradict the denomination’s positions and interpretations.

As we focus on conduct, we recognize that the vast majority of our employees have lived out their commitments to the university’s purpose, mission, and denominational relationship with integrity. While Calvin has systems and processes in place to promote and ensure accountability to our expectations, we acknowledge that the university could communicate its expectations more clearly, enforce its policies more consistently, and live into its practices more fully. As always, we remain committed to better live into and provide additional clarity around expectations and processes related to personal and professional conduct and how this is monitored by the university.

To the end of promoting a deep understanding of the university’s identity and commitments, as well as aligned conduct, the university will:

- enhance faculty and staff onboarding processes focused on the university’s Reformed Christian identity and mission, ensuring robust and consistent attention to all three strands of the tradition and commending each strand to all employees as enriching the university context and supporting Calvin’s mission;
- ensure that the university’s positions are transparently and consistently presented in public-facing communications and processes;
- review, revise, and disseminate relevant policy documents to trustees and employees.

V. Updating trustee and faculty frameworks for confessional subscription and differences

While all (non-student) employees and trustees are required to affirm the three ecumenical creeds, trustees, cabinet members, enfranchised faculty,¹⁴ and other employees with faculty status are also required to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.¹⁵ For these members of the community who participate in shared governance of the institution, this requirement ensures not only alignment of conduct, but also alignment of conviction, with the distinctives of the Christian Reformed Church.

Understanding the importance of safeguarding and promoting our Reformed Christian distinctives, Calvin University remains deeply committed to this convictional alignment for trustees, cabinet members, enfranchised faculty, and other employees with faculty status.

At the same time, the university continues to believe that its mission as a Reformed Christian institution of higher education is most faithfully expressed through applying certain governance and procedural distinctives that rest on differences from the ecclesial functions of the church. One such distinction has been the allowance for some trustees or faculty to serve despite their personal disagreement with a confessional teaching.¹⁶

Calvin's approach to confessional differences has reflected the Reformed tradition's emphasis on robust theological reasoning as a foundation for confessional identity. A deeply Reformed commitment to scholarship and academic freedom recognizes that "faith seeking understanding" draws on both special and general revelation – Scripture and creation – calling for intellectual humility and an openness to genuine questions and dialogue. Some faculty, through deep, good-faith engagement with Scripture, the confessions, and academic study, may arrive at positions that differ from synodical interpretations, yet still operate within a framework of confessional fidelity and Reformed Christian identity. This approach aligns with the Reformed tradition's embrace of catholicity, reflected in the confessions themselves, in the primacy of Scripture and the creeds, and in an acknowledgement that faithful Christian inquiry occurs within a broader historical and global conversation rather than solely within the bounds of any one denomination's contemporary interpretations. The confessions themselves arose from such theological engagement, and the ability to wrestle very seriously with them – while maintaining alignment in conduct and mission – reflects the very kind of Christian learning to which Calvin faculty are called.

For more than a century, our confidence in this calling has grounded Calvin's carefully considered allowances for indefinite confessional exceptions in areas where a faculty member has a conviction that diverges from a specific confessional teaching. The most common exceptions have been to confessional teachings on election and infant baptism. Notably, the university has not assumed that a faculty member with an indefinite confessional exception is not Reformed or cannot serve the university's mission with distinction.¹⁷ Rather, the university has taken a more capacious view in which Reformed identity and ability to serve the university's mission does not hinge upon perfect confessional alignment.

Moving forward, we believe that the university and its mission will remain well served by such an approach. At the same time, while we believe it is essential to maintain the distinctives of a university in order to faithfully live out our Reformed mission, we also seek to more closely align with the expectations and practices developed for officebearers at Synod 2024 and set out in the revised Church Order.¹⁸

Our ongoing flexibility on confessional differences continues to rest upon the different purposes and missions of the church and the academy and the different vocations of officebearers and university trustees and faculty. While there are some overlapping spiritual functions between officebearers,

on the one hand, and trustees and faculty, on the other, expectations of confessional commitment and the shape of confessional differences in each sphere should be grounded in the distinctives of vocation and institutional purpose.

We propose revised confessional subscription frameworks that enhance alignment, transparency, and accountability while reflecting and honoring the callings of trustees and faculty, as well as the practical dimensions of their service.

VI. Trustee alignment framework

Trustees are called to exercise fiduciary responsibilities not only focused on missional integrity, but also on institutional accreditation, financial sustainability, and academic excellence. It is, therefore, mission-critical for boards to represent and balance many constituencies, varied competencies, deep experiences, and sophisticated perspectives on a complex array of issues and topics, keeping in mind the expectations and requirements of accrediting authorities. Flexibility in the midst of authentic and serious confessional commitment can help ensure adequate representation of specialized skill sets and perspectives among trustees.

For trustees, we will implement a tiered alignment model which ensures that the majority of trustees are fully aligned with synod's confessional expectations while allowing for measured flexibility in trustee selection to maintain governance sustainability and effectiveness.

- Mechanisms for alignment
 - Convictional alignment with the denomination's standards and synodical interpretations will be the standard for Classis Region Trustees, who already have the established expectation of membership in a CRCNA congregation.
 - Preference for convictional alignment, with clear expectations of conduct aligned with full support for the CRCNA standards and synodical interpretations, will be the standard for At-Large and Alumni Trustees (consistent with current practice).
- Strengthened trustee selection and oversight processes

The Board has directed its Trusteeship Committee to ensure that all nominations follow the tiered requirements above while allowing current trustees to complete their existing terms under the previous guidelines.
- Periodic reaffirmation of confessional commitments

All trustees will participate in annual active reaffirmation of confessional commitments.

We believe that this approach aligns with synod's expectations and Calvin's historical practices while maintaining the governance flexibility necessary to meet fiduciary responsibilities related to mission, accreditation, financial sustainability, and academic integrity.

VII. Faculty alignment framework

Faculty are called to teaching, scholarship, creative work, and service in the academy, where a carefully bounded space for confessional difference does not dilute confessional identity but strengthens it by ensuring that faculty convictions are formed with integrity through rigorous engagement with the Reformed tradition rather than mere institutional conformity. Faculty contribute to the similar formation of students in robust and authentic Reformed Christian belief not by indoctrinating them in unexamined precepts, but by affirming the confessions and exploring, testing, extending, and applying their conceptual foundations, underlying logics, and practical implications. This work will typically involve imparting a clear and reasoned understanding of differing perspectives, including those that may differ from or challenge their own convictions.

For faculty, we will implement a new developmental framework that features periods of mentoring and formation. While this framework does include the possibility of some confessional exceptions for some faculty on some issues, it also includes new features that align more closely with updated CRCNA practices for officebearers or reflect the academic distinctives recognized and emphasized by Synod 2024.

This framework includes:

- requiring annual active reaffirmation of confessional commitments;
- introducing an initial three-year period of mentoring and development during which a faculty member need only affirm the ecumenical creeds;
- framing confessional difficulties as two- to three-year periods of discernment and mentoring;
- permitting some indefinite exceptions only after at least six years of service (the typical timeline to tenure) and a period of discernment and mentoring that would feature serious theological study and prayerful consideration, after which ongoing service at the university would still require alignment of personal and professional conduct.

See the appendix to this report for a more expansive outline of, and rationale for, the new framework for confessional subscription and differences for employees with faculty status.

Moreover, the work of modifying our processes for confessional differences is already underway.

- Beginning in August 2023, the university has shared with each candidate for a faculty position a summary of the institution's confessional commitments, approach to confessional differences, and position on human sexuality.
- Beginning in October 2024, the university committed itself to the following:

- The Professional Status Committee (PSC) and Board of Trustees are no longer accepting template difficulties.
- All difficulties will be considered on an individualized, case-by-case, basis, including the following considerations:
 - the quality of the gravamen, especially its biblical engagement and grounding in confessional logics,
 - the individual’s role in the university, and
 - the individual’s record of aligning personal and professional conduct to the university’s position and expectations.
- At least one trustee will be appointed to join PSC deliberations about difficulties, per the expectations established in the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*.

We believe that this new framework will strengthen the university’s Reformed identity and provide important clarity for current and prospective faculty members.

VIII. Engaging and strengthening channels for trust-building communication and collaboration

Because we value our partnership, the Board of Trustees shares synod’s interest in building trust between the university and CRCNA churches and understands the role of revisions to university policies and practices in working toward that goal. At the same time, the Board of Trustees understands the bilateral and fundamentally relational dimensions of our trust-building efforts.

Trust depends in part on recognizing and valuing the distinct role each partner plays within the context and contours of covenantal responsibilities.

- Christian universities are charged with and called to learning and inquiry. Centered on and bounded by their theological identities, they conserve knowledge, conduct perspectival teaching and scholarship that questions and critiques received wisdom, and synthesize and build fresh understanding.
- The denomination is charged with and called to interpretation of Scripture, creeds, and confessions, as well as accountability-keeping within the contours of trust, engagement, and relationship.

We recognize that neither the university nor the church has perfectly, completely, or consistently understood, valued, and recognized each other’s gifts and roles. Moreover, these two partners may not have fully taken stock of what a covenantal partnership entails. In this moment, each must ask itself what it can do better. When some churches do not trust Calvin, the university must searchingly ask, “Why?” When at times the university perceives the denomination as overreaching, the denomination must genuinely ask, “Why?” Self-examination, humility, and commitment to understanding and valuing the other partner is the pathway to deepening trust.

We request that synod recognize and honor the Board of Trustees’ responsibility to govern the university faithfully and effectively. The work outlined

above will put a premium on patience and may require improved ongoing communication and collaboration. To those ends, we look forward to continuing our communications and collaborations in the channels already established by synod. These include:

- reporting through synod's Education and Candidacy Committee;
- meeting with the Council of Delegates (COD) and welcoming COD representatives to our Board of Trustees meetings;
- participating in Ministries Leadership Council (MLC);
- participating in the Connections Committee.

We believe that these are opportunities to enhance mutual understanding, and if any of these channels require change to further strengthen communication and collaboration, we are willing to work together to make those modifications. Making the most of these channels will afford the churches of the denomination a greater opportunity to learn about, with, and from Calvin University, all the while affording the university the opportunity to learn about, with, and from CRCNA churches.

IX. Inviting participation in our 150th anniversary celebrations

Recognizing not only our intentions to deepen trust, but our long legacy of partnership, we invite you to join us in celebrating our 150th anniversary during the 2025-2026 academic year, expressing our gratitude for the Lord's provision, blessing, and continued grace for our work together. We would be especially honored to welcome denominational partners to the worship service commemorating 150 years of God's faithfulness to the university on March 29, 2026.

As we reflect on the numerous achievements and milestones reached over the past century and a half, we are filled with joy, a renewed sense of purpose, and a deep gratitude for our relationship with the church. This partnership has not only enriched the university and the church but also set a profound example of dedication and resilience. We look forward with confidence, not only because of the strength of our shared values and mutual respect, but primarily because we also know that our God is in control as we step together into the next chapter of our storied history. As our shared contemporary testimony teaches, "The future is secure, for our world belongs to God."¹⁹

ADDENDUM

I. A revised framework for faculty confessional subscription and differences at Calvin University

Taking seriously Synod 2024's instruction both to define differences in our use of *gravamina* and to revise our policies and practices to align and build trust, all while recognizing key differences between the university and the church, the university sees multiple reasons to revise our policies and practices related to confessional subscription and differences.

- The university sees multiple opportunities to align more closely with the church. These include annual, active reaffirmation of subscription and development of a period of discernment and mentoring for those with a confessional difficulty.
- Maintaining the *language of confessional difficulty gravamina* in the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty* requires us to change the use of those gravamina and align them more closely with Church Order, while maintaining the *practice of confessional exceptions* requires us to create the category of confessional exception gravamina.
- The university sees significant value in developing a formative or developmental approach to confessional subscription and differences. Such an approach will support new faculty, regardless of their theological and ecclesiastical backgrounds, in developing a robust understanding of the confessions while opening space for mentoring and discernment for those with confessional differences.

II. What will be the new framework of policies and practices, moving forward?

During the hiring process, all faculty candidates are informed of the university's relationship to the CRCNA, its confessional standards and interpretations, and policies related to confessional differences. At the time of hiring, enfranchised faculty must affirm the three creeds and the mission of Calvin University. They must also agree to align personal and professional conduct (including, but not limited to, teaching, scholarship, advocacy, and public pronouncements, as well as advising, guiding, and mentoring students) with the positions of the CRCNA.

Before the three-year reappointment, all enfranchised faculty will take part in the Kuiper Seminar and the de Vries Institute faith and learning fellowship, familiarizing themselves with the Reformed tradition, the CRCNA's theological standards, and the university's approach to the integration of faith and learning.

At the three-year reappointment, enfranchised faculty will sign the Covenant for Faculty Members, which affirms their convictional alignment with scripture, the creeds, the confessions and synodical interpretations. Faculty who have a confessional difference – including any difference with a synodical interpretation – must also submit a *confessional difficulty gravamen* to PSC at this time. According to the processes outlined in the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*, PSC will determine whether the gravamen constitutes a substantial difference with the confessions, and if so, whether or not the difference (a) should be disqualifying for continued employment or (b) should initiate a two- to three-year period of study, mentorship, and discernment for the faculty member.²⁰ The PSC's recommendation will go to the Board of Trustees for approval.

At the six-year reappointment (conferring tenure or its equivalent for professors of practice and lecturers), any faculty member who has previously

submitted a *confessional difficulty gravamen* and arrived at a settled conviction that differs with a matter in the confessions or synodical interpretations may submit a *confessional exception gravamen* to the PSC. PSC will then determine whether the gravamen constitutes a substantial difference with the confessions/interpretations, and if so, whether or not an ongoing difference on the matter (a) should be disqualifying or (b) should be permitted. The PSC's recommendation will go to the Board of Trustees for approval. If the difference is allowed, the faculty member will hold an indefinite exception. There will be a high bar for approval of confessional exceptions, which will need to exhibit biblical and Reformed rationales. We expect that a minority of faculty will hold any settled conviction contrary to the university's confessional standards or synodical interpretations thereof.

All faculty submitting gravamina of any kind (*confessional difficulty* or *confessional exception*) must write their own gravamen, so that the weight of their disagreement can be judged in the context of their broader Reformed convictions, as well as their biblical and theological sensibilities. All faculty with approved gravamina will be subject to guidelines for teaching, scholarship, advocacy, public speech, etc. specific to their role at the university (e.g., discipline of study, position type).

Annually, all enfranchised faculty who have not yet come up for their three-year reappointment will reaffirm their belief in the creeds, support for the mission of Calvin University, and commitment to alignment in action with the standards of the CRCNA. All faculty who have signed the Covenant for Faculty Members at Calvin University will reaffirm their commitment to that covenant.

III. What will the study, mentorship, and discernment for faculty with approved confessional difficulty gravamina entail?

Enfranchised faculty with approved confessional difficulty gravamina will be paired with mentors designated by the Board of Trustees for a period of study and discernment that privileges the position of the CRCNA and aims for alignment, even while being open to a possible confessional exception in the end. During this time, the university will also provide structured opportunities to understand better the university's relationship to the CRCNA and the university's related expectations of institutional citizenship.

The university will develop a list of approved mentors (and may develop curricula) to facilitate these periods of discernment. Over the two- to three-year period, these mentors will prayerfully guide faculty through readings, discussions, and reflections designed to explore the faculty member's difficulties and faithfully present the positions of the confessions. If, at any time, the faculty member finds that they agree with the confessions, the formal period of mentorship and discernment may end. If the faculty member reaches the end of their discernment period without coming into agreement with the confessions, then they may either submit a confessional-exception

gravamen or resign from the university (subject to the conditions of the customary terminal year). In order to promote transparency and trust between the mentor and faculty member, the university will not solicit or accept the opinion of any mentor on any personnel matter pertaining to the faculty member, other than to confirm the faculty member's good-faith engagement in the process.

IV. What is the timeline for faculty whose gravamina do not receive approval from the Board of Trustees to leave the university?

Faculty whose confessional differences are not approved will normally be granted the conventional "terminal year" of employment, which will last for a full academic year after the decision is made. At the board's discretion a terminal year may not be granted for a difficulty with a doctrine taught in or foundational to the ecumenical creeds or if the employee has not met the university's expectations for alignment of personal and professional conduct.

V. What are the advantages of this change? How does it contribute to a constructive, good-faith response to synod? How does it support Calvin's mission?

The revised framework for confessional subscription and differences brings Calvin's policy for enfranchised faculty into closer alignment with that of the Christian Reformed Church's policy for officebearers in at least two ways, which we hope will build trust with CRC churches.

- First, faculty without gravamina, who have passed their first reappointment, will be expected to reaffirm the Covenant for Faculty Members annually, just as CRC officebearers without gravamina sign the Covenant for Officebearers annually. In this way, confessional subscription is regularly celebrated and reaffirmed, reminding subscribers and the whole community of our unity in faith and witness.
- Second, faculty who submit confessional difficulty gravamina that are accepted by the Board of Trustees will enter a period of mentorship and discernment, just as CRC officebearers who submit confessional difficulty gravamina that are accepted enter a period of discernment. In this way, confessional difficulties are opportunities for spiritual mentorship and growth, bolstering understanding of and commitment to the confessions among faculty and officebearers alike.

The revised framework also facilitates fulfillment of Calvin University's mission to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.

- First, the three-year period of Christian formation that begins with a faculty member's initial appointment prompts faculty to think deeply together about the beliefs to which they will commit. Similarly, the two- to three-year period of mentorship and discernment

following the acceptance of a confessional difficulty gravamen also prompts faculty to think deeply, together with their approved mentors, about the beliefs with which they have reported a difficulty. This careful consideration promotes integrity of belief and prepares faculty to empathize with and assist students and others who are thinking deeply about the Reformed Christian faith, whether for the first time, or in the context of their own difficulties.

- Second, the reciprocal commitments to personal and institutional integrity made by faculty and by the university through the new framework facilitate living wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. On the one hand, faculty are expected to self-report any differences they have with the confessions, rather than secretly harboring such differences or unreflectively assenting to beliefs that they have not tried hard to understand. On the other hand, the University is expected to uphold previously approved gravamina and to support faculty through their processes of mentorship and discernment if and when their confessional difficulty gravamina are approved, rather than jeopardizing the employment of faculty whose differences are acceptable and who follow the framework in good faith. Moreover, this framework upholds the university's integrity as an institution of Reformed Christian higher learning by supporting faculty inquiry while affirming the authority of the confessions. In this way, Calvin faculty and Calvin University model integrity for students and the entire community so that their lives and witnesses may be wholehearted even as they submit to the challenging teachings about life and faith posed by the confessions.

VI. What about faculty who arrive at confessional differences – whether through realization, change of mind, or fresh interpretation by synod – following the six-year milestone? What about faculty who have a shorter run-up to reappointment (three-year or tenure)? And what about the continuing faculty, employed before these changes have gone into effect?

After the recommended changes go into effect, the following applies to both future hires and currently employed faculty who develop a confessional difference: Enfranchised faculty become eligible to submit a confessional difficulty gravamen at the time of their first reappointment and eligible to submit a confessional-exception gravamen once they have completed a period of mentorship and discernment. Because all faculty with difficulties are expected to engage in serious discernment and good-faith efforts to seek alignment, neither prior employment at Calvin nor a quicker run-up to tenure (or its equivalent for lecturers and professors of practice) exempts a faculty member from a period of mentorship and discernment between their submission of a confessional difficulty gravamen and a confessional exception gravamen. This period of study, mentorship, and discernment is necessary to give the faculty member every opportunity to come into alignment with the confessions in accordance with the CRCNA's teaching, in faith that

the confessions are reasonable and that seeking to understand them will result in agreement with them or, in some cases, in limited, circumscribed differences of conviction that are nonetheless grounded in the faculty member's understanding of scripture, the creeds, and the confessions.

Endnotes

¹ *Acts of Synod 2024*, 882.

² See the CRCNA's booklet, *What It Means to be Reformed: An Identity Statement*, which the university has long supplied to faculty candidates. The university has committed itself to all three strands of the Reformed tradition described in this booklet and has noted that it does not privilege any one of them over the others.

³ Ephesians 4:3, NIV.

⁴ The *Expanded Statement of Mission* describes this relationship as "covenantal," using the term no fewer than nine times to emphasize that the partnership is both mutual and enduring, even through times of tension and difficulty.

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, "Bound to the Word," in *On Education*, ed. Wendy Naylor and Harry Van Dyk, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 92-93.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁷ *Expanded Statement of Mission*.

⁸ This covenantal partnership between the university and denomination is one both parties want, and its legal basis derives from the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Their provisions, along with other related documents, describe synod's role as appointing trustees (nominated by the board of trustees or elected by six classis regions) and approving any changes to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Otherwise, synod delegates the work of governing the institution fully to the Board of Trustees, which must ensure fidelity to the purposes of the institution, missional integrity, and sustainability. The work of the trustees includes setting expectations for employees either directly or through the administration.

⁹ *Expanded Statement of Mission*.

¹⁰ See *From Every Nation: Revised Comprehensive Plan for Racial Justice, Reconciliation, and Cross-Cultural Engagement at Calvin College* (2004).

¹¹ Calvin's relevant policy documents include expectations for teaching, scholarship, advocacy, and public pronouncements, as well as advising, guiding, and mentoring students. Such expectations are expressed in the employee handbook, *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*, trustee handbook, and other relevant policy documents, including but not limited to *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom and Homosexuality and the Calvin College Community*.

¹² It is worth noting that while Calvin also expects alignment of convictions (see a later section of this report for more detail on the extent of that expectation), there are significant advantages to leading with alignment of personal and professional *conduct*. While conduct is not without its ambiguities, it is more readily subject to empirical observation and judgment. Clear expectations and consistent enforcement are more straightforward in the domain of conduct.

¹³ See *Calvin's Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom* document for the definitive account of the university's approach to expressing both of these core commitments.

¹⁴ Enfranchised faculty include tenure-track faculty, lecturers, professors of practice, some library staff, and administrators with faculty status.

¹⁵ Enfranchised faculty and other employees with faculty status affirm these confessions by signing the Covenant for Faculty Members, which aligns with the Covenant for Officebearers. Signatories not only affirm the authority of scripture and the creeds and confessions, but "promise to be formed and governed by them" and aver that they "heartily believe and

will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.”

¹⁶ To be clear, there are many confessional teachings – including those teachings reflected in the ecumenical creeds – and synodical interpretations thereof on which an exception would not be countenanced. Examples are included throughout *Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom*.

¹⁷ There is no way to know precisely how many indefinite exceptions have been granted in Calvin’s long history of this practice. Past examples include Paul Henry, whose faithful service as a professor of political science was in no way compromised by his indefinite confessional difficulty with infant baptism. Indeed, the university, the church, and their broader publics were enriched by Dr. Henry’s outstanding teaching, scholarship, service, and unimpeachable Reformed Christian commitment.

¹⁸ Our work takes seriously synod’s expectations that we both align *and* define differences, recognizing that the university and the church differ in ways that include academic freedom and tenure; the necessity of both aligning and defining differences also reflects the distinctive purpose of each institution, as described in the “Partnering” section above. Notably, we believe that alignment and difference are entirely compatible such that alignment does not require a 1:1 correspondence between Calvin’s practices and those of Church Order.

Similar assumptions about alignment have seemingly been made by previous synods. For example, when Synod 2014 commended to the churches Calvin’s framework for confessional subscription and differences in the context of academic freedom, the university’s practices were not in 1:1 correspondence with Church Order. Yet Synod described the university’s approach as honoring prior synodical teachings, which suggests that they were not misaligned. Clearly, then, a 1:1 correspondence is not required for alignment. When it comes to understanding alignment in the midst of differentiation, two metaphors may be helpful:

- Two parallel lines can accurately be described as *aligned* even though they are *different* lines and will never intersect.
- The wheels of a car or train are aligned even though they aim toward different points. Alignment is required for the vehicle to function correctly. Because it has support on two sides and wheels that travel parallel paths, it enjoys increased stability. That said, maintaining that alignment is important work that requires attention, regular maintenance, and occasional interventions. ^{xx} Notably, the university’s standard for submitting a confessional difficulty is the same as the CRCNA standard now articulated in “Affirming the Standards,” issued by the General Secretary on January 24, 2025.

¹⁹ *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*

²⁰ This period for faculty members’ confessional difficulties is consistent with the time the denomination has set as appropriate for officebearers with confessional differences to enter into study, mentorship, and discernment.

Canadian Justice Ministries

The Canadian Justice Ministries are composed of the Centre for Public Dialogue, Indigenous Ministry, and Intercultural Ministry. Collectively these ministries help churches in Canada live out God's call for justice, reconciliation, and belonging.

Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue

I. Introduction

The Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG), operating as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (CPD), is a justice and reconciliation ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada. The Centre for Public Dialogue works to encourage active Christian citizenship, studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective, and interacts with policy makers and shapers in a constructive, faith-filled manner. Our focus issues are currently refugee rights and resettlement, Indigenous justice and reconciliation, and climate justice. We also strive to be nimble and responsive on critical issues that come up in collaboration with the Committee for Contact with the Government.

With the recent departures of a long-serving director and some committee members, the CPD is in a significant time of visioning and rebuilding. Our work is sustained by existing staff and through collaboration with Canadian Justice Ministries.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We seek to work with local churches in an effort to live into the call to seek God's justice and peace in every area of life. We do this in the following ways:

1. Providing liturgical and devotional resources connected to Indigenous justice, refugee rights, and climate care via our website and social media.
2. Gathering local church members to tell stories and think together about Christ's call to justice through the *Do Justice* blog (dojustice.crcna.org). Through our *Do Justice* columnists initiative, writers from across North America have regularly shared about ways in which they are wrestling with the call to do justice in their own local contexts. Our seventeen regular columnists (including seven people of color) focus on specific issues from poverty to climate change to Reformed theological reflections to refugee sponsorship. *Do Justice* also starts these conversations through a podcast format. This year we talked with guests about what they would have liked to have known before engaging in justice ministries and about how to do justice together in community through learning cohorts.
3. Working closely with the justice mobilization program manager for Canada, Cindy Stover, to develop and animate learning opportunities

on justice and reconciliation. We continue to respond to church requests for virtual, in person, and recorded materials. This year we also completed a new *Justice: An Everyday Spiritual Journey* workshop for use in both Canada and the United States.

B. Loving mercy, doing justice

We assist local churches in loving mercy and doing justice as follows:

1. Communicating with government officials through direct interaction with policy makers and shapers at the federal level and through mobilizing Christian citizens to interact with their elected representatives. We continue to work closely with partners to help local churches respond to urgent issues of justice and reconciliation. These partnerships include World Renew, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Canadian Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, KAIROS, and Citizens for Public Justice. We continue to raise the issue of equity in Indigenous education, including through the sending of Education Together campaign postcards to representatives, and to invite advocacy for refugee resettlement through cobranded action alerts with World Renew-Canada.
2. Working with CRCNA partners to bring justice-themed learning experiences to churches. We continue to offer a variety of workshops in person and online through the Thinkific learning platform, which allows churches to advocate on issues they care about. The Hearts Exchanged program continues to be an important pillar of work in collaboration with Indigenous Ministries.

III. Connecting with churches: Our Journey (Ministry Plan)

A. Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline

The Centre for Public Dialogue offers worship materials for a special Sunday in February. We create continual space for prayer on significant issues of the day through *Do Justice* weekly prayers.

B. Listening to the voices of every generation

We continue to seek ways to connect with young people through the *Do Justice* blog, the *Do Justice* podcast, and an active social media presence. Justice and reconciliation mobilizer Cindy Stover regularly connects with campus ministries, supports student programs such as Act Five and the SOCO Beach Project, and hosts workshops in churches. In recent years we have also increased the number of schools we connect with, delivering presentations and Blanket Exercise workshops in many Christian elementary and high schools.

C. Growing in diversity and unity

We regularly connect with churches across the country to help them seek justice through workshops, responses to inquiries, and learning opportunities. Justice and reconciliation mobilizer Cindy Stover also serves as one of the coaches of a Multicultural Churches Cohort focused on helping congregations to increase intercultural connections and belonging. We also work

in close relationship with the CRC's Indigenous Ministry and Intercultural Ministry, ensuring accountability to one another as we create resources and support churches at the intersections of justice, reconciliation, diversity, and advocacy in Canada.

D. Sharing the gospel

Doing justice and reconciliation is gospel proclamation—we know and celebrate that Christ is renewing all things and that he calls us to be collaborators in this task. When the church does justice and Christians participate actively in the ministry of reconciliation, our witness is stronger and has more integrity. By being salt and light in the Canadian public sphere, we act as God's agents of renewal sharing a gospel vision of equity for all.

Indigenous Ministry

I. Introduction

The Indigenous Ministry is made up of a national committee (Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee), three Urban Indigenous Ministries, and a senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation, each using their strengths to support healing and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. Hearts Exchanged is a learning and action journey designed to equip Reformed Christians to go beyond the headlines into deep work that wrestles with how our churches can become places of belonging and embrace God's call to reconciliation with Indigenous neighbors. Participants are transformed in their minds and hearts as they are invited into honest dialogue about the harms of colonialism and as they encounter "hearts broken" stories and experiences. A seasonal cycle of cohorts has continued with four groups meeting online and six groups meeting in local churches. Ecumenical partners have also expressed interest in Hearts Exchanged over the years, and we've begun a cofacilitated cohort with the Mennonite Central Committee to test out adapting the content to the wider Canadian-church context.
2. Past Hearts Exchanged participants are now being equipped through two Communities of Practice, which meet to continue to take action steps toward reconciliation through mutual support and coaching.
3. The Urban Indigenous Ministries continue to support growth in individuals within their local communities. This work involves activities such as talking circles, meal sharing, and parenting classes.

B. Loving mercy, doing justice

1. Resources, studies, and other tools are available as churches take steps toward addressing harm done to Indigenous people. Given the history

- of the church in Canada, the process of reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples is an important part of the way the Canadian CRC has made real the work toward shalom. This year we featured several Indigenous voices regularly on the *Do Justice* blog and podcast to equip congregations for further justice conversations.
2. The KAIROS Blanket Exercise is an embodied workshop we continue to share throughout Canada. It has provided many people with an opportunity to understand the injustices faced by First Nations people in the history of Canada, especially with regard to land claims. Here's what one Christian high school student shared with us after this workshop: "I learned about the Indigenous peoples' point of view—specifically, how it felt to have my home taken away as the blankets were folded inward or just scooped up. Indigenous people had little to no say in what happened and were not seen as stakeholders in Canada."
 3. We initiated on-the-land learning activities in Indigenous communities and participated in key events such as the Strawberry Communion and Thanksgiving this year. These learning opportunities have been created to support ongoing engagement for people who have completed Hearts Exchanged or who are looking for practical learning experiences. Participants engage in hands-on projects like plant restoration or maple sap collection, learn about land rights and allyship, and get connected to local Indigenous neighbors.
 4. Creative and winsome programs continue at each of the Urban Indigenous Ministries. The Indigenous Christian Fellowship and Edmonton Native Healing Centre served meals in the thousands, provided food boxes, and offered community services such as beading circles and foot care.
- C. Gospel proclamation and worship
1. Resources were created for Indigenous Ministry Sunday. The bulletin insert this year featured coming together for reconciliation over food.
 2. Senior leader for Indigenous justice Adrian Jacobs has been invited to preach in a variety of churches and regularly shares how Scripture connects with his life as an Indigenous Christian.
 3. The Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Regina, and Edmonton help to meet the spiritual and social needs of Indigenous Canadians. These ministries are located in low-income neighborhoods and are consistently present to serve the needs there.

III. Connecting with churches: Our Journey (Ministry Plan)

A. Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline

Indigenous Ministry offers prayers and devotions for churches. These are available in print form and on our growing YouTube channel. Our audio reflections for National Truth and Reconciliation Day are widely used. Each

of the urban ministries regularly hosts culturally appropriate prayer, and many of these prayers are shared in Hearts Exchanged cohorts.

B. Listening to the voices of every generation

The Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee currently includes members from a mix of ages and backgrounds, including two members under age 30. Resources are shared to engage kids in Indigenous justice, and the urban ministries offer programming for kids such as special events and family games. We have seen a significant increase in requests from Christian schools for presentations of the Blanket Exercise, and we are working with educators to incorporate this workshop into their curricula as requested.

C. Growing in diversity and unity

The senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation regularly responds to community requests asking for regional support for reconciliation. This includes sermons, speaking engagements, and workshops. We also work in close relationship with the CRC's Intercultural Ministries and Centre for Public Dialogue, ensuring accountability to one another as we create resources and support churches at the intersections of justice, reconciliation, diversity, and advocacy in Canada.

D. Sharing the gospel

Doing justice and reconciliation is gospel proclamation. Christ is renewing all things and calls us to be collaborators in this task. When the church does justice and Christians participate actively in the ministry of reconciliation, our witness is stronger and has more integrity. Indigenous Ministry is equipping churches to be in relationship with Indigenous neighbors in ways that help members to share the good news with graciousness and humility. The three Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres provide culturally relevant spaces for Indigenous Christians to worship and find belonging in gospel-shaped community.

Intercultural Ministry

I. Introduction

Intercultural Ministry in Canada is supported by the Decolonization and Antiracism Collective, a national advisory committee in Canada. Collaborating closely with the senior leader for intercultural ministry, our mission is multifaceted. We are dedicated to equipping and empowering Canadian churches, helping them to adapt to and embrace the growing diversity of ethnocultural and racial groups within their communities and congregations. The collective is steadfast in its commitment to fostering practices of hospitality and guiding churches toward evolving into vibrant, healthy intercultural communities. This transformation is deeply rooted in the principles of biblical justice and love, aiming to reflect these values in every aspect of church life.

This year senior leader for intercultural ministry Pablo Kim Sun took a different position and was replaced by co-senior leaders for intercultural ministry Sebastian Maldonado and Jeremiah Bašurić.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We recognize the complex interplay between faith and cultural identity, especially for our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) members. These individuals often encounter challenges when integrating their unique cultural experiences in some CRC spaces. To address this, our ministry provides support through a range of avenues, including personal interactions and small-group dialogues.

Our consistent message to the community stresses that ethnocultural and racial diversity is not just a societal reality but a vital part of God's vision for humanity. We emphasize the beauty and inherent value of intercultural church communities. This message is promoted through various channels, including our online platforms, our website, the One Family Conversation Initiative, preaching engagements in local churches, and appearances at regional events as we aim to make our presence felt and our message heard far and wide.

B. Mercy and justice

In our advocacy for intercultural interaction, we prioritize approaches grounded in love and justice, mirroring Christ's ethos. By engaging in multicultural cohort groups and initiatives like the One Family Conversation, we aim to foster churches and regional gatherings into inclusive environments. Here, every member, regardless of their background, is valued and empowered to contribute.

Justice, a central pillar of our Canadian mission, extends beyond the confines of individual ministries. We actively collaborate with ministry groups such as Resonate, Thrive, Diaconal Ministries, and World Renew. This collaboration is aimed at pursuing a comprehensive approach to justice that captures the diverse aspects of God's call and reflects our commitment to a just and equitable society.

C. Gospel proclamation and worship

We advocate for and encourage diverse preaching and worship styles. We have started to develop an online network of BIPOC members within the CRCNA that will allow us to get to know worship leaders, reach out to them, and invite them to lead and infuse their particular cultural heritage experiences into diverse worship. We are inspired by the imagery of intercultural worship found in Revelation 7:9-10 and 21:22-27, symbolizing the universal and inclusive nature of God's kingdom.

III. Connecting with Churches: Our Journey (Ministry Plan)

A. Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline

We actively listen and engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, learning about their unique practices of prayer, spiritual disciplines, and discernment processes. It is enlightening to discover the various expressions of prayer and spiritual disciplines within our churches. Sharing stories and practices not only enriches individual spiritual journeys but also strengthens our collective faith experience.

B. Listening to the voices of every generation

Acknowledging the importance of generational diversity, we aim to bridge generational divides. By leveraging our experiences in intercultural dialogue, we enhance these valuable intergenerational connections, fostering a deeper understanding and respect among different age groups within our communities.

C. Growing in diversity and unity

In November 2024, Jeremiah Bašurić and Sebastian Maldonado were appointed as co-senior leaders for Intercultural Ministry in Canada. This collaborative leadership approach combines their extensive experience to enhance support for churches already engaging with multiculturalism within the denomination. They will continue offering Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) facilitation for churches as well as other resources and training aimed at creating spaces where diverse voices are valued and empowered. In February 2025 they began supporting and leading an intercultural cohort designed to create spaces in which churches can share multicultural wisdom, their learnings from various experiments, and their best practices regarding multicultural hospitality and community. A participant from the 2024 cohort shared this reflection with the leadership team: "I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of getting together with like-minded folks focused on making our church a friendly inclusive place for people of differing cultures. I feel wonder and awe at what God is doing in and through CRC congregations across Canada!"

D. Sharing the gospel

Our ministry places a strong emphasis on sharing the gospel through both actions and words, rooted in deep, trusting relationships. By guiding churches in cultural humility and intercultural engagement, we empower congregations to effectively convey Christ's love across cultural boundaries. This approach enriches our collective understanding of the gospel's universal appeal, demonstrating its relevance and power in a diverse world.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.

I. Introduction

Established by synod in 1983, the CRC Loan Fund helps CRC congregations finance capital improvements through low-interest loans. The Loan Fund has originated over two hundred loans totaling more than \$90 million to hundreds of churches across the United States. The Loan Fund operates solely through lending revenue and does not receive ministry shares. In the past fiscal year the Loan Fund committed \$1,797,525 to two churches and received \$4,467,274 in new or renewed investments. The Loan Fund aims to grow both lending and investing activity and is exploring opportunities to lend to CRC-affiliated organizations such as Christian schools.

II. Board of directors

Synod is responsible to appoint two Loan Fund board members annually, with members being eligible to serve up to two three-year terms. Jeffrey Feikens (2025/2) is completing his second term and is ineligible for reappointment, while Carl Kromminga (2025/1) is completing his first term and wishes to serve a second. The board requests that synod reappoint Carl Kromminga for a second term and appoint one new board member from the slate of two nominees below for a three-year term, with eligibility for reappointment.

Ray Slager, a member of Lakeside Community Christian Reformed Church in Alto, Michigan, earned a business degree from Calvin College and a master's degree in accounting from Western Michigan University. Now a retired CPA, he taught at Calvin University for 29 years and has served as an elder and a deacon at both Lakeside Community CRC and at Brookside CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He currently volunteers locally at Legacy Thrift, has mentored at Guiding Light Ministries, and has provided AARP income tax assistance at the Grand Rapids Library for twelve years.

John M. Vander Haag, a member of Sanborn (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church, earned a business degree from Dordt University and runs a family-owned trucking parts and service business. He has served as a deacon and elder at his church and as a member and chair of the board at Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa. He also serves as a kingdom ambassador of Barnabas Foundation, a board member of the local museum, and on various city civic committees.

III. Financial operations

In the 2024 fiscal year (ending June 30, 2024), the Loan Fund began recovering from a lending slump brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Loans receivable increased by \$37,561 to \$9,968,557. The board approved \$1,797,525 in loans to Rudyard (Mich.) CRC and Drenthe CRC, Zeeland, Michigan, for renovations. Net assets grew by \$294,871. The Loan Fund

maintains a loan loss reserve and has experienced only minimal losses over its more than forty-year history, with no losses in the past ten years.

Investments decreased by \$2,120,052 to \$9,379,019 in fiscal year 2024. To attract more investors, rates increased to 3-4.5 percent for fiscal year 2025, with a time-weighted average of 2.86 percent. The Loan Fund is authorized to sell Investment Certificates in twenty-three states.

Below is selected financial information on the Loan Fund's operations and trends.

<i>Financial Highlights</i>	2024	2023	2022
Cash and equivalents	\$5,696,748	\$7,481,890	\$9,263,219
Loans receivable	10,014,323	10,013,377	10,806,504
Total assets	<u>\$15,711,071</u>	<u>\$17,495,267</u>	<u>\$20,069,723</u>
Certificates and interest payable	\$9,465,733	\$11,544,800	\$14,391,628
Total liabilities	<u>\$9,465,733</u>	<u>\$11,544,800</u>	<u>\$14,391,628</u>
Net assets	6,245,338	5,950,467	5,678,095

A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2024, is available at crcna.org/welcome/governance/financial-statements.

IV. Sources of funding

The Loan Fund's operations are funded through the following sources:

- sales of Investment Certificates in approved states
- gifts and bequests
- investment of net assets

V. Staff

The Loan Fund is staffed by Alice M. Damsteegt, program coordinator, and Layla Kuhl, director.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the Loan Fund's director or board members when discussing matters related to the Loan Fund.

B. That synod, by way of the ballot, appoint one new board member from the slate of two nominees presented, and reappoint Carl Kromminga to a second three-year term.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
Layla Kuhl, director

Pensions

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church in North America maintains employee benefit programs that provide retirement, health, life, and disability benefits for employees of the denomination in its ministries, agencies, local churches, and other CRC organizations.

In December 2024 the trustees of the CRCNA pension boards in the United States and Canada decided to outsource the day-to-day administrative duties of the ministers' pension plans. This move does not affect benefits, and it helps to provide long-term stability to the pensions plans' critical daily activities. The third-party administrator for the pensions plans is CEB Services in Grandville, Michigan.

II. Board matters

The ministers' pension plans, special-assistance funds, and employees' retirement plans are governed by the U.S. Pension Trustees and the Canadian Pension Trustees. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint session. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed.

Alan Van Dyke is completing his second term on the U.S. Pension Trustees board in 2025 and is eligible and recommended for a third three-year term. Drew Sweetman is completing his first term on the U.S. Pension Trustees board in 2025 and is eligible and recommended for a second three-year term. John Bolt will be concluding service on the U.S. Pension Trustees board. (*Note: John Bolt will continue serving the board in his capacity as staff at CEB Services.*)

Dick Vreugdenhil is completing his second term on the Canadian Pension Trustees board in 2025 and is eligible and recommended for a third three-year term. Daryl DeKlerk is completing his first term on the Canadian Pension Trustees board in 2025 and is eligible and recommended for a second three-year term. Kathy Wassink will be concluding service on the Canadian Pension Trustees board.

III. Benefit-program activities

A. *Ministers' pension plans*

The ministers' pension plans are defined-benefit plans. Benefits paid by the plans are defined by formula, and the required funding of the plans is determined by actuarial calculations. The plans provide four types of benefits, as follows:

- Retirement benefits commencing at age 66, or early-retirement benefits in a reduced amount beginning at age 55.
- Long-term disability benefits provided through an insurance company (to all full-time, active participants who have furnished the information concerning compensation and housing as required by the insurance carrier).

- Survivors' benefits paid to a surviving spouse if death of a participant occurs while in active service.
- Orphans' benefits paid to a participant's orphaned children up to age 18, or to age 21 if in school.

The following is a summary of participant counts as of December 31, 2024, for each plan and in total. Participants having an interest in both plans (generally the result of having served churches in both the United States and Canada) appear in the column where they have residence.

	<i>United States</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>Total</i>
Active ministers	606	248	854
Ministers receiving benefit payments	649	168	817
Spouses and dependents	190	56	246
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	<u>101</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>131</u>
Total	1,546	502	2,048

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. Both plans are required to have a valuation every three years. The next valuation is due as of December 31, 2025, and will be summarized in the *Agenda for Synod 2026*. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their performance is measured against established benchmarks and regularly reviewed by the trustees.

The plans' actuaries have informed us that as of the date of the plans' last valuation (required every three years), on a going concern basis, the actuarial liability totaled approximately \$139.1 million for the U.S. plan (as of Dec. 31, 2022) and approximately \$53.8 million for the Canadian plan (as of Dec. 31, 2022). These amounts reflect the present value of the plans' future obligations to all participants including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	<i>December 31, 2024</i>	<i>December 31, 2023</i>
United States (U.S. \$)	\$125,556,000	\$125,333,000
Canada (Can. \$)	93,586,000	82,183,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings along with contributions to the plans provide a significant portion of the resources needed to meet the plans' obligations to the active participants and to fund payments to retirees and beneficiaries.

2. Plan review

The pension plan has undergone several changes since separate plans for the United States and Canada were established in 1983. While the basic defined-benefit form of the plan has not been altered, changes were made to benefits provided by the plan, to clarify how the plan is administered, and to improve the protocols used to obtain funds needed to pay costs.

Synod 2024 affirmed that the pension plans were created with values that have shaped and guided them (1) to enable ministers to serve in Canada and the U.S. while maintaining consistent retirement benefits; (2) to mitigate the impact of serving a smaller congregation; (3) to honor the covenant of the denomination to care for pastors with long-term disability protection and life insurance. With that in mind, the pension trustees are exploring broader retirement benefit options that may include a blend of defined-contribution plans along with the defined-benefit plan(s). The trustees are in the process of exploration and research, with the assistance of plan consultants, to develop recommendations. This will include discussion and input from U.S. and Canadian pastors, including bivocational and recently ordained pastors. In addition, the trustees are working on providing more information and education to pastors and churches about the current defined-benefit pension plan and the defined-benefit contribution plan available to them, as well as about the importance of building retirement savings through these plans. These tasks are currently in process, and the trustees intend to prepare recommendations for submission to Synod 2026.

3. Funding

All organized churches are plan sponsors and thus are expected to pay church assessments determined by an amount per active professing member age 18 and older or, if greater, the direct costs of their first or only pastor's participation in the plan. The amount of the assessment for 2025 (in local currency) is \$37.20 per member in both Canada and the United States, and direct costs have been set at \$7,704 for both countries as well. These amounts are collected by means of monthly billings to each organized church, based on reported membership statistics.

All emerging churches and other denominational ministries that employ a minister as a missionary, professor, teacher, or in any other capacity, including organizations that employ endorsed chaplains (with the exception of chaplains serving in the military who are not yet entitled to receive any military pension benefits) are required to pay the annual cost of participation in the plan. All pension assessments, however determined, are billed monthly, and the grant of credited service for pastors is contingent on timely payment of amounts billed.

B. Employees' retirement plans

The employees' retirement plans are defined-contribution plans covering most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries

who are not ordained as ministers of the Word. In the United States, contributions are paid into the two available defined-contribution plans by participating denominational agencies and ministries in an amount up to 6 percent of compensation. An additional employer contribution of up to 4 percent of compensation is made to match employee contributions of a similar amount. U.S. churches with staff participating in the 403(b)(9) plan set the contribution rates independently. In Canada, contributions of up to 9 percent are paid to the plan by participating employers. In Canada, there are no contributions made to the plan relative to matching employee contributions. In these defined-contribution plans, participants may make additional contributions up to the limits determined by federal or provincial regulation. Participants receive periodic statements indicating the dollar amount credited to their accounts, the value of their accounts, and the vested percentage.

Individual participants direct the investment of their account balances among several investment alternatives, including fixed-income and equity funds. The investment alternatives are currently managed for U.S. participants by Empower Retirement and Envoy Financial, while Great-West Trust serves as custodian of the plan’s assets. For Canadian participants, Sun Life Financial Group manages and serves as custodian of the plan’s assets.

As of December 31, 2024, the balances in these plans totaled approximately \$44,070,000 in the United States and \$6,058,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 343 participants in the U.S. plans and 111 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	<i>United States</i>	<i>Canada</i>
Active	206	103
Inactive	137	8

C. Financial disclosures

Audited or reviewed financial statements (crcna.org/welcome/governance/financial-statements) of the retirement plans are made available each year to the treasurer of each classis with the request that they be made available to any interested party. In addition, summary financial statements are included in the *Acts of Synod*. Individualized statements are furnished to active members of the ministers’ pension plans and the employees’ retirement plans.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Canadian Pension Trustees, the U.S. Pension Trustees, the CRCNA’s chief administrative officer, and the U.S. managing director of CEB Services when matters pertaining to insurance and retirement plans for ministers and employees are discussed.

B. That synod, by consenting to this report, will have designated up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2025 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1), but only to the extent that the pension is used to rent or provide a home.

C. That synod, by consenting to this report, will have designated up to 100 percent of an ordained pastor's distributions from their CRC 403(b)(9) Retirement Income Plan in 2025 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1), but only to the extent that those funds are used to rent or provide a home.

D. That synod, by way of the ballot, reappoint Drew Sweetman to a second three-year term and Alan Van Dyke to a third three-year term on the U.S. Pension Trustees, and reappoint Daryl DeKlerk to a second three-year term and Dick Vreugdenhil to a third three-year term on the Canadian Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2025.

Pensions
Shirley DeVries, chief administrative officer

ReFrame Ministries

I. Introduction—mission and mandate

ReFrame Ministries serves as the worldwide media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. ReFrame looks much different than when it launched as a single English radio program, *The Back to God Hour*, in 1939. Today our vision is that the lives and worldviews of *all people around the globe* will be transformed by God's gospel message.

Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we create contextual media resources in ten major languages that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church globally. This work takes place through four core strategies:

- Church rooted: We believe the Holy Spirit works through the church, so we partner with churches to build and strengthen the body of Christ.
- Major languages: We strive to reach the widest possible audience, so we create content in the world's most spoken languages.
- Context driven: We work with local partners who faithfully contextualize the gospel message and use the most effective media channels connecting with diverse audiences.
- Relationship focused: Following the example of Christ, we seek to build long-term, discipling relationships with individual members of our mass audiences.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The focus of ReFrame Ministries is primarily global mission. All of our work is guided by the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Much of our work also aligns with other parts of the CRCNA's fivefold calling as we seek to work alongside churches and ministries worldwide.

A. Global mission

ReFrame ministers in ten major world languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. We also have two special translation projects in Korean and Urdu.

ReFrame leverages popular forms of communication to share the gospel globally, reaching countries where traditional Christian missions often face restrictions. Through radio, print, TV, the internet, mobile apps, and social media we bring the message of Jesus to people without access to a faith community. As people worldwide share their experiences of encountering Jesus for the first time through ReFrame's media resources, it's clear that God is working through the CRCNA and ReFrame's international partners.

1. ReFrame works with about 170 indigenous staff members and more than 400 volunteers around the world. Working with its partnerships, ReFrame has a ministry presence in 53 countries through production and discipleship centers, broadcast locations, and resource distribution.

ReFrame and its partners reach people in nearly every country through the internet and via mobile application resources.

2. ReFrame's international partnership ministry teams have developed 24 ministry websites in 10 languages supported by 73 social media pages. ReFrame produces 47 audio programs, about half of which are aired on the radio, and 49 TV/video programs.
3. Together with our partners we distribute nearly 2 million printed devotional booklets annually in six languages. In general, the number of printed daily devotions has decreased as we are able to reach more people in more places digitally through email, Facebook, and smartphone apps. We send more than 400,000 devotional emails daily.

B. Faith formation on the global mission field

ReFrame provides faith formation resources in English, primarily for North American audiences. To learn more about these resources, see section III of this report or visit ReFrameMinistries.org/English.

Culturally relevant discipleship resources are also available in the other nine major languages in which ReFrame works with media ministry partners. Produced and distributed in print, online, through social media channels, and via smartphone apps, devotions and faith formation resources are bringing God's Word to global audiences.

1. Audio programs apply God's Word directly to people's lives through Bible-teaching programs, and offer Reformed and biblical perspectives on current cultural issues within the context of the nations where we do ministry.

Since the war in Ukraine began, ReFrame's Russian-language ministry partners have been producing and broadcasting special pastoral and evangelistic programming for displaced Ukrainians. In 2024 we established a hotline allowing listeners to call in or chat online with Christian psychologists, who continue resourcing them and connecting them with churches for further support.

2. ReFrame and its partners offer print resources including devotional guides in nearly every language ministry. Annually ReFrame and its partners distribute about 2 million devotional guides and other gospel-centered material. Much of this content is also available online. In all of our ten language ministries, we regularly hear from people who are grateful for receiving a meaningful daily reflection on God's Word.

For example, Charleen, a *Today* devotional reader, shared how the daily readings strengthened her faith. "I want to tell you how much I have enjoyed your devotions this month," she wrote. "I truly receive joy, encouragement, peace, and more than words can say from the *Today* devotions. God bless you."

3. As video-based programs become increasingly popular and accessible, ReFrame and our partners now have 49 different video programs glob-

ally. These programs range from daily, two-minute devotional reflections to hour-long church services for people who can only attend remotely. No matter the length, each video program offers the hope of God's truth in an easily-accessible format. Most of these programs are available on social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. In 2024, ReFrame's English team enhanced accessibility to devotional videos and other resources by launching a new *Kids Corner* app. This app helps parents discover devotions, activities, and other resources appropriate for family use.

One parent, Danielle, wrote "*Kids Corner* brings the Bible to life for kids. The episodes are accurately based on Bible stories, and the kids are pointed to Scripture at the end of each episode to learn more. I also appreciate that they cover not just your typical kids' Bible stories . . . but dive deeper into the Bible and ultimately point listeners to Jesus."

C. Servant leadership on the global mission field

ReFrame Ministries is blessed to work with ten indigenous ministry leaders gifted in ministry and media. These leaders and their teams provide culturally relevant outreach in their respective language and cultural settings.

1. International ministry leaders include: Rev. Youssef Adel Hanna (Arabic); Pastor Jerry An (Chinese); Justin Sterenberg (English); Rev. Marc Nabie (French); Rev. Arliyanus Larosa (Indonesian); Rev. Masao Yamashita (Japanese); Rev. Hernandez Dias Lopes (Portuguese); Rev. Sergei Sosedkin (Russian); Rev. Huascar de la Cruz (Spanish); and a Hindi ministry leader whose name is withheld for security reasons.

We praise God for these leaders and their various partnerships with on-the-ground media ministry workers, denominations, and organizations.

2. ReFrame-related training events equip leaders to share the gospel contextually.
 - a. French ministry leader Rev. Marc Nabie hosted Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) events in several West African nations.
 - b. ReFrame's Hindi (India) and Arabic (Egypt) ministry partners provided training and curriculum for vacation Bible school and Sunday school teachers.
 - c. ReFrame's Russian ministry team provided leadership seminars for Russian-speaking students and future church leaders who are attending universities in Russia and Ukraine.
 - d. Rev. Hernandez Dias Lopes leads online courses for church leaders and pastors in Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries.
 - e. Pastor Jerry An facilitates and leads events for church leaders in Asia and North America promoting media for sharing the gospel.

D. Loving mercy and doing justice on the global mission field

While the mission of ReFrame is primarily global media missions, ministry teams and partners have opportunities to provide comfort and assistance to people who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and disadvantaged. Many programs that ReFrame and its partners produce are messages of hope for people living in challenging circumstances—questioning their beliefs where it could be dangerous to do so, living in physical poverty, or suffering from sickness. In these ways, we also address social justice issues through our various programs in several languages.

1. Our ministry partner in India practices a holistic approach, providing for physical as well as spiritual needs. The team makes a special effort to distribute food and sanitary equipment because many of their listeners are in the lowest castes of India's society.
2. Our English ministry's *Family Fire* staff has been producing materials for people experiencing pain and brokenness in marriage and in other family relationships.
3. To help disciple and encourage Christ-followers in their faith, ReFrame also produces the *Think Christian* online blog and the *Groundwork* audio program, which regularly offer discussions on issues related to biblical justice.

For example, in 2024, Revs. Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee discussed the topic of justice in the book of Amos. "When justice rolls down like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream, it is an everyday life situation," said Delaney. "It is about making sure you treat people fairly in all your dealings and show integrity in your relationships. It is about treating others with respect—and when you see things that are broken, you use your mouth and your voice to speak up against it."

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

ReFrame's core mission is proclamation using various media to share the gospel in ten major world languages. ReFrame continually seeks culturally relevant and effective ways to proclaim the gospel and call people into a relationship with God.

1. We have increasingly moved to a partnership model with local denominations and organizations in our international ministries. This provides a greater opportunity for local ownership and sustainability. In Brazil, for example, we partner closely with congregations in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil to distribute biblical content for church members and the communities where they serve in missions, including communities as far away as Angola, in southern Africa.
2. As the world moves toward becoming a more paperless society, ReFrame expands the CRC's use of digital outreach for sharing the gospel: developing new apps, growing email and social-media audiences, and sharing almost all content online, even if it's also available offline.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey*

ReFrame offers a variety of programs and resources to help congregations and individuals work toward the milestones named in our denominational ministry plan, *Our Journey*.

A. *Cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline*

1. Our English ministry team has grown a network of more than 8,500 prayer partners in North America and globally who pray for people who respond to our media outreach programs. This number has grown exponentially over the past several years, as the number of prayer requests has grown.
2. Our *Today* devotions, produced since 1950, is available in print, at TodayDevotional.com, by email subscription, on podcast websites, and through mobile applications. We print and distribute about 210,000 *Today* booklets six times annually, and more than 350,000 people receive *Today* emails. In addition, about 75,000 people use the *Today* devotional app on their mobile devices.
3. *Groundwork* is a 30-minute audio program and podcast that builds biblical foundations for life. *Groundwork* guides listeners in casual but thoughtful conversations about practical applications of God's Word in today's world. You can listen on the air or online at GroundworkOnline.com.
4. *Think Christian* is a collaborative online magazine that invites readers to practice seeing God in all things—particularly popular music, movies, television, and other forms of pop culture. Rooted in the Reformed tradition, *Think Christian* recognizes that all of culture falls within God's sovereignty and that by his common grace believers and unbelievers alike can create beautiful things.
5. *Family Fire* is an online community (through Facebook and the website FamilyFire.com) that provides resources to spiritually strengthen families through articles, devotions, email and social media interaction, and live retreat events.

B. *Listening to voices of every generation*

1. *Kids Corner* is a program reaching children ages 6-12. This program has transitioned from a single audio program to a growing collection of online resources for children's spiritual growth across North America. *Kids Corner* will launch a new app in 2025, making these new features available with an accompanying parent-friendly blog.
2. People of all ages respond to messages in our *Today* devotions. A class of high school students responds to a new set of devotions each year by taking photos and writing reflections on the topic presented that month. Students read the devotions, look for daily reminders of the message content, and take photos of those things.

C. *Growing in diversity and unity as we build relationships*

1. ReFrame’s global outreach is strengthened through crucial networks of North American and international partners. Strong collaborations create effective partnerships for mission and allow resources to be invested wisely. In addition to our sister ministries within the CRCNA, ReFrame works cooperatively with the following Reformed denominations worldwide:

- North America (Words of Hope, affiliated with the Reformed Church in America)
- Japan (Reformed Church in Japan)
- Brazil (Presbyterian Church of Brazil)
- Mexico (National Presbyterian Church in Mexico)
- Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church)
- Egypt (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile)

In addition, we partner with evangelical congregations in Eastern Europe and Africa, India and surrounding countries, and with house churches and Christian ministries in China.

2. ReFrame Ministries has partnered with the CRC’s Korean Council since 2008 to publish a bilingual Korean-English version of the *Today* devotions.
3. ReFrame Ministries continues to broaden the reach of Faith Alive’s *Seeking God’s Face* devotional book. After launching an English-language website with the devotional content in 2021, ReFrame’s Chinese, Arabic, and—in 2023—French ministry partners have also translated the content for their audiences.

D. *Sharing the gospel, living it missionally, and planting new churches as we connect with our local and global ministry contexts*

1. *Church Juice* helps churches to be intentional about using the variety of media tools available for effectively communicating with their congregations and communities.

Church Juice offers virtual and in-person opportunities for church communicators to come together (both online and through occasional in-person events), learn, and encourage one another. If you have questions about improving your church’s communications, start a conversation with *Church Juice* producer Bryan Haley. Email him anytime at bryan@churchjuice.com.

2. ReFrame’s English language ministry produces ebooks as downloadable pdfs. Several are also available in print for group discussion or personal growth. Topics from the newest resources include *The Lord and the Rings (Think Christian)*, *A Handbook of Biblical Parenting (Family Fire)*, *Waiting in Expectation (Today)*, and an updated version of *How Do I Pray?* (ReFrame’s prayer ministry).
3. ReFrame’s Japanese ministry partners offer videos to churches that are part of the Reformed Church in Japan. These videos help introduce the

- church to prospective visitors and seekers in the area and offer a glimpse of what a Sunday is like in a typical church. In this way, ReFrame helps to grow the global church in Japan using media resources.
4. ReFrame's Hindi ministry team supports the work of church planters in northern India. The team hosts radio-program listener gatherings and offers resources to communities of believers. These gatherings often take place in house churches that eventually become church plants.

IV. Recommendation

That synod grant the director of ReFrame Ministries, Kurt Selles, and the director of administration for ReFrame Ministries, Nellie Kooistra, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to ReFrame Ministries are addressed.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

ReFrame Ministries
Kurt Selles, director

Resonate Global Mission

I. Introduction

Resonate is your Christian Reformed mission agency, and we partner with churches in three key ways through our Core Initiatives: Global Mission, Local Mission, and Church Planting.

These broad categories help us to continue more than a century of passion for God’s mission around the globe—and to lead the CRCNA in myriad ways to join in. In addition to these Core Initiatives we have begun to increase investment in programming and curriculum development, including through our consolidation with Raise Up Global Ministries.

Our mandate from synod is to give leadership to the denomination in its task of bringing the gospel holistically to the people of North America and the world, drawing them into fellowship with Christ and his church. Three main aspects of this mandate are as follows (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 651):

- Encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism and discipleship.
- Initiate, support, and guide new-church development and other evangelistic and discipling ministries.
- Develop Christian leaders.

These ministry priorities are evident in our Core Initiatives and continue to guide our work from day to day.

During the 2024-2025 ministry year, we finalized our Core Initiative structure and implemented a plan to reduce our expenses in order to respond to uncertainties in ministry-share and other revenues. This objective developed from both our long-term plan to reduce cash reserves and the reality that ministry shares, which until recently made up over 40 percent of Resonate’s revenue, account for about 14 percent of revenue this year. Overall, we have spent significant time this year in developing a vision for Resonate that is sustainable in the long term and will be able to increase the engagement of the CRCNA with the global church.

Throughout this process, one of the most encouraging reaffirmations for Resonate has been that God has a calling for the CRCNA. We have vital work to do in the sphere of mission work, and Resonate has a special niche as a “Big-R Reformed” mission agency in more than 40 countries where your missionaries and church planters are at work. In the past year we have seen God’s faithfulness at work through the prayer and support of the Christian Reformed Church, which continues to make mission a priority. Thank you for your generosity.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

We are the mission agency of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Together we amplify the good news of Jesus through churches, neighborhoods, and communities around the world.

Our calling as a mission agency is simple but encompasses much. It includes faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship.

Our Core Initiatives

1. Global mission

We partner with churches, leaders, and Christian organizations to live out and share the gospel throughout the world to everyone.

- a. The Global Mission Team seeks to inspire and equip Resonate's constituency and ministry partners to witness to Christ beyond their own cultures, mobilizing them to do so in community and collaboration together in diverse settings in North America and around the world. We do that by resourcing, equipping and connecting vocational workers who multiply leaders in the places where they serve. We also build capacity for churches in North America and around the world to witness beyond their own cultures through immersive opportunities and formation programs where they can discern their own calling. As a result, our participants and networks grow in their love for the global church and in discerning their place in it. This initiative includes the following:
 - Identifying, preparing, and sending mission workers on long-term career mission assignments and short-term volunteer opportunities.
 - Establishing and coordinating ministry partnerships with congregations that guide missionary ministry and provide financial support.
 - Offering a full suite of support for missionaries and volunteers, including training, visas, travel, housing, spiritual care, fundraising, etc., so that they not only survive but also thrive on the field.
 - Equipping local Christians through Timothy Leadership Training, which trains pastors in Reformed theology, and through Educational Care, which trains teachers to share the love of Christ in their classrooms.
- b. Summary report on global mission
 - 47 career missionaries serving in 26 countries and 83 partner missionaries serving in 36 countries. Combined, these personnel serve in 44 countries.
 - 381 CRCNA churches supported these missionaries. In addition, 161 volunteers were sent by 32 CRCNA churches to eight regions, and 22 young adults participated in the Cohort program.
 - 1,242 people worldwide made a decision to follow Jesus, 20 new churches started overseas, 152 local gospel workers were mobilized in international contexts, and 4,300 participants were involved in leadership training (including, but not limited to, coaching or mentoring, higher education, Timothy Leadership Training, Educational Care, church planter training, etc.).
 - Global Mission staff worked with 547 participants in events related to healing and reconciliation; discipled 238 individuals along their

faith journey; provided member care for 41 Resonate staff, partner missionaries, and volunteers; and visited 61 other staff and partners for learning and/or encouragement.

Example and story: “Under the Shea Tree”; resonateglobalmission.org/sheatree

2. Local mission

We partner with churches and leaders to live out and share the gospel in practical and engaging ways in their own contexts.

- a. This core initiative exists to mobilize missional leaders who in turn help shape existing congregations and faith communities to bear witness to the gospel. In short, we help churches live out and share the gospel in their neighborhoods and communities. This initiative includes the following:
 - Leadership development and coaching: We are all missionaries, and our mission field is all around us! Resonate is investing in identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers in our own congregations and worldwide.
 - Regional engagement teams: Our team of missional experts lives and works across North America. Each staff member walks alongside congregations to encourage and equip them in fulfilling God’s mission. Through these teams, Resonate is investing in walking alongside mission committees, forging partnerships, and working with young adults whom God is calling to mission work.
 - Campus ministry: Resonate connects churches with universities and colleges in ministry on more than 40 campuses across North America. Resonate is investing in training and supporting campus ministers to be a faithful presence on campuses and to help students discover God’s will for their lives.
 - Global Coffee Break: Resonate’s Bible study curriculum helps churches to invite neighbors to discover God’s story together.
- b. Summary report on local mission
 - Provided financial and coaching support to campus ministers and their teams at 14 universities and colleges in Canada and 17 in the U.S.
 - Managed a newly developed 10-month mission training program called Reverb in two North America regions (one in Canada and one in the U.S.). Three groups participated: one of young adults, one of volunteer missionaries, and one of lay leaders. The program is now being adapted into an online course to be used with Resonate staff and offered to churches.
 - Placed 33 students in internship programs in international and domestic settings.
 - Consulted/coached 432 Christian Reformed congregations.

- Started four cohorts of CRCNA congregations on a three-year neighborhood-based ministry program (Go Local and Joining God in the Neighborhood).
- Completed a survey and study of church growth through evangelism. As a part of this study, we reached out to interview the top 20 churches growing through evangelism in the CRCNA and surveyed the top 200. The full report on this survey is available at resonateglobalmission.org/evangelism.

Example and story: “Following God’s Lead”;
resonateglobalmission.org/compass

3. Church planting

We come alongside churches to form new Christian communities who live out the gospel and bear witness to Jesus.

- a. Our goal through church planting is to cultivate a healthy ecosystem that allows Christian Reformed congregations to form and lead new churches. Though it’s a rapidly changing area of Resonate’s ministry, this is an area in which our denomination is already growing and becoming a leader that other churches and organizations look up to. This initiative includes the following:
 - Parent churches: We partner with established churches to identify church planting opportunities and the operational systems necessary to establish and sustain their ministry.
 - Partner church plants: We come alongside church planters with networking, coaching, continuing education, and funding.
 - New expressions of church: Church plants are one of the most effective ways to reach new groups of people, so we are developing new methods like microchurch plants, church planter training hubs, and multisite church plants.
- b. Summary report on church planting
 - Overall, church planting is the area in which our denomination is experiencing the most growth. Last year we planted 11 new churches.
 - In fiscal year 2025-2026, Resonate expects to continue partnerships with 53 church plants and to start 33 additional new partnerships! Grant funding remains a key need for all of these partners, but Resonate has already expanded other areas of vital support.
 - Supporting microchurches—at least a third of the churches we plan to begin partnerships with next year are new kinds of church plants commonly generalized as “microchurches.” We are currently wrapping up a two-year pilot program with Calvin Theological Seminary focused on pastor training for microchurch pastors. The lessons learned will be crucial in supporting this growing area of church planting.
 - Supporting diaspora and ethnic-minority churches—another third of new churches are those that serve people groups who are often first-

or second-generation immigrants and speak a language other than English. Resonate is developing coaching capacity, training methods, and partnerships in order to serve alongside these churches. Often diaspora and ethnic-minority churches seek out affiliation with the CRCNA because they value the doctrine and deep theological richness of our approach.

Example and story: “Then Came the Morning”;
resonateglobalmission.org/morning

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey*

Resonate exists to serve CRCNA congregations as they share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant churches—a key goal of the *Our Journey* ministry plan—and our work flows through all four aspects of this plan. Our Christian Reformed congregations are our most important ministry partners, and equipping young people, supporting diaspora ministry, and engaging in ministry with ethnic minorities are the most significant areas in which Resonate can help CRCNA congregations in mission.

A. Global mission

The Global Mission team has been working to foster stronger church engagement through Resonate’s North American regional teams. In particular, there is now a local mission leader (LML) who specializes in global mission on each of the six regional teams in North America. We’ve equipped them and other staff to communicate about global mission work needs, giving us an avenue of engagement especially for the purpose of connecting missionaries to new support and for recruitment for all of Global Mission programming. LMLs are also in place to listen to churches, to cultivate practices of prayer and care for global mission, and to help live out the gospel through mission work around the world.

As we scan the landscape of our international regional teams, we see that the Lord has indeed been leading us. We see the categories or themes of our work coming into sharper focus. The following are main themes and emerging themes:

- Diaspora, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (European, Korean, Japanese, Latin American/Caribbean)
- Unreached and Muslim (Japan, Cambodia, Nepal, Europe, Middle East and W Africa, China)
- Church planting networks (Nepal, Cambodia, Nigeria)
- Learning programs (Timothy Leadership Training, Educational Care, Global Coffee Break)
- Young adults, students (Cohort Latin America, Middle East, Europe, and emerging in Eastern and Southern Africa)
- Trauma healing and reconciliation (a growth area)

An important development in the past quarter has been the integration of the learning programs (formerly Raise Up Global Ministries) into Resonate.

Timothy Leadership Training and Educational Care are now under the supervision of the Global Mission Initiative, and Global Coffee Break is under the leadership of the Local Mission Initiative. We see this as a favorable move that promises to bring regional work into unity with the learning programs. It will also give learning-program staff a home within the core initiative areas.

B. Local mission

Resonate Global Mission's contribution to the mission of the CRCNA is to help congregations live out a biblical and holistic gospel vision in their local communities and around the world. We invite churches into two significant postures/priorities in their missional call. The first is to embrace their call locally. We want congregations and faith communities to discern where God is at work in their local neighborhood and surrounding community. The second is for congregations and faith communities to see their place within the global church.

We cannot be the church without being active in the mission of God. We desire to see each local church influence and be influenced by what God is doing around the world. The strategy for this transformation of congregations is the mobilization of missional leaders from within the congregation.

1. Classis engagement

Resonate staff began a renewed effort to be present and engaged at classis. Beginning last fall, Resonate prepared a suite of talking points, presentations, handouts, reporting, and other resources to equip regional mission leaders and local mission leaders to engage each classis group.

- a. **Announcing new resources:** The CRCNA has generally not had a wide variety of its own tangible resources for developing practices and skills in gospel witness. Especially over the past year we have developed resources, experiences, curriculum, and other ways for churches to experience God's leading and step out of their comfort zones. One key example is the Witness Curriculum, available at resonateglobalmission.org/witness.
- b. **Introducing guiding messages for mission:** Over the past year we have encouraged classes to see a "bright future" for the CRCNA in terms of the special calling and equipping this denomination has. In the coming year we are asking classes to "look for the light," to be guided forward by the evidence of God at work and by the successes we can see right now in the mission work we are doing together.

2. Church engagement

We serve Christian Reformed churches by helping them respond to God's call to live out and share the gospel in their own neighborhoods. We provide coaching, discernment, and partnership so that everyone may join God at work through salvation and renewal in their own community. Mission work using this strategy includes the following:

- a. Leadership development and coaching: We are all missionaries, and our mission field is all around us! Resonate is investing in identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers in our own congregations and worldwide.
- b. Regional engagement teams: Our team of missional experts lives and works across North America. Each staff member walks alongside congregations to encourage and equip them in fulfilling God’s mission. Through these teams, Resonate is investing in walking alongside mission committees, forging partnerships, and working with young adults whom God is calling to mission work.
- c. Campus ministry: Resonate connects churches with universities and colleges in ministry on more than 40 campuses across North America. Resonate is investing in training and supporting campus ministers to be a faithful presence on campuses and help students discover God’s will for their lives.

C. Church planting

Since the CRCNA adopted church planting as part of a major milestone of the *Our Journey* ministry plan, Resonate has invested in expanding our support for church planting, and we hope you will be encouraged to see how God is using our denomination in this important ministry area.

Church planting in the CRC has always been done in close collaboration with classes and parent churches. The renewed effort we’re making to expand church planting is focused on creating a garden where we grow all types of churches and ensure that each gets what they need in order to thrive. This type of ecosystem includes all of our Christian Reformed congregations, whether or not they directly parent a church plant!

1. Classis engagement

Resonate staff are working to build the capacity of classes to plant churches, with work that happens both within a given classis and in partnerships across multiple classes. The demand for church planting is driving both support for Resonate and the need for Resonate to support congregations.

- a. Lessons of exponential growth—Resonate staff work with each classis to make sure that all others can learn from successes in church planting and other mission work.
- b. Effective partnership with classis—When a new church is constituted, Church Order requires approval from classis. Resonate helps to facilitate this process and to help establish credibility and accountability.

2. Church engagement

Church plants always start under the care of an established church.

Through relationship building, identifying parent churches, and walking with churches that plant, Resonate helps to make the church-planting vision a reality.

- a. Many considerations—Practical aspects of starting a church can be daunting, but Resonate partners with parent churches to help them each step of the way—from discerning the need, to recruiting a church planter, to selecting a site, to registering and incorporating the new church.
- b. Ordination—Only an organized church can ordain someone. So if a church plant is calling a pastor, the organized church that is sponsoring the plant must officially call the pastor.
- c. Resonate helps churches to allocate their financial support for church plants where it is most needed, through funding classis projects and through gifts and offerings to Resonate that are used as grant support. We also help to train church planters to budget and raise funds for their church.

3. Denominational growth

The demographics of the CRCNA are changing, and this is happening primarily through church planting. The momentum of our church planting ministry will provide us with the tools and resources we need to continue building a bright future for our denomination!

- a. The reputation of the CRCNA is strong. Especially among diaspora and ethnic-minority churches, we find that church plants highly value affiliation with the CRCNA. In particular this is due to open pathways into ministry and to our strong sense of relationship with other churches.
- b. The call to build a global church—The expanding reach of church planting is a (1) confirmation of God’s call to all our churches to join with God’s mission globally and (2) an opportunity to serve all of our neighbors.

4. Needs for the future of church planting

The financial need remains the biggest obstacle to church planting—for individual church plants and for the denomination as a whole. We ask that every classis encourage their churches to support church plants locally and with Resonate! Beyond financial needs, there is also a need for cultural shifts that each classis can help to make at the local level.

- a. Hospitality to new kinds of church plants—Some leaders of micro-churches, diaspora communities, and young adult communities report not being included at the classical level in the same ways that typical, traditional pastors often are. For example, some of these leaders have not been included on email lists or have not received notifications when discussions are happening. One way for a classis to be hospitable is to check in with their church planters to ensure they have a seat at the table.
- b. Restricted funds—A significant number of classes have funds designated for church planting, but they have no church plants. If that is the

case in your classis, we encourage you to connect with Resonate so that we can think creatively together on how to put those funds to work.

- c. Church plant visits—The first step toward finding out what your church planters need is to get in touch. We have seen church-plant visits make a big difference in a classis' church-planting engagement. We encourage you to make time to visit a church plant, especially if you sense God's call on your church or classis to plant a church.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the chair of the Global Missions Ministries Committee of the Council of Delegates, Jill Feikema, and director of Resonate Global Mission, Kevin DeRaaf, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to Resonate Global Mission are addressed.

B. That synod, along with the Council of Delegates, encourage all Christian Reformed congregations to recognize the following Sundays as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Resonate Global Mission: Easter, Pentecost, the second Sunday in September, and the fourth Sunday in November.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Resonate Global Mission
Kevin DeRaaf, director

Thrive

I. Introduction—Mandate and mission

Led by Rev. Lesli van Milligen, Thrive seeks “to engage and accompany Christian Reformed congregations as they seek to faithfully and holistically embody the gospel in their respective contexts” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 956). Synod has entrusted Thrive with the responsibility to provide expertise, wisdom, and compassionate support to congregations while remaining attentive to a wide range of opportunities and challenges facing the church today.

While Thrive’s primary focus is on local Christian Reformed congregations, Thrive’s capacity to encourage and equip congregations will be enriched and strengthened by engagement with external associations and partnerships, particularly those that focus on specialized aspects of Thrive’s responsibilities. (See *Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 78; *Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 956-57.)

Synod charges Thrive to be attentive to a broad spectrum of congregational leadership roles and a wide array of congregational opportunities and needs. The underlying goal or mission that motivates Thrive’s efforts is to equip and encourage congregations in ways that help them thrive in their respective contexts.

In carrying out this mission, with a deliberate regional presence, Thrive engages Christian Reformed congregations through six primary activities: consultations and workshops for churches and classes; coaching and network facilitation for ministry leaders; and resource curation and creation for a wider range of audiences.

Thrive had a robust year as a ministry agency of the CRCNA. In forming Thrive, we indicated that a leading priority was the formation of a cohesive team. While continuing to adjust to this agency’s new rhythms, our team of Thrive staff have pulled together, have communicated well with each other, and have been learning to embrace our common mission of encouraging and equipping congregations and ministry leaders. It is a privilege to work alongside such a dynamic, competent, and gifted team.

Additionally, Thrive prioritized church renewal, intergenerational ministry, support for ministry leaders, leaning into our denomination’s growing multilingual and multicultural identity, and establishing Thrive’s infrastructure. From the perspective of key activities and metrics, Thrive met or exceeded its primary goals. A few activities have been adjusted due to staff turnover and to an increase in needs from churches that have required more urgent attention.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

It has been two years since synod endorsed joining nine previously separate ministries into one ministry agency (see crcna.org/Thrive). The consolidation worked! Thrive continues to be better able to engage holistically with

and to encourage congregations in the CRCNA's five areas of calling (Our Calling): faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship. Over the past two years we have laid the foundation for a wraparound case-management approach to serving congregations that enables Thrive to be responsive in a timely manner to the various ministry needs and resources of Christian Reformed congregations. Whether through facilitated listening sessions, cohort learning opportunities, deeper consultation, or regular contact from our regional staff, Thrive is focused on equipping and encouraging congregations and their ministry leaders.

An example of this approach is our Intercultural Cohorts, in which congregations that are experiencing growth from the influx of newcomers to North America have gathered to learn from one another on how best to welcome and enfold people from a variety of cultures and language groups into the full life of the church, including worship, leadership, fellowship, and discipleship. Together these congregations learned how to use technology for linguistic translation and how to include multiple languages and cultural expressions in their corporate worship. Thrive was able to support congregations with Lilly grant support, regular coaching, and the creation of a multicultural toolkit that can be accessed by other congregations that are on a similar journey.

Here are a few additional examples of how Thrive has lived into these ministry callings:

Thrive supported the **faith formation** efforts of our congregations in the following ways:

- Continuing to host parent listening groups in order to learn how Thrive can better support faith formation in the home. We have done four sessions so far. These listening groups are part of a broader initiative to help congregations better understand the faith formation needs of families and children.
- Hiring a faith formation consultant who will equip congregations in cradle-to-grave discipleship.

Thrive supported **servant leadership** and church renewal efforts in our congregations as follows:

- Facilitating *Thriving Essentials* workshops. From July 1 through December 31, 2024, Thrive facilitated *Thriving Essentials* with 705 participants from 61 congregations (33, Canada; 28, U.S.) For example, Classis Red Mesa worked through *Thriving Essentials* as a leadership development group with 40 people representing 11 congregations. We are excited to see and hear the responses to this resource, and we hope congregational engagement with *Thriving Essentials* will grow in the coming years. The development of individual leaders in a church will result in more members being available to serve on

councils, greater ownership of and collaboration in ministry, and increased capacity for spiritual discernment.

- Hiring a new consultant for pastor well-being.
- Hosting a Pastors' Wives Gathering in Niagara Falls, Ontario, with 50 participants from across North America. The purpose of this gathering has been to indirectly support pastors by supporting their spouses. The theme for this event in October 2024 was how to create support for pastors' families that will help them in the quickly changing landscape of pastoral ministry.
- Continuing to support congregations and classes through Next Steps Discernment in response to recommendations adopted by Synod 2024, especially in conjunction with discussions regarding disaffiliation.
- Revamping the pastor search process to address longer vacancies and an increasing pastor shortage. Thrive works closely with the Candidacy Office in this area of its work.

In the area of **gospel proclamation and worship** Thrive supported congregations in the following ways:

- Contributing to the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship's efforts through having multiple Thrive staff present at the annual Symposium on Worship.
- Hosting three worship roundtables centered on disability and worship, as well as multiple worship-planning roundtables throughout the liturgical year.

Thrive supported congregations in the area of **mercy and justice** as follows:

- Translating *Power and Privilege* materials into Korean.
- Developing strategic partnerships and collaborations with Exodus World Service and Crossroads Prison Ministry. Both initiatives have led to meaningful follow-up opportunities with churches and ministry leaders, rooted in deep faith formation and discipleship.
- Recruiting new disability access advocates for areas throughout North America—six new regional disability advocates started as volunteers in their classes, and thirteen new church disability advocates began work in their congregations.

Thrive supported congregations in the area of **global mission** as well. Recognizing that global mission is at our doorstep, Thrive meets regularly with Resonate Global Mission staff in order to ensure that our efforts are aligned with each other and that Thrive is aware of resources and support that are necessary for congregations growing with newcomers to North America.

III. Connecting with churches

The Council of Delegates, with the endorsement of Synod 2023, tasked Thrive with leading the CRC in a robust effort to support and encourage church renewal that touches on the four milestones of the CRCNA Ministry Plan: *Our Journey*. Renewal will come through deeper engagement with

prayer and practices of discernment and through strengthening adult formation, which can in turn embolden witness and engagement with each congregation's mission in their context. Thrive also continues to find a variety of ways to listen both to emerging young adult leaders and to leaders from diverse backgrounds to help us understand the particular resources and postures necessary to grow healthy intergenerational and multicultural churches.

Thrive specifically supported **cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual discipline** in the following ways:

- Hiring a faith formation consultant. One of the main tasks of this role will be to support this part of the ministry plan.
- Prioritizing prayer and faith practices as part of our own team rhythms. Aside from opportunities to participate in CRCNA-wide devotional times, Thrive staff meet monthly as a team for prayer and Scripture engagement.
- Translating faith formation tips into Korean and Spanish. These tips are now available online in English, Korean, and Spanish and can be used on a three-year rotation in church bulletins and newsletters.

Thrive continues to **listen to the voices of every generation**:

- Through our Generation Spark initiative (shared with the RCA), Thrive staff continue to help congregations engage with emerging adults and young people through a supported mentoring program that helps congregations pair older members of their congregations with younger members to work together on meaningful ministry challenges.
- Thrive continues to facilitate listening sessions with parents to discover more about how churches and the denomination can better support parents in faith formation in the home. Supported in these efforts by the Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative, Thrive is able not only to gather important information on how to resource parents well but also to provide a facilitated space for parents to connect with and support each other in the important work of parenting faith. Parents have consistently expressed the desire to gather with other parents to discuss the challenges they are facing together for mutual encouragement and idea sharing.

Thrive promoted **growth in diversity, reconciliation, and welcome** in the following ways:

- In November the first iteration of a Thrive-supported Intercultural Congregation Cohort had its final retreat in Vancouver, British Columbia. The thirteen congregations and three micro churches that participated shared what they gained from their cohort experience while learning about ways to engage in healthy multicultural worship practices.

- Thrive’s Equip Team will be compiling the learnings from this cohort and creating a toolkit that will be accessible to congregations throughout the CRC.
- Additionally, congregations in both the United States and Canada are being recruited for a new Intercultural Cohort that will begin in early 2025.
- All Thrive staff have completed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment for better serving our churches and leaders by supporting their growth in cultural competency. This effort strengthens Thrive's mission to promote cultural awareness and equip leaders for more effective, inclusive ministry.

Thrive supported **sharing the gospel** in the following ways:

- Helping congregations identify their missional calling within their unique contexts. Thriving Essentials workshops continue to be our most impactful tool for helping congregations engage in a renewed commitment to sharing the gospel. We are currently working on a plan to train emerging adult leaders to facilitate this program and connect with a new generation of church leaders.
- Providing staff time through the work of Elaine May and several other Thrive staff as they participated in Gather events (for the Office of General Secretary) in which CRC participants are able to explore and identify the various ways God is using their congregations to share the gospel in their regions and local churches. Five out of ten planned events were completed in 2024, and the rest will be completed before the meeting of Synod 2025. Data is being collected to help us understand how to support churches in their unique missional calling.

IV. Other significant activities

Thrive continues to be grateful for grant support from Lilly Endowment, Inc. The grants Thrive has received support ministry initiatives that we are committed to in relation to faith formation and pastoral well-being. Thriving Together in Ministry (for pastoral well-being) is a sustaining grant to continue and expand our support of ordained leaders who are in seasons of discernment and transition related to their call. This year Thrive has hosted events that help pastors in their first call and those who want to retire well.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant Lesli van Milligen, director of Thrive, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to Thrive are addressed.

B. That synod, along with the Council of Delegates, remind all Christian Reformed congregations that Thrive exists “to provide expertise, wisdom, and compassionate support to congregations while remaining attentive to a wide range of opportunities and challenges facing the church today”; and that synod encourage ministry leaders and CRC members to reach out to Thrive for support.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Thrive
Lesli van Milligen, director

World Renew

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

In 1962, twelve years after the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) was formally asked to “consider the advisability of appointing a Synodical Diaconal Committee” (*Acts of Synod* 1950, p. 63), synod approved the formation of the denomination’s diaconal agency. Its mandate was “to minister in the name of our Lord to those distressed by reason of the violence of nature, the carnage of war, or other calamities of life, and to relieve the suffering of the needy in the world” (see *Acts of Synod* 1962, p. 333).

World Renew has fulfilled this mandate with bold hope and unrelenting love for more than 60 years, reaching out in Christ’s name to support vulnerable people around the world. Through global staff placement and meaningful localized partnerships, World Renew works to respond to God’s call to live justly, love mercy, and serve Christ as the international community faces the challenges of injustice, hunger, displacement, and disaster. Because we serve the risen Savior, we aim to help renew hope where there is despair; reconcile lives into right relationship with our Creator, our neighbor, our world, and ourselves; and restore creation through sustainable practices and processes so that every one of God’s people can flourish.

B. Mission and ministry

Through your heartfelt generosity in 2024, World Renew joined with 559,987 participants worldwide who experienced deep need and brokenness. Yet in each community where we worked, we found Jesus already there, ready to meet people with his loving attention and to invite them into the fullness of life. He knows and remembers each person by name and calls us all to work boldly together for a better world.

By God’s grace and with the continued support of donors, World Renew has been able to press on to show mercy abundantly, commit to living justly, and seek wisdom in walking humbly into God’s transformative work around the world so that his redemption and renewal might be experienced in abundance.

World Renew strives to be an instrument of peace for God’s glory as we work to shift power to partners and communities in the 29 countries where we have programs. Through the church worldwide and servants called to ministry, lives are transformed and all glory goes to God.

As we aim to fulfill our mandate, we believe in working *with* (not *for*) communities, using the approach of community development, disaster response, and peace and justice. In this way we strive to help make paths straight for the Spirit to change lives.

Through community development programs in 19 countries, 254,769 participants received support in the key areas of food security, economic opportunity, community health, and peace and justice. Additionally, 305,218 people who experienced war, drought, famine, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tornadoes in 21 countries received assistance with emergency support. These included emergency food, water, shelter, sanitation, economic assistance, and livelihood rehabilitation.

Thanks to the generosity and compassion of 47 sponsoring groups including many Christian Reformed churches, World Renew facilitated the sponsorship and resettlement of 148 refugees last year. This work of welcome is made possible through our status as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with the Government of Canada. In 2024, World Renew celebrated the results of an organizational assessment by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Our “Zero Risk” status allows us to continue working with sponsors in providing refugees with safety, protection, and hope for a better future through sponsorship and resettlement.

World Renew has never received Christian Reformed Church ministry shares. Instead, it depends primarily on the generous donations and offerings of God’s people to support its work in communities of poverty and need. In 2024, World Renew was entrusted with millions of dollars in gifts from individuals and churches who believe in building up and supporting the Body of Christ worldwide through justice and mercy. Our work was supported by 1,246 volunteers who donated their time and gifts to situations of need worldwide, totaling 87,503 hours or the equivalent of 36 full-time employees. Twelve international relief managers volunteered their time to serve through volunteer training, project consulting, and travel to disaster sites to distribute emergency aid.

For a more detailed account of our work over the past year, please refer to the World Renew 2024 Ministry Report at worldrenew.net (U.S.) and worldrenew.ca (Canada).

Last year, World Renew continued to fulfill its mission to “engage God’s people in redeeming resources and developing gifts in collaborative activities of love, mercy, justice, and compassion.” And while the World Renew community depends on generous donors and on the participants in our projects (men, women, and young people who step out in faith to work with us), none of this is possible without the provision, mercy, and grace of God. To him be the glory as we share in this report some of the remarkable things he has done in the past year through World Renew.

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
—Matthew 19:26

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

At World Renew, faith formation is a foundation for keeping our motivation for justice and mercy front and center. Our staff participate in prayer times, devotions, small groups, book studies, and educational experiences that develop their faith. There are ongoing conversations about how we can ensure that our faith in God guides every step.

In North America, World Renew's faith formation resources include devotions, videos, webinars, in-person educational conversations, and curriculum for churches. Many of these resources are now offered digitally, via worldrenew.net/worldrenew.ca and our social media channels.

The Food and Faith Webinar Series held in spring 2024 brought together people from congregations across the United States and Canada to learn from leaders in the food-systems field as they taught about how their faith has informed their work and worldview.

With a \$1.2 million grant from the State of Michigan, we completed work on our Sacred Spaces project to identify ten churches in low-income and environmentally vulnerable neighborhoods. We made energy-efficiency upgrades to their buildings so that these churches can save money and reinvest in their communities. World Renew also partnered to launch the new nonprofit Solar Faithful, a faith-based power initiative that has already assisted 20 congregations by installing solar panels and improving environmental stewardship.

In Canada, congregations are mobilized through the work of the Canadian justice mobilizer (a position held jointly between the CRCNA and World Renew) and the staff of World Renew's Church and Community Engagement team. This team offers instruction and interaction at schools and universities, including through the Equipped to Educate curriculum for K-12 that aligns biblical teachings on food security, water, and refugee resettlement with Canadian educational requirements.

Meanwhile, around the world our World Renew ministry teams and partners offer a biblical basis for conservation agriculture, healthy families, good stewardship, and more so that community leaders can be inspired and led by the Holy Spirit to participate in activities that support the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health of their neighbors. Across all of our ministry teams, our annual event 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence has encouraged thought about how our faith should inform healthy, God-honoring relationships, particularly through the use of a devotional guide during the campaign. The *Do Justice* Podcast, hosted by World Renew and the CRCNA, is a conversation starter for people wishing to pursue justice in and through the Christian church, find new ideas and perspectives, share better ways to engage in justice work, and grow in faith. This past season's panelists included Adrian Jacobs, Lindsay Wieland Capel, Rev. Elaine May, Mark Vanderwees, and Syd Hielema.

B. Servant leadership

Recruiting and training servant leaders is one of the great joys of the World Renew team. Across the world, building leadership capacity is a fundamental part of our calling. This can mean training birth attendants to help serve women in labor, hiring interns to contribute to and learn from our teams, or supporting program participants as they pursue new skills to build income for their families.

Another significant way that World Renew nurtures servant leadership is through our volunteer programs. For instance, participants in our Global Volunteers Program take time and resources to come and learn from God's people in different contexts. World Renew's dedicated international relief managers put their expertise to work for no personal gain except the experience of living and working with people in the most challenging of circumstances. And our Refugee Sponsorship and Resettlement Program for newcomers to Canada is run almost entirely by volunteers who raise support, except for a small team that ensures the implementation of World Renew's significant responsibilities as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder.

The majority of those who've volunteered with World Renew, though, are our "Green Shirts" — Disaster Response Services volunteers. These dedicated and hardworking individuals make our efforts to assist with long-term recovery after a disaster in North America possible.

C. Global Mission

At World Renew we believe that our call to be witnesses of Christ's kingdom to the ends of the earth starts and ends with local churches and denominations. Whether in the Global North or the Global South, we work in partnership with churches, denominations, and networks to discern how biblical wisdom can inform our pursuit of living out the gospel. Our expertise is in building strong partnerships between churches from Grand Rapids to Guatemala, from Bangladesh to Burlington, and so many in between.

Our church partnerships are something we view as a long-term relationship, not a short-term visit. We plan and dream together, taking our lead from a community and then working with them to build a bridge with another party whose passions align with theirs. Some might call this fundraising, but at World Renew this part of our work often feels more like match-making as we seek to align kingdom purposes across the world. Some of these partnerships have been continuing for years, with congregations in Alberta or California connecting regularly with their counterparts in Uganda or Honduras.

World Renew both depends on and supports the church worldwide in times of crisis. When disasters occur, whether due to climate or conflict, we look for local denominations, congregations, and other organizations that are already responding, and we ask them what they require to be able to do their God-honoring work of compassion more effectively.

D. Mercy and justice

The CRCNA formally acknowledges mercy and justice as integral to its mission, vision, and calling. In World Renew's global ministry of community development and disaster response, mercy and justice are inseparable in experiencing the wholeness that God intends for all people, particularly for those who face extreme poverty, hunger, and the effects of disaster.

As an agency that firmly believes we are all imagebearers of God (Gen. 1:26), we emphasize gender justice through our programs. In 2024 we continued to implement our global gender strategy in all our programs by encouraging staff and partners to see gender justice connecting with the exclusion of other marginalized groups such as young people, seniors, and disabled persons.

The Refugee Sponsorship and Resettlement program in Canada embodies our justice work as it equips churches in and beyond the Christian Reformed Church to welcome newcomers who have fled their countries of origin in fear of their safety. Across North America, the Climate Witness Project directs church communities wishing to steward God's creation in meaningful and creative ways. Our Justice and Peacebuilding colleagues inform and inspire advocacy through action alerts, email campaigns, and trainings. This team also offers workshops and communities of practice around themes like food and faith, neighboring, asset-based community development, and more.

Prayer is an essential part of the work of mercy and justice as well, so we offer devotional and prayer resources alongside our annual campaigns and designated Sunday offerings. When we bring the world's overwhelming issues of injustice before the Lord, we witness how God can bring freedom and new life to people who have never experienced it before.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

We proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and seek to worship him in all that we do. For World Renew, our life in Christ is now and for eternity, so our worship offering is to contribute to flourishing and fullness of life on earth, waiting for the day when Christ will return and complete the story of salvation. When our neighbors around the world experience barriers to their well-being, those barriers can translate into despair. Hope made tangible through food, health, and economic opportunities can help to show that God makes his presence evident in the most difficult situations.

We celebrate through our relationships with churches and church groups how the good news can be made tangible through the work of justice. Whether discussing food security, asset-based community development, or helping without hurting, we rejoice when we are invited to discuss the application of the Bible to questions of injustice. Our work consists of many conversations, webinars, collaboration with deacons and Diaconal Ministries Canada, and events to explore together what God's great plan of jus-

tice involves—and then going out and doing it. It consists of Disaster Response Services’ working with local organizations to build the capacity of recovery groups, churches, and other groups as we step alongside them with resources, industry experience, and volunteer time and labor. It consists of staff and partners sitting down together to create strategies that will fortify minimally resourced churches in the Global South to grow creatively so that they can serve the most vulnerable members of their congregations and communities. This justice work is a proclamation of Christ’s unimaginable love for his people. And when justice is realized, the body of Christ praises God.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

—Ephesians 4:16

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey* (Ministry Plan)

A. Cultivating practices of spiritual discipline

World Renew provides resources to churches such as devotions, prayer guides, and worship materials in connection with our designated Sundays and special offering resources. Throughout the world we integrate prayer and spiritual development into our work in communities. We model prayer through resources and reminders to our supporters so that they can lift up the prayers and praises of our ministry teams together. We support our global teammates as they visit churches and individuals across the Christian Reformed Church in North America, involving them in World Renew’s work financially but also through prayer.

At World Renew we have experienced how God can speak most clearly to us while we are joining with others to serve him. God is present in every tragic situation, and we have seen how he answers prayer:

In Sarasota County, Florida, Disaster Response Services (DRS) continued to respond to families recovering from Hurricane Ian. In 2022 the category-4 storm damaged or destroyed 35,000 homes and killed more than 150 U.S. residents. Hurricane Ian was a catastrophic event in people’s lives, and for many the future looked bleak.

That was certainly true for Gina, a homeowner in Sarasota. The winds from Hurricane Ian ripped the roof off her house, and floodwaters rose to two feet on the first floor. After sitting unrepaired for some time, the second-floor ceiling started to fall in from dampness and rot.

For a while, all utilities were shut down, and when the electricity came back on, mold in the air conditioning unit made Gina’s family sick. Eventually Gina’s children had to move in with one of her church friends because of the environmental risks at home.

As World Renew began to work with the long-term recovery organization in Sarasota County after Hurricane Ian, DRS volunteers were

assigned to complete the long-needed repairs to the roof, walls, and floors of Gina's house, making it healthy and safe for her and her children to live there again.

Gina said she was blessed by the help and hope she received through World Renew DRS. "I am so thankful for the volunteers," she said.

"The repairs have been an answer to my ongoing prayers. God's family has helped me recover from this hurricane, finally."

B. Listening to the voices of every generation

Through visits, videos, podcasts, and webinars, World Renew offers peer-to-peer learning opportunities. We collaborate with ministries such as Diac-
onal Ministries Canada and with CRCNA justice teams to contribute to meaningful dialogue around living out our faith. Some of the workshops delivered to youths in the past year focused on "Jesus and Justice" and asset-based community development. Our *Equipped to Educate* curriculum has been used effectively in approximately 40 classrooms.

Our volunteer opportunities have the exciting characteristic of often consisting of intergenerational groups that come together to learn, experience, and reflect. In 2024, 107 Canadians and 30 Americans traveled with World Renew to visit programs we are involved in around the world so that they could listen and learn, discovering how God is at work in many ways and in many places.

In many of our communities, elders are highly esteemed, but young people are often overlooked. Our youth engagement programming helps to motivate young people to pursue education, make healthy choices about sex and substances, and overcome trauma. These programs are even effectively changing the story of human trafficking in Cambodia:

Sreymom Tith is a 12th-grade student at PorThom High School in Svay Rieng, Cambodia, where World Renew's partners are facilitating youth programs. Area youths often drop out of school to find jobs to help support their families. Many migrate to urban centers or to nearby countries in search of work but lack proper documentation or knowledge of risks such as human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse.

World Renew sponsors a program called Youth Countering People Trafficking (YCPT), which focuses on educating young people in rural communities about these risks.

Sreymom is active in a YCPT program at her school. After training sessions and opportunities to work together with others in community research activities, she soon became a confident group leader. She was excited to conduct presentations and share ideas with her peers and community members.

“I want to encourage young people to make every opportunity count,” Sreymom said. “It is rewarding to contribute to your community. Whether you help others become educated about social issues or raise awareness about key topics, you can work toward creating healthy interactions with people from all walks of life.”

C. Growing in diversity and unity

The World Renew team is committed to cultivating a sense of belonging and seeks to hire staff in ways that reflect the body of Christ, anticipating the day when people from every tribe, language, and nation will worship the Lamb of God together. We look for opportunities to support people who are most vulnerable so that each person, regardless of ability, ethnicity, gender, or age can be welcomed and celebrated. As we do so, Jesus shows us the incredible journey of justice in which he has invited us to participate. World Renew is deeply committed to diversity, and we monitor our efforts to ensure we are growing toward this biblical ideal, increasingly reflecting the composition of the communities in which we live, work, and serve.

In our programs, peacebuilding and trauma healing allow participants to overcome differences and become unified in their visions for their communities. Through our communications, we strive to represent diversity, treat people with dignity, and highlight participants’ experiences in their own voices whenever possible. Every year, World Renew participates in the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign:

Globally, one in three women are subjected to gender-based violence (GBV), which includes physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. For women living with disabilities, GBV can go unnoticed. During the 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2024—a time designated to advocate for an end to GBV and uphold the rights of women and girls—the Beautiful Gate Handicapped People Centre in Nigeria, in collaboration with World Renew, hosted an advocacy seminar to amplify the issues of GBV. The goal was to raise awareness and provide crucial support for people with disabilities.

The room was filled with individuals who have faced similar struggles, all sharing their stories and finding strength in each other. The participants expressed immense gratitude to Beautiful Gate for organizing the seminar, saying they felt heard, supported, and ready to be advocates in their community. “I now feel equipped to not only protect myself but also to help others who might be going through similar experiences,” a participant shared.

Education is key, helping more people understand the specific vulnerability faced by women with disabilities. Through these efforts we build a stronger and more inclusive community that stands up against all forms of violence. This seminar provided participants with contacts to reach out to when faced with challenges of violence.

As we continue to seek justice, we need more spaces where people can come together to share their experiences and learn how to protect themselves and others. Creating a rippling effect of awareness and advocacy can reach even the most remote communities.

D. Sharing the gospel and living missionally

Contributing to the flourishing of all people as imagebearers of God is central to the good news that Christ came to bring us life in all its fullness.

World Renew's global partnerships with churches give room for missional living in a remarkable way as communities across the world share with each other, pray for each other, and build each other up. In the U.S. and Canada, more than four dozen churches are committed to partnerships.

One beautiful way in which God's family is living missionally with the support of World Renew is through our Refugee Sponsorship and Resettlement Program. Sponsoring churches are challenged to host families in crisis and to provide community as they adjust to life in Canada. In the following story the names of family members are changed to protect their identity amid ongoing needs for security:

The Ali family, as Christians and members of an ethnic minority group, didn't know what to do in their home country. "You work hard, but you're second-class citizens," said Roqia, one of four siblings living together with others in their extended family. "We were in a very bad situation in Afghanistan."

As the Alis observed that other members of their community experienced abuse or even disappeared, they decided to escape to Pakistan. The family spent months living in a single crowded room with dozens of other people or in unfinished houses. They feared constantly for their safety, especially for their brother Murad, who uses a wheelchair, and their sister-in-law Fatima, who was expecting a baby.

"When we escaped from Afghanistan and we lived in Pakistan, that was the hardest time," Roqia said.

"Our family is a big family, so completing the documentation for entry into Canada was not easy," Roqia explained. The refugee committee at the local church in Alberta "worked hard day and night to complete it and bring us here. We are very thankful to our church community and to World Renew."

Finally, plans came through to bring the family to Canada. "The 18-hour flight felt like one hour," Roqia recalled. "In Pakistan, I was just a refugee. Now I have a home. I feel more secure and safe, and I can sleep. Our church makes us feel like we are around family."

A member of the local church's refugee committee, said, "It's a blessing to us too. This has united our church. We all came together to do this; everybody wanted to help. And when we called a prayer meeting, a lot of the church showed up." To the committee's amazement,

their community quickly and generously raised the funds needed, and the Ali family were able to begin a new life in Alberta.

Roqia and her sisters and nieces had become used to hiding. They were forced to cover their faces and didn't feel safe leaving their house in Afghanistan. But in Canada they now have bicycles and can go wherever they want, whenever they want. "I feel free," Roqia said.

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.
—James 2:22

IV. Board matters

The World Renew Board of Delegates is a key support of our ministry. The board's primary function is to set the vision and mission of World Renew and to encourage and track the accomplishment of that vision.

World Renew's governance structure is made up of delegates from each CRC classis, in addition to members at-large, who together constitute the Board of Delegates of World Renew.

The delegates are a vital communication link with CRC classes and churches. They select member national governing boards, with seven to nine members on the U.S. board and up to ten members on the Canadian board. The two boards together form the Joint Ministry Council (JMC), which provides governance for World Renew as a whole.

Board of Directors of World Renew-Canada

Jeff Adams, president; Calgary, Alberta
Harry Bergshoeff, vice president; Burlington, Ontario
Marg Hoogland, secretary; Lacombe, Alberta
Darryl Beck, treasurer; Grimsby, Ontario
Gordon Van Vliet, board director; Calgary, Alberta
Echo MacLeod, board director; Ottawa, Ontario
Cari Fydirchuk, pastoral advisor; Cochrane, Alberta

Board of Directors of World Renew-U.S.

Jeffrey Banaszak, president; Holland, Michigan
Shanti Jost, vice president; North Haledon, New Jersey
Kenneth Macbain, treasurer; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Rodolfo Gonzalez, secretary; Moreno Valley, California
Bonny Mulder-Behnia, pastoral advisor; Bellflower, California
Thomas Christian, board director; Grandville, Michigan
Beverly Abma, board director; Grandville, Michigan
Charles Udeh, member at-large; Kentwood, Michigan
Graham Seel, member at-large; Concord, California

A. Board nominations, reappointments, and term completions

Information on new board members, reappointments, and term completions will be provided in the World Renew Supplement report to synod after the annual general meeting of World Renew.

B. Financial matters

1. Salary disclosure

In accord with synod’s mandate to report executive salary levels, World Renew reports the following:

<i>Job level</i>	<i>Number of positions</i>	<i>Number below target</i>	<i>Number at target</i>
E1	2	2	0
E2	1	1	0
E3	4	4	0
H	2	2	0

2. Detailed financial information

Detailed financial information and budgets will be submitted to synod by way of the *Agenda for Synod 2025—Business and Financial Supplement*.

C. Human resources management

World Renew continually evaluates the excellence of its programs and relies on its human resource systems to provide support to its teams. World Renew’s diverse, professional, skilled staff is expected to meet goals set around its vision and mission.

World Renew has a rigorous recruiting process and successfully hired approximately 31 highly skilled staff last year to serve our U.S., Canadian, and overseas teams. We continually expand our recruitment activities to ensure that we meet our diversity and professional learning goals. To that end, we promote professional development and learning and continue to develop competencies across the organization.

Annual performance reviews are routine for all World Renew staff. This practice gives staff an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and critically review their growth areas. World Renew values the people God has called into this kingdom service, who are essential to providing program excellence in communities around the globe.

D. Resource development report

The work of World Renew begins with hope. As people created by God live in hunger and poverty because of a changing climate and violent unrest, we keep hold of faith in Jesus Christ: He is the hope in every story. The stories of hope shared in this report are made possible by your involvement, prayers, and gifts for the work of World Renew in communities affected by poverty worldwide.

World Renew is grateful and humbled to have received \$37 million (USD) from all sources in 2024, including individual gifts, church offerings, grants, and estates. This income was leveraged into even more ministry funding through our networks and collaborations, resulting in greater capacity among our on-field partners in disaster response, community development, and justice education.

World Renew's expenses last year totaled more than \$41 million (USD). Thirty-five percent of ministry dollars were directed to international development programs; 39 percent went to our disaster programs internationally and in North America; 19 percent was spent on fundraising, general, and administrative costs; and the remaining 7 percent was used in education and justice programming.

World Renew connected with international organizations such as Canadian Foodgrains Bank, ACT and Integral alliances, and Growing Hope Globally, providing technical and financial resources that expanded our reach to more people and communities. Through various partnerships including our deep relationships with Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Growing Hope Globally, and local denominations, and via direct implementation, we were able to exceed our social impact target for 2024, reaching 19 percent more people than we had thought possible.

In 2024, World Renew received accolades from nonprofit monitoring organizations for its financial and management practices. World Renew was awarded certification in the Core Humanitarian Standard in 2023 and was able to maintain that certification in 2024. Charity Intelligence awarded World Renew five stars, their highest rating, in international aid. Charity Intelligence looks at how each charity spends the money they receive and rates their transparency in providing this information to their audiences.

In the U.S., World Renew again achieved platinum transparency status with Candid (formerly GuideStar) and is an accredited charity with give.org. We also continue to maintain our excellent standing with Christian monitoring organizations—the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability in the U.S.

World Renew is committed to pursue its mission and to manage with integrity the financial gifts we receive, and we thank God for public recognitions of our values: faith, people flourishing, effectiveness, and stewardship.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Jeff Banaszak, president of World Renew-U.S.; Jeffrey Adams, president of World Renew-Canada; Carol Bremer-Bennett, director of World Renew-U.S.; and Mike White, acting director of World Renew-Canada, when World Renew matters are discussed and need to be addressed.

B. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Carol Bremer-Bennett, director, World Renew-U.S.
Mike White, acting director, World Renew-Canada

STANDING COMMITTEES

Candidacy Committee

I. Introduction

Synod 2004 established the concept of the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee, which is now known as the Candidacy Committee. The committee began meeting in late 2004 and was provided with a full-time staff person in late 2007. The committee mandate is available in a document titled *Journey Toward Ordination*, accessible on the Candidacy Committee website (crcna.org/candidacy).

II. Committee membership

The members of the committee meet three times per year. As with other synodical standing committees, Candidacy Committee members serve a potential of two three-year terms.

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Andrew Beunk (2027/2), Judy Cook (2025/2), Lora Copley (2026/1), Caleb Dickson (2027/2), Felix Fernandez (2025/2), Moon Kim (2026/2), Michelle Kool (2027/1), Henry Kranenburg (2025/1), Andy Sytsma (2025/1), Susan LaClear (staff), Jul Medenblik (ex officio, as the Calvin Theological Seminary representative), and Zachary King (ex officio, as general secretary).

Nominations for new members will be presented in the Candidacy Committee's supplemental report to synod.

III. Developing binational connectedness in the EPMC program

The EPMC Facilitation Team, a subcommittee of the Candidacy Committee, is tasked with walking alongside participants in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) program to advise, resource, and support them. The team members also oversee and implement the strategies of the program. The EPMC Facilitation Team currently includes the following members:

- Rev. Shawn Brix, staff adviser, Calvin Theological Seminary; Canadian church relations liaison for the seminary
- Victor Chen, general member, Classis B.C. Northwest
- Rev. Lora Copley, Candidacy Committee representative, Classis North-central Iowa
- Rev. Charles Dillender, general member, Classis Central California
- Rev. Al Gelder, general member, Classis Grand Rapids East
- Rev. James Hollendoner, general member, Classis Illiana
- Rev. Kelsi Jones, general member, Classis Grand Rapids East
- Rev. Timothy Joo, general member, Classis Hackensack
- Rev. Timothy Kooiman, general member, Classis Wisconsin
- Rev. Michael Koot, general member, Classis B.C. Southeast
- Rev. Aleah Marsden, general member, Classis Central California
- Rev. Daniel Mouw, general member, Classis Grandville
- Rev. Benjamin Oliveira, general member, Classis Muskegon
- Rev. Marg Rekman, general member, Classis Ontario Southwest

Rev. Jack Van de Hoef, general member, Classis Eastern Canada
Rev. Geoff Vandermolten, staff advisor, Calvin Theological Seminary
Rev. Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy

The Candidacy Committee is deeply appreciative of the valuable contributions of the following members who are completing or have completed their terms on the EPMC Facilitation Team: Rev. Maria Bowater, Rev. Kelsi Jones, Rev. Al Gelder.

One of the desired outcomes of the EPMC program is for participants to develop a deeper sense of connection and commitment to the CRCNA throughout the program's two-year process. Two program components that are designed with this goal in mind are the two in-person "connection" events. A "CTS Connection Trip," jointly hosted by the Candidacy office and Calvin Theological Seminary, intends to foster participant connections to faculty, staff, and resources at the seminary. Participants spend time meeting and conversing with professors; engaging in spiritual formation exercises with the director of vocational formation, Dr. Geoff VanderMolen; meeting with their formation group; and experiencing some unique CRC ministries in the Grand Rapids area. The second event is the "CRCNA Connection Trip," in which participants have opportunities to meet and converse with CRCNA staff, learn about resources that can enrich their future ministry work, and spend time in a retreat setting having conversations about spiritual and emotional health for ministry.

For many years, both of these connection events were held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Then in 2022, with the assistance of Rev. Shawn Brix, the Candidacy Committee began offering the "CRCNA Connection Trip" in Burlington, Ontario, for Canadian participants. The goal was to help those who were more likely to take a call in Canada to learn about and connect with the staff, resources, and ministries in Canada rather than in the United States.

U.S. participants in the program have historically attended both of the connection events in Grand Rapids. However, this year the EPMC Facilitation Team reflected on the value of helping all candidates understand the binational character of the denomination and decided to revise these events so that *all participants* can connect with CRCNA staff, resources, and ministries on both sides of the border.

The Candidacy Committee approved this change, expressing appreciation for the work and vision of the EPMC Facilitation Team in regard to fostering binational awareness and developing a sense of connection in our candidates.

In 2025 and in the future, then, all EPMC participants will be required to attend both a "U.S. Connection Trip" (in Grand Rapids, connecting with Calvin Seminary and denominational staff and resources) and a "Canada Connection Trip" (hosted in various locations in Ontario, where participants

will engage in a spiritual retreat and experience some of the unique and inspiring Canadian ministries of the CRCNA).

IV. Review of standards for the commissioned pastor office

The Candidacy Committee’s mandate includes a statement that the committee is to “establish with the approval of synod standards that will result in consistency, fairness, and justice in applying the denomination’s requirements for each person who desires to become a minister of the Word in the CRC, whether applying under Article 6, 7, or 8 of the Church Order, or who desires to be a commissioned pastor applying under Article 23.” In order to accomplish this, the committee is also asked to “maintain, clarify, and periodically review these standards.”

This year the committee determined that it would be timely and helpful to conduct a review of the current standards for the office of commissioned pastor, articulated in Articles 23 and 24 of the Church Order. The commissioned pastor office has grown in both use and complexity over the past decade. With almost 10 percent of CRCNA churches now led by commissioned pastors serving in a solo/lead role, it is important to be attentive to developing best practices for training and ordaining men and women to these important ministry roles.

To ensure that this review received ample attention, the committee appointed a Commissioned Pastor Study Team consisting of the Candidacy director, three Candidacy Committee members (Lora Copley, Andy Sytsma, Caleb Dickson), and four classis pastors (Joel Sheeres, Petr Kornilov, Dan DeGraff, Shawn Brix). The team was asked to do the following:

- Review the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor—this work correlates with Synod 2024’s directive that the Candidacy Committee review the implications of the Church Order Review Task Force report’s reflections on the “boundaries of ‘ministerial work’ and the significance of ordination” for the commissioned pastor office (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 124, 139-40; *Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 853).
- Through a survey of commissioned pastors, review the effectiveness of the current classis practices for training, ordaining, and supporting commissioned pastors.
- Review the Article 24-b “bridge ordination” process to determine whether current practices are resulting in effective and healthy ministry.

Because the Commissioned Pastor Study Team deemed it wise to invest a significant amount of time to reviewing item 1 (the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor), it was decided to prioritize the other two tasks for completion before this report and to devote more time in the spring and fall of 2025 for reviewing the theological framework. The following subsections therefore report on the results of a survey of commissioned

pastors (item 2) and on the team's review of the Article 24-b "bridge ordination" process (item 3).

A. Commissioned pastor survey results

A survey was designed to solicit feedback from commissioned pastors regarding their experiences with the training process and their sense of connectedness within their classis and the broader denomination. Through the survey, the committee hoped to glean insights about the effectiveness of current training pathways and thus inform our work of resourcing and guiding classes along this route to ministry. The findings are included below, for information.

The survey was sent to all 300 commissioned pastors in the denomination, and 79 completed the survey.

Regarding commissioned pastor learning plans:

- 16.5 percent of commissioned pastors were trained through individualized training plans designed and approved by their classis.
- 15.2 percent were trained through an established training program not developed by their classis (including *Coram Deo*, Christian Leadership Institute, and various degrees and programs through CTS and other seminaries).
- 13.9 percent were mentored but given no particular course of study.
- 12.7 percent were trained through a Leadership Development Network developed by their classis.
- 8.9 percent reported having no mentorship or learning plan prior to ordination.
- 7.6 percent reported that their learning plan consisted of an agreement to begin making progress toward completion of the required education for ordination as minister of the Word (Art. 24-b).
- 6.3 percent were trained through a packet of materials provided by the Candidacy office.

Length of training period before examination:

- 40.3 percent—more than 2 years
- 12.5 percent—1-2 years
- 19.4 percent—7-12 months
- 15.3 percent—3-6 months
- 12.5 percent—less than 3 months

Subjects covered in learning plan:

- 80.3 percent studied Reformed creeds and confessions.
- 67.6 percent studied Reformed perspective.
- 63.4 percent studied basic Bible knowledge.
- 60.6 percent studied CRC history.
- 57.7 percent studied Reformed hermeneutics.
- 56.3 percent studied CRC polity.
- 52.1 percent studied preaching.

- 52.1 percent included a character development component.
- 40.8 percent studied “the call of a pastor.”
- 36.6 percent studied CRC ministries.
- 32.4 percent studied other contextual components.

Overall effectiveness of learning plan in training for particular ministry role:

- 56.3 percent believed their learning plan was very effective.
- 40.8 percent believed their learning plan was moderately effective.
- 2.8 percent believed their learning plan was very helpful.

Effectiveness of mentoring component:

- 36.4 percent felt the mentoring was helpful.
- 28.6 percent felt the mentoring was a rich part of their experience.
- 24.7 percent were not assigned a mentor.
- 10.4 percent reported that the period of mentoring was brief or not very formative.

Likelihood of an individual continuing education toward ordination as minister of the Word:

- 40.8 percent were content with their current role and ordination.
- 30.3 percent were strongly considering continuing their education.
- 7.9 percent were already in the process of further seminary education.
- 21.1 percent reported that they may consider continuing their education.

Sense of connectedness to the broader denomination:

- 62 percent expressed feeling adequately connected.
- 24.1 percent expressed feeling very connected.
- 13.9 percent expressed feeling quite disconnected.

Sense of connectedness to local classis:

- 44.9 percent expressed feeling adequately connected.
- 42.3 percent expressed feeling very connected.
- 12.6 percent expressed feeling quite disconnected.

Here are some additional insights and comments offered by commissioned pastors who responded to the survey:

- Commissioned pastors serving as foreign missionaries expressed a sense of disconnection from their classes.
- Classis leaders were apologetic to one individual about the “hurdles” they were making him jump, but he actually experienced all the training and preparation as valuable and effective, leading him to feel confident in his service.
- It was suggested that commissioned pastors who have served for many years should be allowed to transition to the office of minister of the Word through Article 7.

- Some expressed being made to feel like second-class citizens within their classes.
- One noted the importance of mentors staying regularly connected to the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT), with the CMLT being active in the process.
- One expressed a desire for commissioned pastors to be assigned a mentor for their first five years of ordained ministry, as is the case for ministers of the Word.
- One expressed appreciation for being invited to the new pastors orientation in Burlington, Ontario.
- One mentioned being actively discouraged from pursuing further education to become a minister of the Word and felt that they had missed out on the support that other commissioned pastors have been given toward that end.
- One suggested that commissioned pastors be highlighted in *The Banner* like the minister of the Word candidates for ministry.
- One expressed a desire for more structure and uniformity in the process.

The Candidacy Committee noted some of the strong positive findings that were reported in the survey responses. The overall effectiveness of training and mentorship for commissioned pastors was rated highly, and the commissioned pastors sensed a strong connection to their classis and to the denomination, which was very encouraging. Over 80 percent of commissioned pastors reported having studied the Reformed creeds and confessions as part of their learning plan, so it appears that classes have maintained Reformed theological training as a high priority. Also, about 65 percent of the commissioned pastors reported that the mentorship they received from their classis was helpful and a rich part of their learning experience. The Candidacy Committee is deeply grateful to God for all who have invested time and effort into this important work of mentoring.

Needs for continued growth in strength and consistency of commissioned-pastor learning were also evident. The core subjects of basic Bible knowledge, CRC history, Reformed hermeneutics, CRC polity, and CRC ministries were reported as present in fewer than 65 percent of commissioned pastor learning plans, and “character training” was included in only 52 percent of plans. This could reflect competencies already achieved in those areas from previous training done by those involved in the CRC’s learning plans, but it could also reflect deficiencies in our training procedures. In designing a plan, CMLTs should take into account already-achieved competencies in order to create flexible, individualized learning plans while ensuring completion of the full range of subjects.

The methods that classes used for commissioned pastor training varied widely. About a quarter of the commissioned pastors were led through a structured program, a quarter were trained through an individual study

plan (some through materials provided by the Candidacy office), and in almost a quarter of cases there was either no mentorship or no study plan prior to examination.

The Candidacy Committee encourages classes to require the completion of a learning plan for all who pursue ordination as commissioned pastor. For classes that do not already have an established commissioned pastor training program, the committee recommends reaching out to Calvin Theological Seminary to inquire about their new Commissioned Pastor Certificate program, in which the classis and the seminary work together in designing an individualized training plan that achieves seminary credit where needed in order to complete the commissioned pastor training.

Feedback from the survey also indicated that about 60 percent of the denomination's more than 300 commissioned pastors have some interest in training for ordination as minister of the Word. Considering this desire for further training and the increasing responsibilities contained in commissioned pastor job descriptions, it would seem wise for classes to actively support and encourage the educational goals of their commissioned pastors. This statistic may also highlight an opportunity for vacant organized churches that have been searching for a pastor for over two years to consider expanding their search by inviting commissioned pastors who are willing to commit to further seminary training to apply for their solo or lead positions (through Church Order Art. 24-b).

The Candidacy Committee also considered a suggestion from survey respondents regarding continued mentorship for commissioned pastors after their ordination. Currently all newly ordained ministers of the Word are required to have a classis-appointed mentor for five years after ordination; however, a similar mentor arrangement has not been expressly required for commissioned pastors. The committee believes it would be beneficial for classes to adopt the practice of assigning a mentor for newly ordained commissioned pastors as well, especially for those who will be serving in a solo or lead position.

B. Review of the Article 24-b "bridge ordination" process

Since 2019, when the "bridge ordination" process (Art. 24-b) was approved by synod, it has gained prominence on the denominational leadership landscape. This route creates a stepped approach that allows a person who has not fulfilled all of the eligibility requirements for ordination to be ordained to a term call as a commissioned pastor, with an agreement to make progress in completing the education required to be ordained as a minister of the Word. The term call is renewable as long as progress continues to be made.

The flexibility this route provides has been beneficial in many cases. It has allowed gifted, called individuals who are not yet eligible for ordination in the CRC the opportunity to begin serving a church while they work toward completing the prescribed theological training. This route has also been a

blessing to congregations struggling with long vacancies, enabling them to reach beyond the pool of eligible candidates to call someone who has been willing to commit to the journey toward ordination as they serve.

The committee has, however, also been made aware of a significant number of challenges that have arisen from the practice of using this route to ordain persons who do not have previous training or experience as commissioned pastors within the CRCNA. The following tensions have been noted:

- Practices that place ordination ahead of learning, vetting, and relational connection are a departure from the denomination's value of theologically trained clergy.
- The practice of ordaining some individuals as commissioned pastors without prior completion of a learning plan while requiring significant training for others before ordination is inconsistent and inequitable.
- This practice creates an impression of devaluing commissioned pastor training and using the office of commissioned pastor as a "stepping stone."
- In many cases, candidates who were not previously known or relationally vetted within a classis have been called, relocated, and installed in their pastoral work before the classis has had an opportunity to assess their readiness. This practice places an undue burden on the classis to get to know the candidate quickly, approve the learning plan and schedule an exam, and, in some cases, provide a crash course on Reformed theology before the examination.
- The Article 8 route to ordination for ministers from other denominations requires a church to establish the need to call an individual who is not eligible before the process can continue. The classis and Candidacy Committee must then weigh in and concur on the need before approval is given for the process to begin. It seems inconsistent to have no such determination of need for an unordained individual to be called through the Article 24-b process.
- This route creates a much less accountable system in which search committees have the primary role in discerning a candidate's fitness for a solo or lead pastoral role in the CRCNA, instead of the entities that our denomination has entrusted with this discernment process (classes, synodical deputies, and the Candidacy Committee). Often these discernment partners are not consulted or involved in the process until after a call has been extended, and it is very common for the individual to begin serving in their role before the classis has had an opportunity to establish a relationship with them. This puts pressure on the classes to approve candidates even when they ascertain through the examination that denominational standards of readiness are not met.
- In some cases in which CRC-specific training has not been engaged before ordination and service, a congregation could potentially be

led for several years by a pastor who does not have a solid commitment to or a grasp of Reformed theology and practice.

- Search committees are often not fully aware of the educational requirements attached to Article 24-b, and that can lead to a candidate accepting a call without fully understanding the commitment they are making to continued theological education.
- Often a candidate accepts a call to a congregational role with only a cursory knowledge of or sense of commitment to the denomination. Candidates who enter into this commitment without a strong sense of call (not only toward the church that calls them but also to the denomination) tend to struggle to engage in the educational process with positivity. This places an undue burden on the candidacy process to inspire and foster such commitment in a relatively short period of time.
- It has come to the committee's attention that Article 24-b has become the "de facto route" for at least one classis and that the lack of connection and training has been noticeable in the health of that classis.
- In some cases, a pastor called through this route has had such a low level of commitment to the denomination that the congregation has been led out of the denomination. This is one of the worst-case scenarios that can arise from the use of Article 24-b.

The Candidacy Committee desires to address the challenges that have arisen through use of this route without eliminating the opportunities that it has created for churches and individuals. In order to do so, we propose the following clarifications to the Church Order Supplement, Articles 24-a and 24-b, and to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. We believe these changes would alleviate the challenges cited above and create a more accountable, healthy process for individuals seeking ordination through this route.

V. Proposed changes to the Church Order Supplement and the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

A. Proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Articles 24-a and 24-b

The four points to be added below are currently presented in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook but do not appear in the Supplement. We propose that they be added here in the Supplement so that they can be more easily referenced.

Note: Proposed additions are indicated by underline, and proposed deletions are indicated by ~~strikethrough~~.

Supplement, Article 24-a

Persons already ordained as ~~€~~commissioned pastors may ~~serve in~~ be called to positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specific circumstances. Three of these circumstances were specified before 2019 in Church Order Articles 23 b, 23 c, and 23 d.

1. Commissioned pastors who are planting a church may continue to serve for “a reasonable period of transition” after the church becomes an organized congregation.
2. Commissioned pastors who serve in an organized church alongside a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, move into the senior/solo role if the minister of the Word leaves.
3. In unique ministry contexts a commissioned pastor may be called to serve in an organized congregation.

A fourth was adopted by Synod 2018.

4. Use of the commissioned pastor office as a “bridge” to becoming a minister of the Word (described in Article 24-b)

All four are now presented and further explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (sections IV, I and J C and D). ~~A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon implementation of a learning plan leading toward meeting the qualifications for minister of the Word, as described in Church Order Article 24-b.~~ In all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church, it is mandatory that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan for denominational orientation, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A commissioned pastor who is called to serve in a solo or lead role in an organized church must meet the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, who shall be present at the examination.

Supplement, Article 24-b

~~In various cases a~~ Persons already ordained as commissioned pastors who are called to serve in a solo/lead role in an organized church shall may desire or be encouraged to seek ordination as a minister of the Word, following the process prescribed in Article 6, including the required education. Though not expected in all circumstances of persons serving as commissioned pastors, a plan toward candidacy as a minister of the Word may be beneficial for the pastor and the church. The learning plan agreement shall be in place before calling a commissioned pastor to a solo/lead pastor role in an organized church. Local ministries in partnership with their classis and synodical deputies may consider the advisability of constructing such a plan, and of using The use of a renewable “term call” should be employed for such cases as a way to hold the commissioned pastor accountable to making progress in the plan.

Grounds:

1. This route is increasingly used by churches to call individuals who have not yet been trained or ordained as commissioned pastors. In

these situations, ordination comes before CRC-specific training, relational connection, or vetting. This does not align with the value our denomination places on ensuring that ordained clergy are well-trained and formed for ministry. This practice also tends to place undue stress on the classis, the church, and the individual who is entering ministry. The Candidacy Committee believes that specifying that this route is for persons “already ordained as commissioned pastors” would address these concerning issues.

2. Specifying that this pathway is for those “already ordained” could also create and encourage opportunities for ordained commissioned pastors serving in associate positions to be considered for lead/solo roles if they are willing to commit to the process of “bridge ordination.”
3. Currently synodical deputies are asked to weigh in on the job description and the use of Article 24-b for a particular situation. We propose that synodical deputies also be present at examinations in order to concur on the examinations of persons called to serve in solo/lead roles in established churches. This will serve to build broader confidence and provide consistent standards for the qualifications of the persons in solo/lead roles.

B. Proposed Changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

We propose that the text on pages 11-13 of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook be changed as follows (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~):

Synodically approved rules for Article 24-a

There are three scenarios in which an individual who is already ordained as a commissioned pastor may be called to serve as a lead or solo pastor in an established church through the use of Church Order Article 24-a:

1. Commissioned pastors who are planting a church may continue to serve for “a reasonable period of transition” after the church becomes an organized congregation.
2. Commissioned pastors who serve in an organized church alongside a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, move into the senior/solo role if the minister of the Word leaves.
3. In unique ministry contexts a commissioned pastor may be called to serve in an organized congregation.

Regarding scenario 1 above:

Ordinarily, the office of commissioned pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, commissioned

pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. If the newly organized church desires to call the commissioned pastor to remain in this position beyond that period of transition, the commissioned pastor shall begin the process of Article 24-b "bridge ordination." ~~Commissioned pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.~~

Regarding scenario 2 above:

Commissioned pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left. In this scenario, the commissioned pastor shall begin the process of Article 24-b "bridge ordination."

Regarding scenario 3 above:

Commissioned pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that ~~such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical~~ possible for one of the following reasons:

(a) The prescribed training is not offered in a language spoken by the commissioned pastor.

(b) The context is one that ~~The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand~~ (a) presents significant obstacles to raising up Indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and ~~(b) have this has~~ resulted in limited- or non-availability of competent Indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.

It is obvious that great wisdom is needed in decisions regarding approval of a commissioned pastor for service as a solo or lead pastor in an organized congregation. In all three scenarios above, the deliberation of classis and the advice of synodical deputies are required. Terms used

in these statements of synod have a purposeful flexibility allowing for a contextual decision.

A commissioned pastor who is called to serve in a solo or lead role in an organized church must meet the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, who shall be present at the examination.

We propose that the text on pages 19-20 of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook be changed as follows:

The Candidacy Committee pondered this matter and proposed the following guideline, approved by synod: "At some point prior to any examination for ordination of a commissioned pastor being considered for a solo pastor position in an emerging or organized church, the classis must ascertain that a learning plan has been approved by the classis and agreed to by the Candidacy Committee, and synodical deputies must affirm through a written report that such approvals have taken place" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 689).

~~Note also that the nature of the role of synodical deputies in this process is limited. A classis acts only to affirm that they have evidence that a learning plan has been formed and carried out in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The synodical deputies concur only that such an action has taken place. In such cases, synodical deputies shall concur with classis on (a) the use of Article 24, (b) the job description of the commissioned pastor, and (c) the examination of the commissioned pastor candidate. It is conceivable, and likely, that such concurrence for the use and job description could be done via email and that the physical presence of the deputies at the classis meeting would be necessary only for concurrence on the examination. is not required. The concurrence of synodical deputies is intended to build broader confidence and provide consistent standards for examinations of persons serving in solo/lead roles. The task of synodical deputy concurrence with the classis judgment of fitness for ministry is not required because commissioned pastors, as locally ordained servants, serve under the authority of the local classis, not the denomination.~~

Grounds:

1. Grounds for the proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Articles 24-a and 24-b also apply to these proposed changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.
2. Since Calvin Theological Seminary's M.Div. and EPMC programs are available in distance learning format, it seems that in almost all of the "exceptional scenarios" listed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook an encouragement should be added for the individual to move toward Article 24-b "bridge ordination." The barriers of language and of very specific cultural contexts (scenario 3) would remain an exception.

VI. Clarifying a process toward ordination for persons not yet trained or ordained as commissioned pastors

In certain situations there may still be cases in which a search committee discerns that it would be beneficial or necessary to select an individual who is not currently trained or ordained as a commissioned pastor to serve in a lead/solo role in their church. In view of such exceptional cases, the committee seeks to provide a clear process that could allow such placements to proceed in a healthy, accountable manner that could benefit both the individual and the congregation.

The committee suggests the following process for hiring temporary unordained stated supply, choosing not to formalize this suggestion into a recommended addition to the Church Order at this time but to allow a few years for classes to “test drive” it and suggest any helpful modifications. The Candidacy Committee has already begun unofficially to guide classical counselors, search committees, and classical interim committees toward the process below in cases in which a church desires to call an unordained individual. This process will be adjusted, or made official, according to the guidance of synod.

Suggested process for hiring temporary unordained stated supply:

1. Classical counselor meets with council to explain the following process.
2. Classical counselor discusses the plan with the Classis Interim Committee, and they concur on the proposed “need” to hire an unordained person as stated supply for a specified term. (*Note: The main criterion for establishing “need” is a determination that the congregation has done a sustained, realistic search for an eligible candidate before considering this option, but other factors may also be considered.*)
3. Individual is examined for licensure to exhort *or*, in some cases, (when the person is well-known by the congregation) to be ordained as an elder with permission to teach, and if the classis deems it appropriate, permission by classis to administer the sacraments.
4. Within six months, if the church and the individual desire to work toward ordination, they contact the Candidacy director and the CMLT to chart out the best course for the required education toward ordination as a minister of the Word.
5. Commissioned pastor ordination may be pursued as a step along the way in some cases.

VII. Additional updates to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

A. Updates related to the Study of Bivocationality Task Force report

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook has been revised to include changes to Church Order Article 23, mentioned in the Study of Bivocationality Task Force report and approved by Synod 2024.

B. Updates based on the Church Order Review Task Force report

Synod 2024's approval of the Church Order Review Task Force report directed the Candidacy Committee to consider the boundaries of ministerial work, the nature of "proper support" for commissioned pastors, and regulations pertaining to release from a call, and to "bring to Synod 2025 any updates necessary to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook as a result of this task force's observations and recommendations" (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 124, 139-40; *Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 853).

Having considered these matters, the Candidacy Committee offers the following response:

1. The Candidacy Committee has formed a subcommittee that will be giving attention to the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor over the course of the present year (see section IV of this report). This group will also focus on the boundaries of ministerial work and the significance of ordination.
2. The Commissioned Pastor Handbook already contains a section on the proper support of commissioned pastors, and it was updated in fall 2024 to reflect the Church Order changes recommended by the Study of Bivocationality Task Force report and approved by synod.
3. Regarding the release of commissioned pastors from a call, the Commissioned Pastor Handbook directs those guiding the process of release to follow a protocol similar to that found in Article 17 for ministers of the Word. Since that directive leads readers to the recent updates in Article 17, no further updates to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook are deemed necessary.
4. In its report to Synod 2024 the Candidacy Committee recommended a process for the reentry of commissioned pastors who were once released from office. This process already mirrors the process outlined by the Church Order Review Task Force report and is set to be ratified by synod this year.

The Candidacy Committee appreciates the Church Order Review Task Force's guidance for ministers of the Word serving in noncongregational roles, and since commissioned pastors can also serve in a wide variety of noncongregational roles, it seems appropriate to recommend the following changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a and to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~):

Proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a [final paragraph]

~~Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Chaplaincy and Care Ministry.~~ The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ~~noncongregational ministers~~ ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ~~commissioned pastors~~ ordained to

noncongregational roles under Article 23. Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Thrive.

Proposed changes to Commissioned Pastor Handbook, page 11

B. Special mention regarding chaplaincy noncongregational roles and the office of commissioned pastor

It bears special mention that ~~one of the most productive uses of the office of commissioned pastor has been~~ can serve in the area of chaplaincy and in other noncongregational roles.

From Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a:

~~Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains noncongregational ministers ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains commissioned pastors ordained to noncongregational roles under Article 23. Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Thrive.~~

Proposed changes to Commissioned Pastor Handbook, page 27

For supervision of doctrine and life it ~~may be helpful~~ is important to specify in a letter of mutual covenant the frequency and nature of expected reports and visits to the calling church. Ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors who serve outside the bounds of the local church, along with their calling churches, will be enabled to enjoy a meaningful relationship through such explicit statements of understanding. ~~Thrive The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry~~ has a template for such a letter, called a "Covenant of Joint Supervision," that can be used for commissioned pastor chaplains, and it is available on their website (on crcna.org search "Chaplaincy Covenant of Joint Supervision"). A more generalized "Covenant of Joint Supervision" template for noncongregational commissioned pastor roles can also be found on the stated clerk resources page of the crcna.org website (sites.google.com/crcna.org/statedclerks/resources-best-practices).

Ground:

This information has been directed specifically to chaplains, but it should be broadened to apply also to others who serve in any noncongregational roles in which there is joint supervision.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy, and to an additional member of the Candidacy Committee, if one is present, when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.

B. That synod adopt the proposed revisions to the Church Order Supplement, Articles 23-a, 24-a, and 24-b, and the corresponding changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (sections V and VII).

C. That synod affirm the process recommended by the Candidacy Committee for congregations to hire unordained individuals as temporary stated supply when no ordained candidate can be found to fill their solo/lead pastoral position (section VI).

Candidacy Committee
Susan LaClear, director

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

I. Introduction

There are two distinct and important aspects to our work: *ecumenical* relationships with other Christian denominations and organizations and *interfaith* interactions between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions. According to our Ecumenical Charter, “the CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel.”

To guide the work of the EIRC relative to the ecumenical directive in bilateral (denomination-to-denomination) relationships, we have continued to use synodically approved categories. First is the category of *churches in communion*—those with whom the CRC has a particular affinity or history. Churches that are so designated may be engaged in joint ventures with the CRC and/or its agencies, exchange delegates at synod, welcome each other’s members at the Lord’s Supper and each other’s pastors into the pulpit, and generally encourage each other in ministry and faithfulness. Second is the category of *churches in cooperation*—a classification that recognizes all the other varied bilateral relationships the CRC has with Christian churches. Some of these relationships have originated through correspondence around mutual interests, others from historic ties, and still others through mutual ministry, whether by way of ecclesiastical connection, the work of CRC agencies, or a specific memorandum of understanding. In addition to bilateral relationships, we pursue our ecumenical work with organizations that allow for numbers of denominations to come together in unity (sometimes known as multilateral relationships).

Interfaith efforts between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions are led by a subcommittee of the EIRC. As a result of decisions by the Reformed Church in America’s General Synod 2019 and the CRCNA’s Synod 2019, we have continued to work together to spur on this work, particularly as it relates locally between and among Reformed congregations and those whose house of worship may be a synagogue, mosque, or temple.

II. Membership and meetings

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2025, are Jake Bentum (2025/1); Lyle Bierma (2025/2); Ryan Braam (2027/1); William Krahnke (2026/1); Shirley Roels, chair (2025/1); and Eleanor Boersma Sarkany (2027/1). The general secretary (Zachary King) and the executive director-Canada (Al Postma) serve as *ex officio* members of the EIRC.

The EIRC met in person in October 2024 and virtually in January 2025. Another virtual meeting is scheduled to be held in May 2025.

III. Nominations for membership/protocols

Lyle Bierma is concluding two terms of service on the EIRC. The EIRC recommends that synod express its gratitude to him for his faithful service.

Jake Bentum and Shirley Roels are completing their first terms on the EIRC, and, given their contributions and willingness to continue, the EIRC recommends that synod reappoint each of them to a second three-year term.

Between July 1, 2024, and the writing of this report, we received the resignations of Roy Berkenbosch (2027/1), Joy Engelsman (2027/2), John Lee (2026/1), and Yvonne Schenk (2026/2).

Due to the number of resignations, the EIRC recommended that the COD appoint Marno Retief as an interim member representing Canada West for a term ending June 30, 2027, with eligibility to serve a second three-year term.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination among the membership of the committee, the EIRC anticipates presenting a slate of eight nominees for the Great Lakes (1), Canada West (1), USA East (1), and USA West (1) positions in its supplementary report to Synod 2025.

IV. Bilateral relationships

The CRC maintains a relationship of *churches in communion* with 23 denominations and of *churches in cooperation* with 21 denominations/partners. The following continents are represented in the combined total of these 44 relationships: Africa (24), Latin and South America (5), Europe and the Middle East (3), Asia (5), and North America (7). A complete list is available on the “Relationships” page of the EIRC website (crcna.org/EIRC).

A. Activities with bilateral partners

1. Reformed Church in America

The CRCNA’s closest ecumenical relationship continues to be with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). While we have 22 other *church in communion* relationships, no other Reformed denomination is mentioned in the Church Order (Art. 8-b.). Synod 2014 and the RCA General Synod 2014 declared that “the principle that guides us, and the intention that motivates us, is to ‘act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately’” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504).

Ongoing collaborations include shared projects between Resonate Global Mission (CRCNA) and RCA Global Mission. Members of the CRCNA have benefited greatly in learning from the RCA’s experience in ethnic church planting within North America and its engagement with member churches outside North America. The CRCNA and RCA continue to collaborate on ecumenical efforts, including in the “interfaith” area (i.e., conversations between Christians and believers of other great world religions such as Islam). CRCNA and RCA senior leaders met three times during the past year to learn together about critical ministry challenges and opportunities facing our two denominations.

See section VII, B in this report for recommendations regarding Synod 2024’s assignment regarding the CRCNA’s relationship with the RCA.

2. Christian Reformed Church of East Africa

During the 2024-25 ministry year, the EIRC continued to note with lament an ambiguous conflict within the Christian Reformed Church of East Africa. At this point, the EIRC is still waiting to discern how it might connect with this denomination in the future.

B. Formal exchanges

1. Rev. Jeff Dykema attended the general synod of the Reformed Church in America in June 2024.
2. Rev. Jeong S. Gho attended the general assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan in October 2024.
3. Rev. Joy Engelsman attended the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in June 2024.

Each of these participants filed a report with EIRC about their exchanges.

V. Multilateral relationships—ecumenical organizations and dialogues

We belong to a number of ecumenical organizations, including the Canadian Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Global Christian Forum, the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Reformed Fellowship. We also participate in important dialogues among those of various Christian traditions. The organizations and dialogues with which we have made specific connection this past year are highlighted as follows:

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The WCRC is divided into nine regions, six of which are represented by regional councils. One such group is the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC). As executive director emeritus of the CRCNA, Colin P. Watson, Sr., completed his role on the steering committee of CANAAC in October 2024. Zachary King attended a meeting of CANAAC in October 2024. The WCRC is preparing to hold its 27th General Council in October 2025 on the theme of “Persevere Your Witness” (wrc.ch/gc2025), and Zachary King and Eleanor Boersma Sarkany will attend as delegates. In 2025 the WCRC will be celebrating its 15th anniversary. As one of the influential founding denominations for the WCRC, the CRCNA has made extra efforts to provide financial support for the October 2025 gathering.

B. Canadian Council of Churches

Executive Director-Canada Al Postma and other EIRC members (see section V, E) routinely participate in gatherings and initiatives of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and represent the CRCNA on the council’s governing board.

C. World Reformed Fellowship

Zachary King attended a gathering of the World Reformed Fellowship and delivered a paper and seminar on how the global church is affecting the CRCNA.

D. Other multilateral organizations and dialogue

We benefit from partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and we participate in the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue. Al Postma attended a denominational leaders meeting of the EFC.

E. Appointed representatives and observers

The EIRC appoints representatives and observers to many of the aforementioned multilateral ecumenical organizations and to other ecumenical efforts; often Christian Reformed Church members are asked by these organizations to serve as well.

1. In 2024, Colin P. Watson, Sr., concluded his service as the CRCNA's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Dan DeKam has been appointed to this role, beginning in 2025.
2. Colin P. Watson, Sr., concluded his service on the steering committee for the WCRC's Caribbean and North American Area Council.
3. Al Postma and Ruth Hofman serve on the governing board of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The Christian Reformed Church also has a number of representatives who serve on various standing committees, reference groups, and commissions of the CCC.
4. Al Postma represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).
5. The CRCNA does not have a representative currently serving on the World Reformed Fellowship board.
6. Ronald Feenstra is the ecumenical staff officer representative of the CRCNA to the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue. Two additional representatives include Matthew Lundberg and Clair Mesick.
7. Anthony Elenbaas is our CRCNA representative who engages with Christian Churches Together USA in learning projects.
8. Marlene Wolters and Adrian Jacobs represented the CRCNA in the North and South American Consultation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in April 2024.

VI. Interfaith activities

The Interfaith subcommittee of the EIRC continues its work. Membership includes Melissa Bos, Zachary DeBruyne, Michael Kooy, Frans van Liere, Tim Rietkerk, Naji Umran, Cory Willson, and the general secretary. The subcommittee met in August 2024 and January 2025. Another meeting is scheduled for May 2025.

The Ecumenical Charter that guides the EIRC states that our “responsibility is expressed locally (between and among neighboring congregations), regionally (among churches in a given geographical area), and denominationally (among churches nationally and internationally).” For interfaith efforts, the EIRC and its Interfaith subcommittee emphasize regional and local engagement. To that end, they seek to highlight regional groups that are open to CRC members and to publicize local efforts.

Members of the RCA Interreligious group and the CRC’s Interfaith subcommittee met together in November 2024. Another meeting is scheduled for March 2025. Members of the RCA Interreligious group are drawn from many different ministries and regions of their denomination. Collaboration between CRC and RCA leaders continues with activities like Shoulder to Shoulder, a multifaith coalition addressing anti-Muslim discrimination.

VII. Synodical assignments

A. Alliance of Reformed Churches

Prior synods requested that the EIRC develop closer communion with the Alliance of Reformed Churches. Last year the EIRC reported to synod that such was premature. More time was needed to explore Alliance processes, particularly in relation to standards for pastoral calls and accountability. In August 2024, Lyle Bierma, Shirley Roels, and Zachary King met with Alliance board and staff leaders to address these matters. Based on Alliance developments, the EIRC proceeded to explore a closer communion via a December 11, 2024, letter to the Alliance. Alliance leaders responded in a January 21, 2025, letter. They indicated that they seek to follow good process with their board and their new executive director, who began in September 2024. This requires gradual consideration. The EIRC may receive another response shortly before Synod 2025. A motion was passed by the EIRC as follows:

Recommendation: That synod approve the Alliance of Reformed Churches as a *church in communion*, pending receipt of a positive response to our invitation.

Grounds:

1. The EIRC has been encouraged by synod to pursue the relationship of *church in communion* with the Alliance over the course of the past few years.
2. The EIRC has had extensive interactions with the Alliance on issues regarding confessional convictions, organization, credentialing, and possible shared ministry.
3. The Alliance and the CRCNA affirm the same confessions.
4. The formation of this denomination honored existing ecclesiastical protocols.

B. Reformed Church in America

1. Background

In response to an overture to “Reexamine Ecumenical Relations with the Reformed Church in America” (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 450-54), Synod 2024 adopted two recommendations (while ruling one recommendation out of order):

1. That synod instruct the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) to communicate with the Reformed Church in America general secretary and Commission on Christian Unity on the following points and to report to Synod 2025 regarding the responses received:
 - a. A desire for shared commitment to our confessional Reformed heritage, doctrine, and practice.
 - b. A concern regarding the nature of churches that have disaffiliated with the RCA as being in alignment with CRCNA positions.
 - c. A request for clarification on the RCA’s ongoing commitment in faith and practice to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A’s 108 and 109, specifically as it relates to the forbidding of unchastity, which encompasses homosexual sex.
 - d. A request for clarification on whether RCA clergy have been, or are being, permitted to solemnize same-sex marriages, or to themselves remain in same-sex marriages or romantic partnerships, while remaining ministers in good standing.
 - e. The report of the EIRC shall be submitted by March 15, 2025, and will be considered by Synod 2025. . . .
3. That synod propose that the EIRC provide a recommendation to Synod 2025 regarding the ecumenical relationship of the RCA as a *church in communion* with the CRCNA.

Grounds:

- a. Since the RCA report to Synod 2024 stated that “the RCA is going through a season of change and restructure” and that in 2021 the RCA general synod “reckoned with deep divisions in the RCA,” we acknowledge that the RCA is no longer the same denomination as the one with whom the CRCNA formed the Pella Accord in 2014 (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 503-4).
- b. Our faithfulness as a church in communion requires encouragement toward faithful statements and faithful practices related to our common Reformed confession.

(Acts of Synod 2024, pp. 883-84)

As part of its follow-up, the EIRC first engaged in a discussion with RCA staff leadership and members of its Commission on Christian Unity by means of a letter dated August 7, 2024.

2. Response from the RCA (see also Appendix)

The EIRC received correspondence dated September 20, 2024, explaining (1) the approach of the RCA toward same-sex sexual relationships in view of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109; and (2) the practices of RCA officebearers with regard to solemnizing same-sex marriages. The following are key points in the written response from the RCA:

- The RCA general synod affirms “that the Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A's 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA's Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman” (*Minutes of General Synod 2017*, pp. 153-61).
- However, according to the RCA's polity, the general synod's declarations regarding its doctrinal standards (which include the Heidelberg Catechism) are not binding on future synods or on other RCA assemblies.¹ Therefore, RCA ecclesiastical assemblies are free to implement (or not implement) this conviction in practices and policies of discipline, ordination of officebearers, and the solemnization of marriages. Thus, at least some RCA clergy are able to solemnize same-sex marriages.
- Furthermore, the RCA general synod has voted to “continue to live in the tension” of both convictions regarding same-sex sexual relationships. This decision led to the disaffiliation of a significant number of congregations from the RCA.
- In summary, while the RCA officially holds the same convictions as the CRCNA on its understanding of “unchastity,” there is latitude within the current RCA classes and consistories to adopt different approaches to discipline, ordination, and the solemnization of same-sex marriages.

3. Discussion

In its discussion on this matter the EIRC recognized a number of issues. First, the EIRC lamented the brokenness that both the CRCNA and the RCA have experienced amid the discussion of human sexuality. The result of

¹ In this regard the EIRC notes that the relative positions of the RCA classes and synod in their system of ecclesiastical governance differ from those of the CRCNA. In RCA polity the individual classes are the centers of gravity and the source of many decisions. This has been true in the RCA historically. At least since the late 1800s with decisions about lodge membership, this has been their polity. In such a polity classes retain the role of making decisions, in light of denominational guidance and historic confessions, on how to address challenging questions of church ministry.

these discussions for both our denominations has included disaffiliation of congregations and ministry upheaval.

Second, the EIRC took time to appreciate the healthy and mutually beneficial partnership between the CRCNA and the RCA on many levels, including the exchange of clergy, union congregations, shared ministry, and mutual support. For example, through the rules of orderly exchange (Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, D) 20 CRC ministers serve in the RCA and 46 RCA ministers serve in the CRC (as of spring 2024). Further, there are nine “union” congregations dually affiliated with both the CRC and the RCA according to Church Order Article 38-g and its Supplement. In fact, given the number of RCA clergy serving CRC churches and union churches, the CRCNA may have “more to lose” by revoking the status of the RCA as a *church in communion*.

Third, the EIRC noted that according to its own synodically approved Ecumenical Charter (revised in 2006 and 2010), “The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as those issues are understood in the CRC. The CRC does not endorse every position taken by ecumenical partners; nor do we need to.” The differences in approach between the RCA and the CRC with regard to sexuality seem to fall in this category. Further, it would seem that revoking the RCA’s communion status could require the altering of the communion status of other denominations that might not align with the CRCNA on one point of doctrine or another.

Fourth, the EIRC further affirmed that rules governing the orderly exchange of RCA and CRC ministers (Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, D) are already in place in the CRCNA Church Order. These rules require RCA ministers to respect and abide by CRCNA convictions on theological matters (and vice versa). For example, Supplement, Article 8, D, 4 states, “Such a person [i.e., an RCA minister serving in the CRCNA] would preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in a manner consistent with the polity of the inviting [CRCNA] church.” Points 5 and 6 in that same section state that “orderly exchange is always at the invitation of the inviting church and subject to that church’s polity” and that an RCA minister serving a CRC congregation will “demonstrate . . . a knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the [CRC] church.” These rules *should* restrain CRC congregations from calling an RCA minister who is out of alignment with the CRCNA on matters of human sexuality. At this point, the EIRC noted that even if the special ecumenical status between the RCA and CRCNA were revoked, CRCNA congregations could still call RCA pastors under the rules of Church Order Articles 8-c and 8-d, though the process would be more cumbersome.

Fifth, the EIRC acknowledged that at Synod 2014 the CRCNA and RCA agreed to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504).

Therefore, CRCNA and RCA clergy, classes, and synods commit to respecting each denomination's convictions and working together respectfully as far as possible.

Finally, the EIRC discussed the ongoing general synod-mandated reorganization of the RCA's classes and regional synods. These two assemblies will be merged to create a "middle assembly." More time is needed to discern how the advent of the "middle assemblies" might affect the RCA-CRC relationship.

4. Recommendations regarding ecumenical relations with the RCA
 - a. That synod adopt a change (indicated by underline) to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 6:
 6. To be able to serve in another church, an ordained minister will demonstrate to the appropriate body of the inviting church a knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church. RCA officebearers serving in the CRC should be prepared to sign the Covenant for Officebearers on the occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations.

Grounds:

- 1) Due to changes under way in RCA polity, this change would clarify that accountability rests with the receiving church's council and the Covenant for Officebearers.
 - 2) The current language of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 6 emphasizes "knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church," but signing of the Covenant for Officebearers signifies a deeper level of commitment.
 - 3) "The mandatory provisions of one [denomination's Church Order] shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive" (Supplement, Art. 38-g, 1, v; Supplement, Art. 38-h, r).
- b. If recommendation a is adopted, that synod affirm the current status of the CRCNA's relationship with the RCA to be that of a *church in communion*, and that the CRCNA synod, classes, and congregations respect and act according to the "orderly exchange" provisions of Church Order Article 8 and its Supplement with regard to the calling of RCA ministers to serve CRCNA congregations.

Grounds:

- 1) The ecumenical relationship of communion between the CRCNA and the RCA has been mutually beneficial for pastoral exchange, congregational life, and mutual ministry for both of our denominations. In fact, the CRCNA might have more to lose by revoking this status than might the RCA.

- 2) The position of the RCA's general synod on "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109 is similar to the CRCNA's confessional interpretation of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109.
- 3) The provisions of "orderly exchange" require CRCNA churches to call RCA ministers who are able to align themselves with CRCNA convictions on unchastity.
- 4) There is nothing to be achieved by revoking the RCA's communion status and the provisions of "orderly exchange" since RCA ministers could still serve in the CRCNA under Church Order Articles 8-c and 8-d, though the process would be more cumbersome.
- 5) Revoking the RCA's communion status would be out of step with the synodically approved CRCNA Ecumenical Charter.
- 6) Time is needed to discern how the creation of "middle assemblies" will affect RCA polity and practice.

IX. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Shirley Roels, chair, and Zachary J. King (ex officio), when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are discussed.

B. That synod express its gratitude to Lyle Bierma, Yvonne Schenk, John Lee, and Joy Engelsman for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.

C. That synod appoint Rev. Marno Retief as an interim member representing Canada West for a term ending June 30, 2027, with eligibility to serve a second three-year term on the EIRC.

D. That synod reappoint Jake Bentum to a second three-year term and reappoint Shirley Roels to a second three-year term on the EIRC.

E. That synod adopt a change (indicated by underline) to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 6:

6. To be able to serve in another church, an ordained minister will demonstrate to the appropriate body of the inviting church a knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church. RCA officebearers serving in the CRC should be prepared to sign the Covenant for Officebearers on the occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations.

Grounds:

1. Due to changes under way in RCA polity, this would clarify that accountability rests with the receiving church's council and the Covenant for Officebearers.

2. The current language of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 6 emphasizes “knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church,” but signing of the Covenant for Officebearers signifies a deeper level of commitment.
3. “The mandatory provisions of one [denomination's Church Order] shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive” (Supplement, Art. 38-g, 1, v; Supplement, Art. 38-h, r).

F. If recommendation E is adopted, that synod affirm the current status of the CRCNA’s relationship with the RCA to be that of a *church in communion*, and that the CRCNA synod, classes, and congregations respect and act according to the “orderly exchange” provisions of Church Order Article 8 and its Supplement with regard to the calling of RCA ministers to serve CRCNA congregations.

Grounds:

1. The ecumenical relationship of communion between the CRCNA and RCA has been mutually beneficial for pastoral exchange, congregational life, and mutual ministry for both of our denominations. In fact, the CRCNA might have more to lose by revoking this status than might the RCA.
2. The position of the RCA’s general synod on “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A’s 108 and 109 is similar to the CRCNA’s confessional interpretation of “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A’s 108 and 109.
3. The provisions of “orderly exchange” require CRCNA churches to call RCA ministers who are able to align themselves with CRCNA convictions on unchastity.
4. There is nothing to be achieved by revoking the RCA’s communion status and the provisions of “orderly exchange” since RCA ministers could still serve in the CRCNA under Church Order Articles 8-c and 8-d, though the process would be more cumbersome.
5. Revoking the RCA’s communion status would be out of step with the synodically approved CRCNA Ecumenical Charter.
6. Time is needed to discern how the creation of “middle assemblies” will affect RCA polity and practice.

G. That synod approve the Alliance of Reformed Churches as a *church in communion*, pending a positive response to our invitation.

Grounds:

1. The EIRC has been encouraged by synod to pursue the relationship of *church in communion* with the Alliance over the course of the past few years.

2. The EIRC has had extensive interactions with the Alliance on issues regarding confessional convictions, organization, credentialing, and possible shared ministry.
3. The Alliance and the CRCNA affirm the same confessions.
4. The formation of this denomination honored existing ecclesiastical protocols.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
Shirley Roels, chair
Zachary King, general secretary (ex officio)

APPENDIX

Response from the RCA—September 20, 2024

Dear friends of the Christian Reformed Church in North America,

I regret not being able to be with you on October 3 when you will be meeting with RCA leaders to discuss our response to the questions of your synod about our ecumenical relationship. On October 3, I will be overseas visiting RCA missionaries and mission partners in Africa. As the General Secretary and Chief Ecumenical Officer of the Reformed Church in America, I want to affirm that we very much value our ecumenical partnership with the CRCNA. Over the years we have partnered in many ways through the Reformed Collaborative efforts in church planting, youth ministry, disability concerns, and in many other ways. The Pella Accord, signed a decade ago between both of our denominations, is also an important testimony of our commitment to partner together for the gospel in the service of God's church. Our close partnership allows for RCA pastors to serve CRCNA congregations, and CRCNA pastors to serve RCA congregations. My hope is that you will be satisfied with our response to the questions your synod is asking and that our ecumenical partnership will continue even stronger in the future. I will keep this meeting in my prayers.

Synod 2024 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America requested clarification from the RCA on two matters:

- the RCA's ongoing commitment in faith and practice to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109, specifically as it relates to the forbidding of unchastity, which encompasses homosexual sex.
- whether RCA clergy have been, or are being, permitted to solemnize same-sex marriages, or to themselves remain in same-sex marriages or romantic partnerships, while remaining ministers in good standing.

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109

In the Reformed Church in America, the Doctrinal Standards are seen as "historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God," as described in the Book of Church Order. Within the RCA, the Standards function more as conversation partners than as a rule book.

Under RCA polity, a General Synod's interpretation of the Standards is not binding on future synods or on other RCA assemblies, yet the RCA's 2017 General Synod did offer an interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109 in response to two overtures. Delegates voted:

R 17-29

To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A's 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns "all unchastity," which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA's Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman (*Minutes of General Synod 2017*, pp. 153-161).

RCA clergy

When the RCA's General Synod 2021 made decisions in response to the report of the Vision 2020 Team, the vote was not about the RCA's position on sexuality but about how (and if) we would live together in the midst of disagreement. General Synod voted to continue to live in the tension, and approved terms for generous departure for people or churches who no longer wanted to live in the tension.

The tension could come from disagreement on any number of things that are not confessional. If we're looking specifically at LGBTQ marriage and ordination, the tension comes in that General Synod statements have repeatedly affirmed marriage between a man and a woman (as in the case of the 2017 statement above), yet the authority for ordination and supervision of ministers lies with the classis and not the General Synod. Consistories have authority over ordination of elders and deacons. On paper, at the General Synod level, the RCA is only supportive of traditional marriage, but in practice that is not always the case at every level of governance.

Whether ministers of Word and sacrament may remain in good standing and solemnize a same-sex marriage or be in a same-sex relationship themselves depends entirely on the classis they belong to.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Eddy Alemán
General Secretary

Historical Committee

I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is a standing committee of the Christian Reformed Church established by Synod 1934. Its revised mandate, as approved by Synod 2022, states the following:

The Historical Committee and the [general secretary] of the CRCNA are responsible for the official Archives of the Christian Reformed Church and its agencies, while administrative oversight is provided by the Hekman Library of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. The Historical Committee ordinarily communicates with the Hekman Library through the Hekman Library Archives Advisory Council. The Historical Committee also cultivates within the Christian Reformed Church, the wider church, and academic world, knowledge of and appreciation for the CRCNA's history, heritage and legacy by, among other things, identifying and assisting in accumulation of resources.

Current elected members of the committee, showing the concluding year and present term of service, are Herman De Vries, secretary (2025/2); Stanley Jim (2026/1); Tony Maan (2025/2); Christian Oh (2026/1); Janet Sheeres, chair (2026/1); and Don Sinnema (2027/1).

Current administrative committee members are Greg Elzinga (ex officio, as president of Calvin University), William Katerberg (ex officio, without vote, as curator of Heritage Hall), Zachary King (ex officio, without vote, as general secretary of the CRCNA), and Jul Medenblik (ex officio, as president of Calvin Theological Seminary).

Since its 2024 report to synod, the committee met in person and via Zoom on May 16, 2024; June 13, 2024; October 22, 2024; and February 11, 2025.

II. Committee Activities

A. *Multiethnic Initiatives*

Work continues by committee members Stanley Jim and Christian Oh on gathering information to be assembled, archived, and shared regarding the history of Navajo and Korean participation in, relations with, and contributions to the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Stanley Jim is planning to record interviews with Navajo members of the Christian Reformed Church whose memories—or memories of family members—recount the history of their communities and families and the denomination, its missions, and the growth of Navajo congregations and leaders. Heritage Hall will assist in this effort by providing digital recorders and other support. When the material is gathered, Heritage Hall will store it and make it available to scholars and other interested users.

Christian Oh is working on gathering information and translating portions of documents that outline the development of Reformed Christianity in Korea, ties to the CRCNA, and how Korean immigrant churches established

connections with the CRCNA. When that material is assembled, it will be made available to scholars and interested users.

These are examples of projects that in the long run will gather materials related to African Americans, Latino Americans, and other groups in the CRCNA as well, along with information and relations with Reformed denominations in countries such as Nigeria, the Philippines, Cuba, and Brazil. The materials will be of value in recording the legacies of the CRCNA and partner denominations and ministries, and they will serve as the basis of future written histories, whether in Heritage Hall's magazine, *Origins*, or in work by community historians, students, and scholars.

B. D.Min. degrees and other advanced degrees awarded to CRC ministers

During summer 2024, James De Jong, former president of Calvin Theological Seminary and former member of the Historical Committee, completed an updated bibliography of theses written for D.Min. degrees. The bibliography will be posted on the Heritage Hall website. The Historical Committee will update that bibliography as needed. It also will work on a bibliography of theses in other kinds of master's degree and doctoral degree programs that are relevant to the history of Reformed Christianity and Christian mission. As this bibliography grows, it too will be published on the Heritage Hall website.

III. Report of the curator, William Katerberg

A. Archives staff

Heritage Hall has had no staffing changes in the past year. Our staff includes Will Katerberg as curator; Jen Vos as assistant archivist and digital specialist; Alyssa Johansen as archives assistant; and Laurie Haan as archives assistant. We also have two student workers, one of whom will be graduating this year. Volunteers remain important to the work of the archives. Phil Erffmeyer works on a variety of projects, processing classis and church council minutes and organizing new collections. Clarice Newhof works on cataloging photographs.

Churches can contact archives staff through our general email address (crcarchives@calvin.edu) or our general phone line (616-526-6313). To connect with the curator, email will.katerberg@calvin.edu. Visit our website for more information (library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna).

B. Archival activity during 2024

1. Library Renovations and the archives

The renovations to the 100-300 levels of the library building are complete. This means it is once again easy to find Heritage Hall. The 200-level of the library building, where Heritage Hall is located, is now a Student Commons space. It includes a café—Peet's Coffee—and a variety of tables and chairs for socializing and studying. Most of the offices on the floor are for student organizations (e.g., *Chimes* and Student Senate) and Student Life staff. The desk area on the left, when coming through the main entrance, is

now the Helpdesk for information technology and audiovisual resources. Helpdesk staff can also help people find their way to Heritage Hall.

The Hekman Library's circulation department and research helpdesk and library staff offices are on the 300-level, along with a variety of seating areas for individual and group work. The 100-level, below ground, includes space for lectures, films, and small concerts; individual and group study; the offices of Calvin Information Technology; and a large compact storage room for Hekman Library periodicals and Heritage Hall material. The library's collections are on the 400-level and the 500-level.

2. Collections

In the past year the archives have had the usual variety of small accessions of manuscript material, genealogical and family history material, rare books, photographs, and more, as well as repository material from the university, the seminary, and CRC congregations. In addition, Heritage Hall received several hundred boxes of records from the CRCNA's Grand Rapids offices due to the move from its 28th Street campus to its new facility.

3. Digitization and indexing

Current indexing projects include *Chimes* (the Calvin University student newspaper), biographical files, and collections of print, negative, and slide photographs, including glass negatives and slides dating to the early 1900s. In relation to the 150th anniversary of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in 2026, Heritage Hall is planning to digitize *Chimes* with the support of the Calvin University Alumni Association. As resources permit, Heritage Hall will also digitize other university and seminary periodicals, such as *Spark* (alumni magazine); *Prism* (annual photo yearbook); and *Kerux* (a seminary "nontheological information weekly" newsletter). Heritage Hall also contributes material to the Hekman Library's Digital Commons (digitalcommons.calvin.edu/).

4. Promotion and outreach

During the past year the archives staff worked with a variety of Calvin University faculty and their classes, doing presentations about the archives and research in them, giving students tours of the collections and rare books areas, and providing classes with material from various archival and rare books collections.

Origins: Historical Magazine of the Archives and *Origins Online* (origins.calvin.edu/) continue to be vibrant forms of outreach to a variety of audiences. The fall 2024 issue of *Origins* magazine included articles on CRC church buildings in Canada; African Americans in Holland, Michigan; a Dutch immigrant woman who left Pella, Iowa, to become a Mormon; and more. The spring 2025 issue includes articles on topics such as Dutch missions among Native peoples in the New Amsterdam colony; the fourth article in a series on Walter and Wilma Lagerwey, based on their wartime letters; a memoir of a family's emigration from the Netherlands to Minnesota in the late

1940s; Calvin College during the interwar years; and more. Back issues of *Origins* magazine are available online (origins.calvin.edu/issues).

Heritage Hall also has a Facebook page, which enables the blog to reach out to a variety of audiences on some stories. Heritage Hall will continue to assess its social media presence and find ways to connect with denominational, university, and seminary audiences as well as others interested in the history of Dutch North Americans.

D. Research

In the past year we have had scholars, students, and community members working on topics such as family histories; the Christian Reformed Church's mission and school in Rehoboth, New Mexico; Geerhardus Vos; Ford Lewis Battles; Dutch American women; local churches; a lecture by David Noebel at Calvin College in the 1990s; Dutch-U.S. academic relations; sports at Calvin; political controversy at Calvin; the history of Calvin campuses; Sidney Greidanus; Calvin-Hope basketball; Cornelius Van Til; Americanization of Dutch immigrants; world missions; missions among Navajo and Zuni peoples; and more.

In addition to editing the *Origins* magazine, the curator, William Katerberg, wrote blogposts for *Origins Online* on history related to the CRCNA, the seminary, the university, and Dutch North American immigration, among other topics (origins.calvin.edu). He also gave a keynote lecture on Native-white relations at a conference in North Carolina, focusing on relations between Navajo Christians and Christian Reformed missionaries. The fall 2024 issue of *Origins* magazine features an article by the curator on the "Calvin Seminary Dames" (a club made up of spouses of students at the seminary from the 1920s-1980s). The spring 2025 issue includes an article by the curator on Calvin University during the interwar years. The curator is also working on a new history of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in relation to the institutions' 150th anniversary in 2026.

IV. Relations with churches and classes and significant anniversaries

The Historical Committee communicated with classical representatives—in virtually all cases now the classical stated clerks—to remind churches to submit minutes and other records to Heritage Hall on a timely basis. (Every three to five years is ideal.) Heritage Hall is also in regular contact with administrative assistants of local congregations. We are grateful for the role of classical representatives in encouraging compliance by congregations and for the work of congregation administrators in keeping the archives up to date. Heritage Hall's copies of these records serve as back-up protection for congregations and complete the denominational collection of archival records.

Council minutes are kept fully restricted for 100 years. They may be accessed only with the permission of the church council, provided on the congregation's letterhead. Minutes more than 100 years old, most of which are

in Dutch, can be accessed by permission of the curator. For more information on records management for congregations, please see the Heritage Hall website (library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna).

Heritage Hall is reaching out to disaffiliating CRC congregations (1) to let them know that their records will remain in the archives, with the same access policies as in the past; (2) to ask them to consider whether any historic or current records, such as church council minutes, should be sent to the archives during this transition; and (3) to let them know that the archives will continue to serve as a repository for their records in the future, if this service would be convenient for them.

Once again the committee is grateful to Heritage Hall staff for providing the following information on forthcoming ordination and congregational anniversaries. We congratulate ministers and churches on reaching these milestones.

A. Ordained ministers – anniversaries of service

Names are listed according to years of ordained service in the CRCNA, with dates of prior ordination in another denomination indicated in parentheses.

50 years (1976-2026)

Bakker, B. Bernard
Bomhof, Gerrit J.
Busink, Evert S. H.
Contant, Martin J.
De Groot, Daniel W.
De Jonge, Philip V.
Draayer, Donald G.
Goudzwaard, Ronald D.
Gunnink, Henry G.
Meyer, Ronald J.
Oosterhuis, Thomas J.
Petersen, James T.
Ritsema, John A.
Steen, Norman R.
Stravers, David. E.
Toeset, Timothy B.
Tol, Bernard F.
Van Ee, Bernard J.

55 years (1971-2026)

Averill, Brent A.
Bulthuis, W. Keith
Compaan, Arlo D.
De Jong, Harold

De Jong, Peter
De Moor, Henry
De Vries, Hendrik
De Young, Ronald D.
De Young, Ronald W.
Dykman, Thomas E.
Joldersma, John
Kuiper, Aldon L.
Mast, Stanley P.
Meyer, Larry D.
Osterhouse, James D.
Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr.
Roeda, Jack
Roossien, Louis, Jr.
Samplonius, Homer G.
Scholten, James H.
Slings, Larry D.
Smits, Lee R.
Steen, Robert D.
Timmer, Robert J.
VerHeul, Stanley E.
Vredeveld, Ronald C.
Vugteveen, Howard J.
Zoerhof, Laryn G.

60 years (1966-2026)

Hogeterp, Peter C.
Klompeen, Donald J.
Louwerse, Anthony L.
Meyer, Galen H.
Meyer, John S.
Noorman, Ronald J.
Vander Kwaak, Nicholas
Vander Meyden, Calvin D.
Van Donselaar, Marvin L.
Visser, Duane A.
Westenbroek, Robert L.
Wigboldy, Homer J.

65 years (1961-2026)

Beukema, Alvin
Evenhouse, James M.
Hellinga, John D.
Koedoot, Gerrit
Mennega, Harry

70 years (1956-2026)

Doornbos, Milton R.
Quartel, Jacob A.

75 years (1951-2026)

Hofman, Leonard J.

B. Church anniversaries – at 25-year intervals

25th Anniversary (2001-2026)

Byron Center, Michigan – Pathway Church
Haledon, New Jersey – Bridgeway Community
Monee, Illinois – Family of Faith

50th Anniversary (1976-2026)

Ancaster, Ontario – Grace Community
Belding, Michigan – Oakwood
Burke, Virginia – Grace
Coquitlam, British Columbia – The Tapestry: Mundy Park
Grand Rapids, Michigan – Providence
Edmonton, Alberta – Centrepointe Community
El Paso, Texas - Missio Dei
Holland, Michigan – Gibson
Mount Brydges, Ontario – Hope Community
Prospect Park, New Jersey – The Good Shepherd
St. Catharines, Ontario – Covenant

75th Anniversary (1951 - 2026)

Brandon, Manitoba – First
Dresden, Ontario – Dresden
Exeter, Ontario – Exeter
Grand Rapids, Michigan – Plymouth Heights
Holland, Michigan – Holland Heights
Listowel, Ontario – Bethel
Lynden, Washington – Bethel
Maple Ridge, British Columbia – Maple Ridge
Monroe, Washington – New Hope Fellowship
Port Alberni, British Columbia – Alberni Valley
Red Deer, Alberta – First

Renfrew, Ontario – Hebron Community
Rock Valley, Iowa – Calvin
Stratford, Ontario – Stratford
Strathroy, Ontario – Strathroy East
Taber, Alberta – First
Wallaceburg, Ontario – Wallaceburg

100th Anniversary (1926 – 2026)

Chatham, Ontario – First
Vancouver, British Columbia – First
Wyoming, Michigan – Lee Street

125th Anniversary (1901 - 2026)

Ellsworth, Michigan – Ellsworth
Rudyard, Michigan – Rudyard
Zillah, Washington – Faith Community

V. Nominations

The committee presents the following slate of nominees for two appointments to the Historical Committee for three-year terms, to replace Tony Maan and Herman de Vries, who are retiring after completing their second terms on the committee this year.

Fred Bultman is the son of a home missionary. He has been a banker and a pastor and worked with urban congregations in the U.S. and Canada, including a diverse community of Dutch immigrants and civil war-refugee immigrants from Africa in Edmonton, Alberta. He has also been involved in ministry with Indigenous peoples in Canada. He is interested in joining the Historical Committee to bring this experience to the committee and to participate in its efforts to promote the history of the CRCNA.

Jessica Joustra teaches religion and theology at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ontario, and directs its Centre for Christian Scholarship. She has served in organizations such as Citizens for Public Justice, the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, the Classis Hamilton Candidacy Committee, and the Interfaith Subcommittee of the CRCNA's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. She is interested in serving on the Historical Committee to help steward the denomination's shared history and to tell the story of what God has done and continues to do in and through our church.

Richard Sytsma served as a missionary in Japan and as dean of students at Calvin Theological Seminary. He is interested in cross-cultural issues and has written about the history of the denomination and missions in eastern Asia. He is currently working on a history of the joint mission efforts of the Christian Reformed Japan Mission and the Reformed Church in Japan from 1951-2017. He would bring this experience to further interest in the CRCNA in the history of cross-cultural ministry.

Kate van Liere is chair of the department of historical studies at Calvin University, specializing in the history of Europe (1500-1800). She has served on the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council and a variety of committees at Calvin University and Woodlawn CRC. She is interested in serving on the Historical Committee to bring her experience in public history, to contribute to its work, and to learn more about the denomination's history.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to committee member Jul Medenblik when matters pertaining to the mandate and work of the Historical Committee come before synod.

B. That synod appoint two new members to the Historical Committee, each to a first term of three years, from the following slates of nominees:

- Fred Bultman and Richard Sytsma
- Jessica Joustra and Kate van Liere

C. That synod take note of the activities on which the committee has embarked and encourage leaders and churches to offer the committee suggestions and information related to them.

D. That synod recognize with appreciation the service of retiring members Tony Maan and Herman De Vries, and of curator William Katerberg and the Heritage Hall staff, student workers, and volunteers.

Historical Committee
Janet Sheeres, chair
Herman De Vries, secretary
Greg Elzinga
Stanley Jim
William Katerberg
Zachary J. King
Tony Maan
Jul Medenblik
Christian Oh
Donald Sinnema

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Dordt University

Greetings to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church. At Dordt University we are grateful for our close relationship with the CRCNA, which has profoundly shaped our institution's mission and identity. Though we are not the official institution of higher education for the denomination, Dordt is committed to serving the CRC and living out our shared Reformed heritage.

We have witnessed God's continued faithfulness in the 2024-2025 academic year at our institution. Dordt remains steadfast in its mission to provide Christ-centered education, a vision rooted in the principles outlined in Article 71 of the Church Order: encouraging the establishment and sustainability of Christian education in the Reformed tradition. This partnership is demonstrated in the many local churches—within the CRC and other traditions—that serve as church homes for our students. Over 90 percent of our students regularly attend church, and more than 50 percent participate in Bible studies or small group faith-formation activities. This engagement carries into our students' post-graduate lives, with 93 percent of Dordt alumni reporting regular church attendance and many taking on leadership roles in their congregations.

Our faculty members also exemplify this faithfulness. This past year more than 60 faculty and staff read through Calvin's *Institutes*, gathering bi-weekly to discuss and deepen their understanding of Reformed theology. These activities reflect Dordt's enduring commitment to fostering both spiritual and academic growth within the student body as well as among faculty, staff, alumni, friends, and beyond.

Dordt has experienced significant momentum, including record enrollment for four consecutive years. In fall 2024 we welcomed 1,943 students, with 1,581 pursuing undergraduate degrees. Such growth underscores the trust families place in Dordt to provide rigorous academics grounded in a biblical perspective. To accommodate this growth, we continue to expand our campus. The new dining commons and B.J. Haan Auditorium expansion are progressing, with plans to be completed by the 2025-2026 academic year. These spaces will serve our community well into the future.

Academically, Dordt remains a leader in preparing students for kingdom work. New program offerings such as construction management and construction engineering reflect our missional commitment to equip students for "Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life," including in the workplace. Dordt graduates are well-prepared for their calling: 99.3 percent of 2024 graduates reported being employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation. Our nursing program demonstrates this excellence as well, with 100 percent of the bachelor of science in nursing students in the class of 2024 passing the NCLEX exam on their first attempt. Our innovative agricultural service technology (diesel technology) program

equips students for kingdom work by combining hands-on technical training, a Christian worldview, and a strong partnership with regional John Deere dealers—all while providing the chance for students to become Deere certified before graduation.

Our students excel outside the classroom as well. The Dordt Wind Symphony received the prestigious invitation to perform at the Iowa Bandmasters Association's Annual Conference in May 2024, showcasing their musical talent. And our athletic teams continue to achieve success regionally and nationally, including women's basketball claiming the program's first-ever NAIA championship in March 2024. This year's program also has a number-one ranking as of this writing in February 2025.

We are grateful for the support of the CRC in helping us carry out our Founders' Vision to provide an educational opportunity "that is Christian not merely in the sense that devotional exercises are appended to the ordinary work of the college, but in the larger and deeper sense that all the class work, all of the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities shall be permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity." Please continue to pray for Dordt's faculty, staff, and students as we pursue this calling. If you have questions or seek further engagement, please contact me or Rev. Todd Zuidema, our director of church relations, whose goal is to strengthen Dordt's connection to CRCNA congregations.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Dordt University
Erik Hoekstra, president

Institute for Christian Studies (ICS)

Greetings:

The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) has a long and cherished history of holding space for conversations that truly matter. At ICS, facilitating difficult, respectful, and safe conversations about controversial matters is a task we are proud to undertake. We believe it is paramount to foster and defend spaces where Christians can, in good faith, disagree about matters of scriptural interpretation or about where the Holy Spirit is leading the church today. We also believe that, in carefully preparing spaces for these difficult conversations, disagreements can take place in a spirit of communal fellowship and solidarity. These disagreements can, in turn, ultimately become a means of growing in faith together.

Convicted by this spirit, we found our hearts broken as we watched and listened to the past several synods of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) silence parishioners who oppose the CRCNA's adoption of the Human Sexuality Report (HSR) and, by giving it doctrinal status, effectively expel all those whose Christian consciences call them to dissent from the HSR and its conclusions. Because of our concern for these persons as well as for the overall well-being of LGBTQ+ people in the church, we decided that we could not support a denomination that shuts down difficult conversations. For this reason, **on January 15, 2025, the ICS Board of Trustees voted to discontinue ICS's status as a Denominationally Related Educational Institution of the CRCNA.**

Our grief over the CRCNA's decision stems from ICS's deep roots in reformational Christianity. ICS's founding members, several of them prominent CRCNA pastors, sought to create a "University for the People" that would impart a living reformational philosophical tradition as a gift and a call to every person. This tradition traces a "creation-fall-redemption" ground motive through the narrative arc of Scripture, which teaches us that God in Christ is busy restoring a broken creation originally made good, and that, as humans, we are invited to participate in these healing and transformational efforts.

For us, the inclusion of sexual minorities is part and parcel of the healing and transformation God calls us to enact. Scripture gives many examples of God's people dramatically reforming traditional positions in their efforts to be faithful to this same ethical call. In kindred spirit, we strive to honor the image of God in LGBTQ+ persons. We believe that, in so doing, we can help end the needless harm inflicted on persecuted sexual minorities and affirm the blessings these persons bring to the church and wider society.

While our convictions compel us to take this step in faith, we do not believe that this decision marks the end of ICS's role in serving the Reformed community. For years, many Reformed congregations and parishioners have walked alongside us, debated with us, listened to us, and supported us. We still consider our institution to belong to these people. For this reason, we

plan to expand our lifelong learning offerings to serve all who seek a safe place to wrestle with their most pressing moral and spiritual questions.

All are welcome in this place.

Shalom,

Institute for Christian Studies
Ronald A. Kuipers, president
Daniel R. Beerens, chair, Board of Trustees

The King's University

Greetings from The King's University!

This year we've been celebrating our forty-fifth anniversary. We once again experienced an increase in our student enrollment for the 2024/25 academic year. We had a 2 percent increase in the total number of students this year compared to last year. We are grateful for the 835 students who studied at King's this fall. We thank God for his continued provision of students who are eager to engage in a Christian university education at King's.

Construction plans for our new Centre for Excellence in the Sciences are well under way, with detailed designs currently being developed. A portion of the original campus containing primarily administrative and faculty offices is being demolished, and the new three-story facility will be constructed in its place. Construction of the new facility is slated to begin this spring, and we are anticipating the completion of the project by September 2026. The Centre for Excellence in the Sciences will include space for a student lounge, research labs, additional teaching spaces, and faculty and administrative offices. This new building will provide space for us to continue to expand programming in the sciences and will support continued enrollment growth. The building project has been fully funded through charitable gifts from our community, and we are continuing to raise support for program expansion, student scholarships, research funds, and ongoing operational costs. To date, over \$23 million has been donated to make this strategic vision a reality. We are so thankful for the community of supporters who continue to support the Christian university education that King's provides.

This past fall, King's psychology offerings expanded into the human health sciences with the launch of a new bachelor of science (BSc) degree in psychology. The current bachelor of arts (BA) in psychology emphasizes a social sciences perspective. The BSc program attracts students who are more interested in the physiological aspects of the human brain and behavior. Dr. Heather Looy, professor of psychology at King's, says the new undergraduate program adds more depth to the biological side of the field of psychology: "The program includes advanced biology-based courses such as human anatomy, human physiology, neuroscience, and psychopharmacology. These courses provide psychology students with a greater understanding of human health and prepare them for more clinical and research-oriented careers." We are also preparing to offer a new bachelor of kinesiology degree soon to further enhance our health sciences program options.

We are pleased to announce that chemistry professor Dr. Peter Mahaffy is the 2025 recipient of the George C. Pimentel Award in Chemical Education. The award, granted by the American Chemical Society (ACS; [acs.org](https://www.acs.org)), recognizes two key areas of Mahaffy's teaching and research: understanding and relating to chemistry as a human activity and reimagining the teaching

and learning of chemistry by using “systems thinking” tools. Mahaffy’s innovative work as the director of King’s Centre for Visualization in Science (KCVS; kcv.ca) is at the forefront of systems thinking. In collaboration with a team of undergraduate student researchers and a network of international and Edmonton-based experts, KCVS has developed an extensive range of digital resources that teach students to consider how chemical systems connect the world. Educators and students can access these interactive models, visualizations, and curriculum materials for free at kcv.ca.

Thanks to generous gifts from our support community, King’s has launched a new Sustainability Transformation Action and Research (STAR) Hub. Our vision is to become a leader in sustainability transition innovation and research that is guided by our Christian understanding of humanity’s God-given responsibility to steward his creation. The innovation and research hub (to be housed in the Centre for Excellence in the Sciences) will catalyze internal research and action projects related to sustainability transition, become a regional hub for sustainability transitions research, and foster sustainability action, in partnership with local, national, and international academic and nonacademic institutions (faith-based organizations, church networks, NGOs, etc.).

Thank you for your continued prayers for The King’s University and our students. The financial support that we receive from many churches in the western Canadian classes of the CRCNA is key in our efforts to keep a King’s education an affordable option for anyone seeking a university degree grounded in the Christian faith. We are grateful for the vision that members of the Christian Reformed Church have had in establishing King’s and in ensuring that this important option for Christian university education is available for students.

The King’s University
Melanie Humphreys, president

Kuyper College

Greetings from Kuyper College!

This year our theme is *Christ: Our Firm Foundation*, based on Luke 6:46-49. David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group, echoes this theme as he calls college leaders, faculty, and staff to form students to be “resilient disciples” of Jesus Christ. This is a high calling for Christian colleges, for we know only too well the literal and metaphorical storms that are striking the lives of our students, our institutions, and our culture. Living out this theme has been our earnest intent this year, through chapel services, classroom discussions, work placements, one-on-one conversations, service projects, and much more.

Here are some highlights describing how we are fulfilling our mission “to form lifelong learners for purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor.”

Purposeful Learning

- We give thanks to God for another year of significant enrollment growth, with the highest undergraduate headcount since 2017. Our niche as a small Bible College and as a federally recognized Work College provides students with an intentional, faith-based community and workplace-ready skills to prepare them for lives of service and ministry.
- In line with our value toward learning outside of the classroom, we partnered with the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders and with Bridge Street Ministries to offer two courses in our new Christian community development minor. In addition, this past summer Kuyper professors hosted two off-campus immersive courses: “Leadership in the National Parks” and “Native American Intercultural Ministry.”
- This past fall we established partnerships with (1) Calvin University to provide our undergraduate students with a pathway to careers serving in elementary and secondary education and (2) Northpoint (Bible) College to provide their students access to our business leadership program.
- To fulfill our mission of forming lifelong learners and engaging our broader community, we hosted two on-campus forums: one last fall focused on faith and politics, and one this winter focused on faith and business.

Purposeful Work

- More than 115 students are involved in KuyperWorks, with work placements in every office on campus, and we have plans to offer off-campus work placements next year. In order to help our students

develop KuyperWorks competencies, we implemented weekly professional development sessions in which they hear from industry and ministry leaders.

- Dr. Richelle White, professor of youth ministry, received a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for a research project focused on storytelling, community, and healing among an intergenerational group of women.
- This year marks 25 years of teaching by Dr. Dan Kroeze, professor of biblical studies and preaching pastor at Westend Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prior to his service at Kuyper, his father, Dr. George Kroeze, taught Bible at Kuyper for 25 years. What a legacy of teaching God's Word!
- In February our board of trustees was recognized by the Association for Biblical Higher Education for successfully completing the Board Governance Training Program. In coordination with our designated board governance coach we developed a strategic board governance plan.

Purposeful Service

- Founded on Kuyper's deep commitment to prayer and community-based learning, our student spiritual life team implemented Chapel Groups this year. These groups consist of 8-10 students, staff, and faculty who join together biweekly to discuss one question connected to this year's theme and to spend time in prayer for each other. In addition, our Alumni Relations Committee created an online prayer portal as a pathway to connect alumni and friends of the college with prayer partners on campus.
- In October, four Kuyper students and two Kuyper staff members joined more than 60 students and staff from seven Work Colleges to participate in meaningful, hands-on service in Kentucky communities. Service activities included packing essential supply bags for local schools, clearing trails at an Appalachian park, and preparing a farm for winter.
- In November, "Homecoming: Falling for Kuyper" combined Kuyper's first-ever homecoming event with our annual Fall Fest. Alumni, representing five decades of graduates, along with faculty, staff, and students, enjoyed a variety of community-building events and an exciting women's basketball game.
- Kuyper College is now home to the Divine Servant, a life-size bronze cast statue depicting Jesus washing Peter's feet, based on John 13. This statue was gifted to the college by the Zondervan Publishing Company after being housed in the Zondervan offices for many years. Situated outside the Vos Chapel, the statue provides a space for reflection, and its message aligns with our mission to serve God and others.

In closing, as I reflect on our theme—*Christ: Our Firm Foundation*—I picture rods and rods of rebar set in a concrete foundation giving strength, protection, and stability to a tall building. I also picture a community founded deeply on Jesus Christ and giving support, encouragement, and care to each other. We celebrate this community at Kuyper College, and we are grateful that we can be part of the larger community of the CRCNA. Thanks be to God for the gift of his church!

Kuyper College,
Patricia R. Harris, president

Redeemer University

At Redeemer University, 2024 was a year of increased enrollment, exciting program development, campus renewal, and engaging events. We also laid the groundwork for future initiatives that will help Redeemer remain relevant and affordable for Christian students. We praise God for his faithfulness! Here are some highlights from the past twelve months.

I. Records in student enrollment

An increasing number of students are choosing to integrate their academic journey with their faith. In fall 2024, Redeemer achieved record numbers in incoming class size, total enrollment, and students living on campus; 1,094 students are currently part of the Redeemer community, an increase of 37 percent since 2019!

II. New programs for increased kingdom impact

Recognizing that the needs of students and the marketplace are changing, Redeemer is expanding program offerings in innovative ways. At the undergraduate level, Redeemer announced a new bachelor of health sciences degree and a redesigned music program. Redeemer is also preparing to launch its first master's degree program, a master of education degree, in 2026. More certificates and master's programs are in development. While preserving its in-person, undergraduate foundation, the university has launched church leadership microcredentials and a not-for-profit management certificate program with online delivery.

III. Strategic leadership in business education

Redeemer's School of Business is becoming a national leader in Christian business education. Last summer the university appointed a new dean of business, Dr. Sophia Kusyk, a strategic leader who brings more than 25 years of professional and academic experience to the role. Additionally, Redeemer launched an online certificate program in not-for-profit management, equipping Christian leaders and managers with sound business training integrated with a kingdom perspective.

IV. Prioritizing student wellness

This past year Redeemer invested in additional mental health and wellness staffing to support students. The university also completed the expansion of its Wellness Centre, centralizing health services, mental health triage, and counseling. At an open house, staff, faculty, and students visited the upgraded facility and explored the variety of services offered.

V. Strategizing for the future

Redeemer also completed the process of renewing its mission and vision statements.

Mission: Preparing students to reflect the love of Jesus Christ in every career and calling.

Vision: Minds renewed. Lives transformed. World redeemed.

In addition, Redeemer has adopted six institutional values, core markers that guide how the university community learns and works together: truth, learning, community, excellence, grace, and courage. The university is also working to wrap up the current strategic plan, *Learn. Forward.*, and to launch its next strategic plan—a ten-year vision—in 2025.

VI. Engaging the community

Hundreds of community members visited Redeemer this past year for a number of exciting events. Last May, Redeemer partnered with Christian Legal Fellowship to host its first annual Public Law Lecture. In the fall Redeemer hosted singer-songwriter Elias Dummer as part of his cross-Canada tour. Redeemer also equipped local youth leaders by hosting its first annual ministry forum for youth leaders. And Grammy-nominated musician and hymnwriter Keith Getty came to campus to host a community music workshop. The Redeemer Concert Choir joined Keith and Kristyn Getty on stage at their Hamilton concert.

VII. Platforming Christian scholarship

The Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship hosted a variety of engaging academic initiatives and events to profile and platform outstanding Reformed Christian research. The centre awarded the 2024 Emerging Public Intellectual Award to American political scientist and professor Dr. Jonathan Askonas (Catholic University of America). The centre also welcomed a variety of guest lecturers to Redeemer, including Dr. Lydia Jaeger (Institut Biblique de Nogent), Dr. Dave Warners and Dr. Matthew Heun (Calvin University), and Dr. Fellipe do Vale (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). In September the centre hosted an academic conference on the life and legacy of J.R.R. Tolkien, featuring a public lecture by Dr. Louis Markos (Houston Christian University).

VIII. Renewing the campus environment

Redeemer invested in a number of campus upgrades in 2024. Founders Hall, Redeemer's main academic building, received much-needed upgrades to refresh the hallways and classrooms. Additionally, the maintenance area was upgraded and expanded to meet the needs of a growing campus. Many residences also received upgrades, including security enhancements and aesthetic improvements.

IX. Enhancing experiential learning

Redeemer's Innovation Centre launched a new venture, The Studio, a student-run video production and digital storytelling company. Additionally, the Career Centre team expanded with the addition of a full-time experiential learning coordinator, giving the centre more capacity to facilitate and grow relationships with reputable organizations. Redeemer also joined a program hosted by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce called Student Talent Connect, which assists local employers in accessing post-secondary student talent.

X. Thank you

We remain grateful for the CRCNA's long-standing, prayerful support. Redeemer's mission of preparing students to reflect the love of Jesus Christ in every career and calling is so needed in the world today. Thank you for helping students discover where God is calling them!

Redeemer University
David Zietsma, president

Trinity Christian College

Greetings from Trinity Christian College. Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update to synod and for your continued partnership in encouraging and training leaders for the church and community through the ministry of Christian higher education.

Over the past year, Trinity Christian College has continued to boldly and strategically pursue a vision of Christian higher education that aims to eliminate students' reliance on loans, enable students to focus on their well-being, and expand our partnerships with local businesses and organizations—all so that Trinity can welcome students as fully as possible into the life-changing experience of Christian higher education.

At the core of Trinity's work has been a vision for partnerships of mutual benefit that connect the gifts of our wider community in ways that are good for students, partners, and the college. We are learning that we can (1) help students access powerful experiential education that supports their vocational growth while also (2) generating student income/debt relief through (3) stipends provided by employment partners who (4) benefit from student work and access to student hiring. This virtuous cycle is helping Trinity move away from the assumption that debt is the economic foundation of higher education in America. This institutional emphasis, open to students in all academic fields, ensures that students get powerful hands-on learning, pursued through a Christian worldview, in ways that allow them to graduate with significantly reduced debt. We see this economic model as a profound expression of our Christian commitments to sound economic stewardship and to seeing the whole-person good of all our students. This approach—our Earn, Network, and Learn Initiative—is generating important regional and national momentum that is beginning to show promise for healthy change inside of higher education as a whole.

Trinity's sponsored nursing degree program with Northwestern Hospital, for example, launched in fall 2024 and will increase in scope next fall. Northwestern pays student tuition in years three and four, trains students in clinical rotations, guarantees a job pursuant to successful completion of the NCLEX Nursing Boards, and asks for a three-year employment commitment. For Northwestern, this partnership reduces hiring costs and—more significantly—provides stability in the nursing workforce, correlating to better community health outcomes. For Trinity students, the partnership provides debt-free education and the promise of meaningful work at a world-class medical facility. This is just the sort of mutuality that underlies Trinity's commitments to students and to its neighbors. The college is working toward a handful of additional sponsored degree programs within education and financial services.

Beyond these sponsored degrees, Trinity has partnered with more than 50 cooperative employers through the Earn, Network, and Learn Initiative, re-

sulting in positive student financial outcomes, exceptional experiential education, and strong outcomes for the employer partners. In addition, we have nearly 100 Community Alliance Program partners—all entrepreneurs from economically underengaged neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago. Tuition grants earned by students through these paid work experiences have more than quadrupled while the number of participating students has grown by 900 percent. Data is showing that students who participate in these programs have average debt loads that are lower than Trinity's overall student body in amounts commensurate with their co-op, Community Alliance Program, or sponsored degree grant amounts. Students are therefore accessing Christian higher education through powerful hands-on learning in ways that reduce or eliminate indebtedness.

It should come as no surprise that student financial well-being is part of a larger picture of student flourishing at Trinity. This spring we are partnering with the Center for Human Flourishing at Harvard to study more deeply the powerful well-being indicators, such as dramatically increased retention and dramatically decreased levels of academic probation, that have accompanied our innovative academic schedule, which features Well-being Wednesday. The openness of that time, which has come with no reduction of course hours, has given students the time they need to focus on spiritual, academic, social, physical, financial, and professional well-being.

Trinity also continues to make key progress on the most significant capital campaign in its history, which aims to enhance numerous aspects of the campus and to help establish the college as a leading voice for change amid the challenged financial and student service model in higher education today. Currently we have raised over two-thirds of the funding toward our campaign goal. We thank God for this record philanthropy, motivated by a transformational approach to Christian higher education.

These structural innovations—all rooted in Trinity's Christian commitments—are designed to improve access to Christian higher education. We know that when students enter academic and professional programs that are shaped by the deep commitments of the gospel of Jesus, profound transformation can ensue. Our commitment at Trinity, located in the second largest county in the United States, is to strive to be a place where any student—regardless of financial background—can experience a Christian vision of life and calling. This is our enduring mission. Every day, we witness God's guiding hand at work in Trinity's community and in our surrounding neighborhoods. We are immensely thankful for the ways in which the support of so many CRCNA classes and partners catalyzes our mission to serve students and neighbors as they encounter the love of Christ in their academic and professional callings. May God continue to bless all institutions working with a Christian vision for education and vocation.

Trinity Christian College
Aaron Kuecker, president

TASK FORCES

ASSISTED SUICIDE TASK FORCE

Report outline

- I. Mandate and goals
- II. Current context
- III. Reformed theological framework
- IV. What about “Passive Euthanasia”?
- V. Disability
- VI. Pastoral care
- VII. What do I say/do when my parishioners ask about medically assisted suicide?
- VIII. After a death by medically assisted suicide has occurred
- IX. Conclusion
- X. Recommendations

Appendices

- A. Medically Assisted Suicide Today
- B. Pastoral Care and the Dying Process, Bible Verses, Hymns, and Prayers for Visiting
- C. Information about Making Health-Care Decisions

I. Mandate and goals

Synod 2023 appointed the Assisted Suicide Task Force “to make a definitive and comprehensive report on the practice of assisted suicide in all its forms” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 981). The task force was assigned to shape its work according to the premise that there is a unique value to all human life and that humans have a special relationship with God as we bear God’s image. Synod asked that the report be in concert with prior synodical work that “condemn[s] the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death” (*Acts of Synod 1972*, pp. 63-64). Before we launch into the main portion of our report, we want to explain how we understand our mandate and goal as a task force.

First, we are writing about medically assisted suicide (MAS).¹ The act of assisted suicide involves the situation in which the health-care system uses medicines to intentionally cause death, to which a capable individual has

¹ In this report we have chosen to use the term “medically assisted suicide” because it is deemed to be clear in describing the act, and without tying it to a particular jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions call it “physician-assisted death,” “death with dignity,” or “medical assistance in dying”; however, none of these phrases are as clear, or accurate, in describing the act to which it refers. In addition, we reject the term Medical Assistance in Dying (MaiD), despite its popularity—particularly in Canada—because it is a euphemism that conflates medical killing with the medical assistance that is given to people in the natural dying process.

consented. MAS has been legalized in Canada and in many states in the United States. It remains illegal for anyone to help someone commit suicide outside of the prescribed processes in these jurisdictions, thus we will limit our discussion to pastoral care and end-of-life decisions in situations in which people are legally able to request that their life be ended with the help of an authorized health-care worker.

Second, we understand that by quoting the 1972 report on abortion, synod has asked us to write a report that is against medically assisted suicide. We focus our work on pastoral care and guidance from the position that a medically assisted suicide is not congruent with a biblical, Christian understanding of life and death.

Third, in its overture requesting that synod “make a statement on assisted suicide” (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 354-56), Classis Zeeland notes that the phrase from the 1972 report on abortion condemning “the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being . . .” does not describe the situation of medically assisted suicide, which is legislated with regard to the principle of patient autonomy and an approval process that includes waiting periods and is thus not arbitrary per se. We agree that a clearer statement on the value of human life would be helpful. We aim to provide a theological and pastoral framework that will help churches support and care for suffering people at the end of their lives or facing difficult life circumstances.

As of 2024, there are some 650 Christian Reformed pastors and chaplains who are doing ministry in jurisdictions where medically assisted suicide is legal. While writing this report, we engaged pastors and chaplains on their experience of providing pastoral care in the context of legalized medically assisted suicide. From our engagement with this group, we learned that MAS is an issue and decision that members of their congregations and communities face, and that some are choosing MAS. Church members hold a range of opinions about MAS. Pastors want people to feel safe to wrestle in community with the issue of suffering and to understand the difference between palliative care and MAS. They desire resources to support individuals and their loved ones in nuanced and difficult situations.

Taking all of this into consideration, we understand that the main question posed to the Assisted Suicide Task Force is as follows: *Given the growing availability and endorsement of medically assisted suicide, how should Christians think about this matter biblically, within the medical context, and in support of practical Christian living?*

In this report we will argue that Christian theology and pastoral-care practices encourage compassionate palliative care and support of suffering, disabled, and/or dying people and their families instead of acting to cause death.

II. Current Context

A. Map of Access to MAS

(Note: Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is available in all provinces and territories in Canada.)



Key

Medium gray—Bills are in place allowing euthanasia or assisted suicide (California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, Washington).

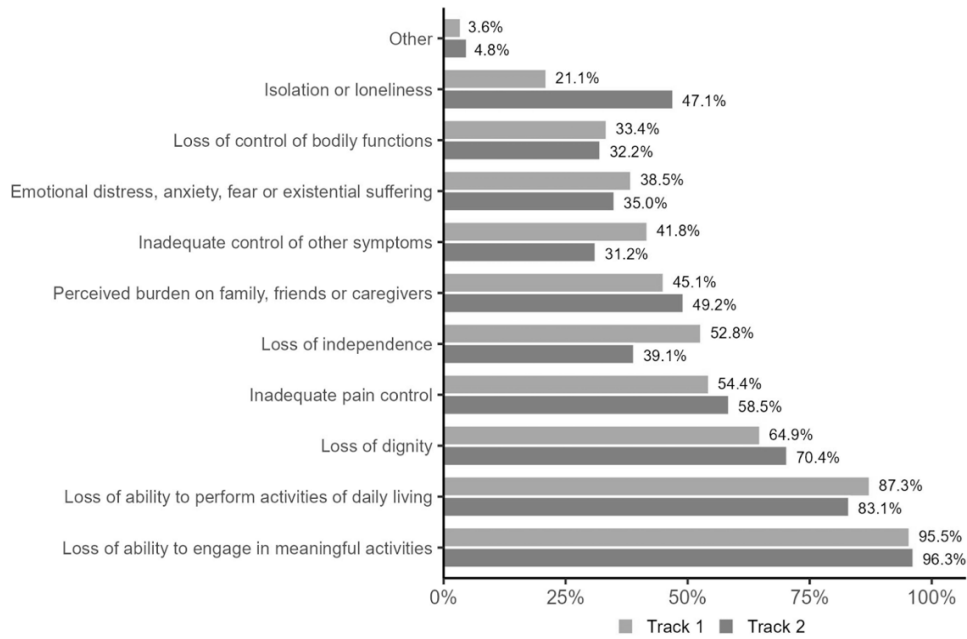
Black—Bills are in place allowing or proposing euthanasia or assisted suicide, but pro-life bills have been introduced (Connecticut, Montana, New Jersey).

Dark gray—Bills allowing euthanasia or assisted suicide are pending (Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York).

Note: Oregon allows people from out of state to travel to Oregon to receive euthanasia/assisted suicide.

Source: deathwithdignity.org/states (accessed Jan. 22, 2025)

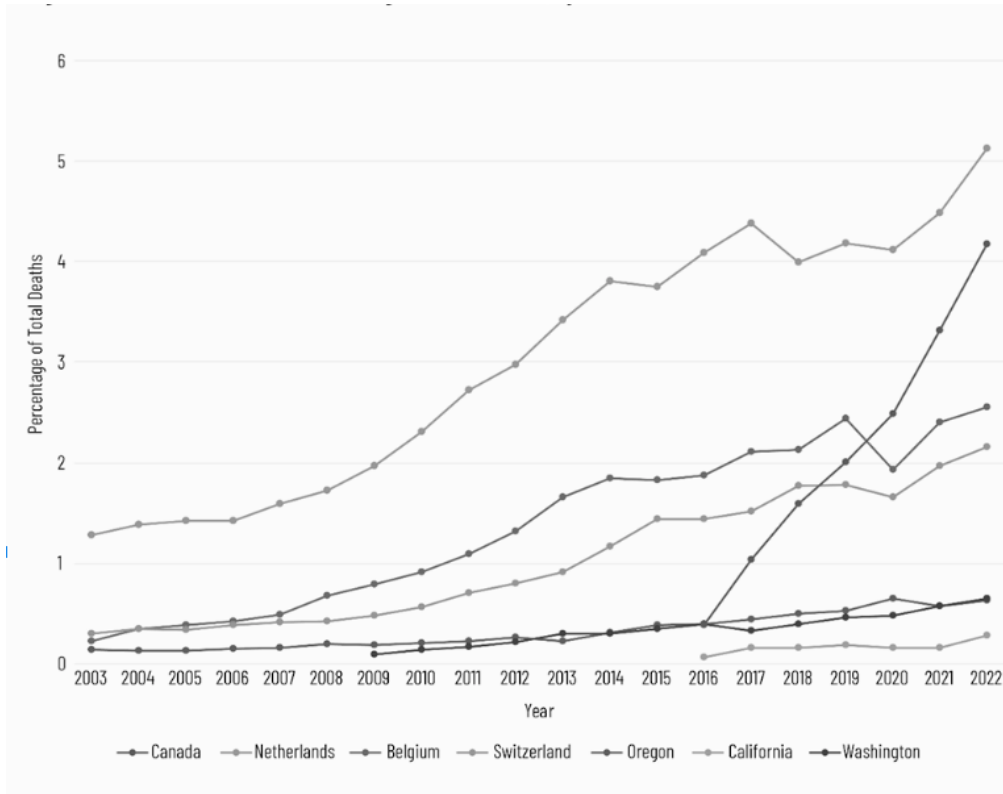
B. Chart showing reasons given for requesting MAiD (MAS in Canada), 2023



Notes: Track 1 MAiD is when a death is reasonably foreseeable. Track 2 is when a death is not reasonably foreseeable but the patient has a disability, illness, or disease and is experiencing unbearable suffering that cannot be relieved under conditions that the patient considers acceptable. For more information of the development of MAiD in Canada, see Appendix A.

Source: Fifth Annual Report on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada, 2023. Stats Canada. (canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/annual-report-medical-assistance-dying-2023.html#f3.6a)

C. Graph showing assisted deaths as a percentage of total deaths in the eligible population, by jurisdiction²



This graph was originally published in color and is available on the Cardus website (see link in footnote). To distinguish the jurisdictions in this gray-scale version, we include the percentage of total deaths for 2022: Netherlands, 5.1%; Canada, 4.1%; Belgium, 2.5%; Switzerland, 2.1%; Washington (state), 0.6%; Oregon, 0.6%; California, 0.3%. Note from author of table:

This graph uses the most recent reported annual number of deaths. While jurisdictions have varying legislation and definitions of euthanasia and medical assistance in dying, the numbers reported here are official government accounts relating broadly to assisted death. The number of deaths recorded in Washington are the number of participants who are known to have died specifically after ingesting the requested lethal doses of medication. Since MAiD is not currently legal in Canada for persons under the age of 18, this Cardus paper calculates MAiD deaths as a percentage of all deaths of persons age 18 and above. Health Canada, however, calculates MAiD deaths as a percentage of all deaths over zero years of age. Consequently, Health Canada data and Cardus’s own calculations show minor differences. For example, the 2022 percentage is 4.2 percent in this Cardus report, while for Health Canada it is 4.1 percent.

² “From Exceptional to Routine” Cardus, 2024 (cardus.ca/research/health/reports/from-exceptional-to-routine/).

These three diagrams demonstrate that MAS is available and endorsed in Canada and the United States. MAS is legally available in Canada and in a growing number of states in the U.S. In Oregon the allowance for nonresidents means that people can travel to Oregon for MAS. There are various reasons people give for choosing MAS. Deaths by MAS are increasing as a percentage of total deaths year over year, most notably in Canada. Given the growing availability and endorsement of medically assisted suicide, how should Christians think about this matter biblically, within the medical context, and in support of practical Christian living?

III. Reformed Theological Framework

A. *Imago Dei and the preciousness of life*

Life is a gift from God, and human life is especially precious to God, our Creator. From the beginning of Scripture to the end, God is the giver and sustainer of life. While all life comes from God, human life is given particular value. In their report “Regarding Responsibility and Community at the End of Life,” submitted to Synod 2000, the Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) wrote that “both humankind and animals are referred to in Genesis as ‘living beings,’ but only of humankind is it said that God ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life’ (Gen. 2:7).”³ There is something warmly personal and intimate in this picture. God did not just give us life; he gave us something of himself.

Dignity and meaning are not derived from one’s cognitive or physical ability and therefore cannot be lost by age, injury, or disease. Dignity and meaning come from God, who created the whole world *ex nihilo* “out of nothing,”⁴ imbued humankind with his image, and declared humanity “very good” (Gen. 1:31; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 6). All persons have inherent worth and dignity, and all people are invited, in ways respective of their unique gifts, to be caretakers of the world and to reflect God’s image in the world (Our World Belongs to God, para. 10).

The preciousness of human life is emphasized in Genesis 9:1-7. This passage begins and ends with the command to be “fruitful and multiply.” In between this reiterated command to fill the earth comes a strong warning about extinguishing the life of another person: Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed, for in his own image God made humankind” (NRSV). Taking the life of another person is very serious.

This is also emphasized in the sixth commandment. Exodus 20:13 says “You shall not murder.” The sixth commandment forbids any wrongful taking of life and affirms that we honor God when we honor and protect

³ *Agenda for Synod 2000*, p. 430. Note that this report is heartily endorsed by our task force as an important statement on responsibility and community at the end of life and worthy of review.

⁴ St. Athanasius, *On The Incarnation: De Incarnatione Verdi Dei* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1996).

the lives of fellow human beings. In Matthew 5:21-23, Jesus expands this command to include any harboring of anger against a neighbor as well. So we understand that the sixth commandment not only forbids the taking of physical life but also prohibits anything that harms, endangers, or even belittles other people. Further, the sixth commandment in its prohibition of killing is also a call to promote the well-being and flourishing of others. John Calvin, in writing on the sixth commandment, said,

The purpose of this commandment is: the Lord has bound mankind together by a certain unity; hence each man ought to concern himself with the safety of all. To sum up, then, all violence, injury, and any harmful thing at all that may injure our neighbor's body are forbidden to us. We are accordingly commanded, if we find anything of use to us in saving our neighbors' lives, faithfully to employ it; if there is anything that makes for their peace, to see to it; if anything harmful, to ward it off; if they are in any danger, to lend a helping hand.⁵

As Calvin illustrates, this command is not just about not ending life; it is also about protecting, promoting, and helping life, in whatever ways we can, to flourish.

The Christian value of life is distinct from that perceived by contemporary culture, where the value of one's life is self-reported and assessed on a rubric of quality of life that prioritizes autonomy, ability, wealth, and health. We, however, believe that the value of human life is intrinsic and enduring. The Anglican theologian Rowan Williams writes, "For the Christian disciple, human dignity—and therefore any notion of human rights—depends upon the recognition that every person is related to God before they are related to anything or anyone else."⁶ So Christians are to honor all lives, our own and others, even when they look different or seem weak. The CCG writes that the value of human life "is not diminished by the physical or mental ravages of old age, disability, disease, accident, or deformity. We may not terminate life on the basis of any of these things, for doing so places us on a slippery slope of treating life as a disposable commodity when its apparent usefulness is lost" (*Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 444-45). We care for others, we receive care when we need it, and we make every effort to protect the lives of all people—especially those whom our culture may deem as less valuable, weak, or unworthy.

The inherent dignity and value of humanity is made most clear in the incarnation and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus took on flesh and lived among us. Jesus was made like humanity in every way except that he was without sin (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). Jesus suffered pain, grieved loss, and experienced suffering in body and soul. Jesus died and was buried. And Jesus' bodily resurrection both affirms the goodness of the body and indicates

⁵ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.39.

⁶ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 65.

that death is not the end. Indeed, Jesus' death and resurrection secured our redemption, affirmed the goodness of humanity, and sealed the promise that we belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1). The incarnation also shows us that we are not alone in our difficulties; Jesus is intimately aware of the suffering and challenges of being human.

B. Suffering

Trouble and suffering are part of being human, and our Lord Jesus is “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3, RSV). He knows suffering. Our good bodies, created by God, can be a source of pleasure and joy, but they also bring us trouble. Disability, disease, and pain change our bodies and the way we live our lives. In our lifespan we grow and develop, and we experience mortal and physical limits that are different for each person—for reasons that may be unclear to us. Suffering involves physical, psychological, and spiritual parts of ourselves, at many times and for many reasons throughout our lives—and often it accompanies the dying process.

We live in a world that urges us to avoid suffering at all costs. Our cultural impulse to flee or eliminate suffering can cause us to miss out on its formative work in our lives. We certainly don't pursue suffering for its sake, but suffering isn't meaningless. Suffering develops character and deepens our dependence on our heavenly Father and on each other. The apostle Paul states that “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4). This passage is not a celebration of pain but, rather, a recognition that even in suffering God is accomplishing his purposes in us. Indeed, Paul writes, at times we are “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Considering the issue of medically assisted suicide, the loss of autonomy is a significant source of suffering for many people. Ewan Goligher, a Christian physician in Canada, suggests that the suffering that most often leads people to seek out MAS is existential pain, loss of meaning, or other, nonphysical reasons—which government statistics confirm.⁷ People wrestle with the loss of autonomy that illness, disability, and aging can bring. People fear being a burden to family or friends. Loved ones may find themselves uncomfortable witnessing the suffering of others, and they may project that concern on those who are suffering in a way that makes them consider ending life. People worry about how the end may come about, and they want control over the time and manner of their death. Understanding the reasons that people consider MAS can help us respond to their concerns.

⁷ aaronrenn.com/p/dr-ewan-goligher-a-christian-response (accessed Dec. 6, 2024) and canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/annual-report-medical-assistance-dying-2023.html#a3.6 (accessed Jan. 3, 2025).

C. Addressing suffering: love, lament, liturgy

As Christians, we are called to respond to human suffering with compassion and care. We are called to *love one another*. Together, young and old, able-bodied and disabled, full of life and nearing death, we fix our eyes on Jesus, who “for the joy set before him . . . endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”; in our suffering we “consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that [we] will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:1-3). We are members of the body of Christ: we belong to God, and we belong to one another. This “belonging to one another” is emphasized in the New Testament through “one another” commands:

- love one another (John 13:34)
- honor one another above yourselves (Rom. 12:10)
- care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)
- be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32)
- bear with one another (Col. 3:13)
- encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11)
- bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2)

We may not be able to alleviate a particular cause of suffering or provide an explanation for the cause of suffering, but God invites us to find personal and practical ways to “carry each other’s burdens and in this way . . . fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).⁸ The love and help of community play a vital role in helping people who are suffering to persevere in faith. Providing presence and accompaniment can be a source of strength and encouragement, as this story from a CRC congregation demonstrates:

When Mary was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she was concerned, especially because she did not have family members living locally. When her church family learned of her need, they stepped in, providing people with various skills to walk with her in her final weeks. The list of ready-to-help individuals included drivers who took her to doctor appointments, and nurses who helped trouble-shoot medical needs like bandaging and medication. There were people who loved to read who visited and read books to her when she became too weak to read on her own, and lifelong church friends who held her hand, wiped her brow, and sat with her in her final days.

Receiving a terminal diagnosis is very difficult. So is asking for help. It takes courage and confidence in the community to be vulnerable about needing support. When a person’s needs and requests are heard and answered, the church lives into its calling to love one another. Unfortunately, in many situations that doesn’t happen. Either those who are suffering are unable or unwilling to share their needs, or the community doesn’t hear

⁸ The CCG chose Galatians 6:2 as the guiding verse for its report on end-of-life issues. We strongly recommend this report for its explanation of how the church can build communities of care for people at the end of life (see *Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 425-48).

and respond. This can bring pain, loneliness, and isolation. We know that some readers will have experienced situations in which they have not cared for or been cared for by their brothers and sisters in Christ. We must pause, recognize, and repent of our individual and collective failures to love each other. And we must begin again, hearing God's call to love one another.

God's people are called to respond with compassion, presence, help, and action to correct unjust situations to alleviate suffering. As followers of Jesus, we care for the vulnerable and for people whom our society devalues or ignores (James 1:27). Christians address suffering by loving one another at a relational level, and we work to alleviate situations like poverty or disasters that bring about suffering. This is of particular importance concerning the issue of MAS because some people may pursue it due to a lack of access to resources that are needed in order to live with a diagnosis or disability. Suffering can be the result of unjust systems and cycles of poverty. Christians work tirelessly to break these oppressive systems to bring about shalom in society.

Our love and care for each other are crucial but inadequate responses to human suffering. When life is a burden and full of suffering, our situations warrant *lament*. Psalms of lament express pain that is physical or psychological, sharing an honest desire for suffering to end and showing trust in God's sovereign care. Lament shows us that God and God's people can hold space for deep feelings; suffering is not to be repressed or hidden. Psalm 13 says, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? . . . But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me."

Psalm 88 is the darkest lament in the Bible. This particular psalm does not end with an expression of trust or praise but with the despair of the psalmist: "darkness is my closest friend" (Ps. 88:18). We do not always see the answers for our suffering or even an end to it, but we love and are loved by a God who welcomes even the darkest places of our lives into his presence in prayer. We cannot make another person's suffering meaningful to them, but we can urge them to persevere and encourage them when they despair, and through our presence we can remind them that our good God will not abandon them. Together we remember the promise "My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). Suffering and death do not have the last word, for "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us a future glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Lament can be individual or communal, and churches should make space for both expressions of lament in the liturgy of their public worship services. Our weekly practice of communal worship gathers the community of believers who individually and collectively cry out in protest to God and

ask for his mercy. Suffering, death, and the dying process can be frightening to people because it seems unfamiliar, but perhaps it isn't as unfamiliar as people think. Christian liturgy teaches us how to live and how to die. Every time we gather around the baptismal font, we rehearse dying and rising with Christ. This regular liturgical practice deepens our faith for this life, but it also readies us for the resurrection that is still to come: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).

D. Medical care in the dying process

Uncontrolled pain or suffering is a situation that all human beings want to avoid. When facing suffering that is likely to worsen, or unlikely to resolve, there is a strong need for compassionate care, and the health-care system seeks to provide such care to people who are suffering. Palliative care and medically assisted suicide are two different solutions offered for the problem of intolerable suffering. However, the intent behind these offered solutions is quite different: whereas palliative care provides medicines and caring resources to optimize quality of life until a natural death, medically assisted suicide uses medicines to purposefully cause the death of a suffering individual who has chosen to die.

Medically assisted suicide follows established protocols to bring about the ending of one's life. A consenting individual who is suffering and wants to end their life seeks the assistance of the health-care system to do so. Depending on what is legal in one's jurisdiction, there may be the option of assisted suicide or euthanasia. In assisted suicide, medicines are prescribed, dispensed by a pharmacy, and self-administered; in euthanasia, a health-care worker administers a lethal injection via an intravenous line. Medication protocols in use are designed to bring a quick-and-painless end to life. Proponents of medically assisted suicide see it as allowing one to maintain control in dealing with immense suffering when illness or disability cause chaos, uncertainty, and fear.

Palliative care, in contrast, focuses on caring for a suffering individual until the natural end of their life. Palliative care brings together expertise from physicians, nurses, chaplains, social workers, personal support workers, and more with intent to optimize quality of life. Hospice care is health care that is focused on the last stage of life, when death is reasonably foreseeable. Palliative/hospice care can be provided in various settings, such as one's own home, a hospital, or a temporary or long-term care facility. Regardless, medicines and tools can be used capably to help with various symptoms one may experience in their suffering, such as pain, depression/anxiety, nausea/vomiting, bowel/bladder dysfunction, fatigue, shortness of breath, lack of appetite, changing cognitive function, or declining ability to take in food or water.

Thankfully, with modern palliative care it is rare for one's physical pain to be inadequately addressed. However, if pain cannot be helped while maintaining conscious awareness, palliative sedation can be used. Here, palliative-care providers use medications skillfully to induce a loss of consciousness, in much the same way that an anesthetist prevents conscious awareness of pain during a surgery. Though this entails a loss of consciousness, the intent remains the relief of suffering—not the ending of life. To be clear, if an individual dies while unconscious from palliative sedation, the cause is the underlying illness, not the sedatives used to provide comfort. This distinction has already been made in the CCG report (see *Agenda for Synod 2000*, p. 446).

As an example of palliative sedation, consider a patient with ALS⁹ who is supported by a ventilator. Her nervous system no longer has capacity to breathe, so a machine pushes air into her body. The disease has progressed, and she can no longer communicate or feed herself. She had previously decided that she would not accept a feeding tube. After experiencing neurological decline for months, she and her family decide she is ready to stop using her life-support system. To avoid the experience of suffocation, her palliative physician provides medications that reduce air hunger and anxiety. She is provided sedation while her body succumbs to death due to her inability to breathe. This is a natural death, in which a health-care worker provides compassionate palliative support without the intent to kill, respecting the wishes of patient and family to stop receiving life-sustaining measures.

When confronted with an illness in which suffering is increasing, without expectation of cure, decisions must be made about whether to continue with life-prolonging treatment. One of the realities of modern health care is medicine's ability to prolong life without enhancing quality of life. This can make decision making about care options very difficult. A positive view of the value of life within the context of a loving community would not typically lead to early abandonment of all medical care. However, believers who have entrusted their life to Christ should not feel the need to pursue medically futile interventions but are free to decline treatment that is intended to prolong but not enhance one's life.

It is difficult to know ahead of time how we will feel and what we will want when there is a change in our health or ability. We may imagine a certain situation to be unbearable—but when it arrives, we may perhaps realize we were wrong. It can be helpful for patients to ask questions in order to fully understand available supports and treatments and discuss those matters with family members. Support from family and community can make difficult situations bearable. Ultimately, as believers, we entrust our lives to our

⁹ Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is a disease in which the nervous system governing muscles progressively degenerates, commonly over months to years, leaving an individual fully conscious yet losing the ability to eat, speak, move, and, lastly, breathe.

heavenly Father, seeking his guidance each step of the way, knowing we have hope that extends into eternity.

IV. What about “passive euthanasia”?

Many people have the idea that euthanasia can be accomplished in two ways: first, by “active/voluntary euthanasia” and, second, by “passive euthanasia.” This two-part categorization is inaccurate and can be misleading. To be clear, this task force understands *euthanasia* as synonymous with active/voluntary euthanasia: the health-care system’s use of medicines to *intentionally cause death, to kill*. On the other hand, passive euthanasia is commonly used to denote *allowing one to die*, usually by declining some level of medical treatment and/or by accepting some level of palliative treatment. “Passive euthanasia” is therefore a misnomer. As a task force, we would unambiguously state that the health-care system should never euthanize people, whereas it should support a person in declining a certain level of medical treatment or in receiving palliative care, in which there is no intent to kill.

Another situation that is sometimes termed “passive euthanasia” and deserves comment is when an individual decides to end their life by declining food and water. In this kind of situation, the context matters. If the individual has accepted a terminal condition, and further nourishment holds little value in sustaining their life, it is quite acceptable to refrain from intake—as is common near the end of life. However, if an individual is overwhelmed by despair and suffering and seeks a means to end it, even without medicines—that is a time to turn to the Lord and his people and thereby find strength to carry on.

Certainly the distinctions described here may be considered a fine line, but the line is real, and most thoughtful Christians who wish to be obedient will, at some point in their lives, have to make decisions involving that fine line. This is not merely a theoretical matter. (See Appendix C for more information on making health-care decisions.)

V. Disability

Medically assisted suicide is not just an end-of-life issue, it is a disability issue. In Canada, “Track 2” MAS allows people whose death is not reasonably foreseeable to access MAS simply on the condition that they have a disability and are suffering. Since we view life as precious, a gift of God and not diminished by age, disability, and disease, “Track 2” MAS involves an alarming devaluation of people who are every bit as valuable as nondisabled people.

People with disabilities experience barriers to participation in community in various ways and situations. The added cost in time and resources to gain inclusion can be weighty, especially when not borne by the larger community/society. Wheelchair users, and those who use assistive devices like a walker or cane, are excluded from physical spaces without ramp or elevator access. People with a hearing impairment or sensory disabilities are

largely excluded from social connection. People with disabilities have more medical and therapy appointments; they have higher costs for adaptive equipment and medication. People with cognitive disabilities are treated as children and experience prejudice based on their disability. In Canada 27 percent of people age 15 and above have a disability.¹⁰ In the United States the CDC reports that 28.7 percent of adults have a disability.¹¹ Social isolation is a source of significant suffering for people with disabilities.

The church must respond prophetically in a society where people with disabilities are devalued and experience higher rates of social isolation and poverty. First, we must work to understand the disabled experience. Second, we must break down barriers to participation in our churches and across society to reduce social isolation. The work of accessibility and community will shape disabled and nondisabled people to be together in a practical and powerful demonstration of the preciousness of all human life. To be pro-life is to be pro-disabled people.

As Christians, we are called to care for one another. We are usually quite good at embracing this as a Christian duty: we serve and give generously to others. Active doers and fixers, however, can find it very challenging to receive care when they need it. This should spark an important reimagining of the dignity of care: we value life when we give *and* receive care. While disability will likely touch all of our lives, most people do not think about, or prepare for, becoming disabled. As people of faith, is our view of the preciousness of human life robust enough for us to love ourselves when we experience disability personally?

VI. Pastoral Care

When people experience suffering, they don't often need more answers or dogma, they need *people* who can be present with them in their distress, *people* who can hear their questions without becoming anxious, *fellow brothers and sisters in Christ* who can help them “find strength in God” (1 Sam. 23:16). As pastors and leaders in the church, we have the opportunity to walk with people in matters of life and death.

Each person's situation is unique, informed by a person's own experiences and resources, and therefore the pastoral response must also be deeply personal. People find themselves in all kinds of situations and for a variety of reasons may wonder about or even pursue MAS. The Christian community is uniquely gifted to respond to and care for people who are hurting. In life and in death we belong to God, and we also belong to one another. This belonging compels us to care well for those facing suffering, disability, end of life, and any other situation that may lead them to consider MAS.

¹⁰statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/5980-disability-rate-canada-increased-2022 (accessed Dec. 6, 2024)

¹¹cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html (accessed Dec. 6, 2024)

A. The power of presence

The Bible teaches us the importance of being present with people who are suffering, spending time with them, giving them our full attention, listening without judgment, absorbing some of their pain. As the apostle Paul writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4). The book *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* offers this reflection regarding the gift of Christian community:

In Christian community we gather in the name of Christ and thus experience him in the midst of a suffering world [suffering people]. There our old, weak minds, which are unable to fully perceive the pains of the world, are transformed into the mind of Christ, to whom nothing human is alien. In community, we are no longer a mass of helpless individuals, but are transformed into one people of God.¹²

Visiting people is a crucial practice for the individual and the church. Pastoral presence can strengthen and encourage. A calm demeanor can help reduce anxiety in a room and connect people who are unable to attend church gatherings. We have provided a document in Appendix B that can be used to equip lay leaders in pastoral visits, especially to those who are suffering and dying.

B. Perseverance in suffering

God has a purpose for our suffering that is not always known to us. Whether or not we understand the purpose for our own or other people’s suffering, we respond with love, lament, and liturgy, drawing people further into relationship with God and others.

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” And the answer, of course, is belonging. In life and in death we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. We are not the masters of our own destinies but beloved children, kept and cared for by our heavenly Father, who knows the number of our days and the hairs on our heads.

Even when we suffer, we can trust the Lord’s timing with our lives, because we trust that he is good. We serve a Shepherd who promises never to leave us and who will surely be with us even in the valley of the shadow of death. God’s pervasive and tender care gives comfort and courage for all seasons of life and enables us to persevere, even in the uncertainty or fear we may feel about dying.

¹² Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (PRH Christian Publishing, 2006), p. 54

C. Protection of life

All people are created in the image of God. We are called to protect the lives of vulnerable people. Our bias ought always to be for life; however, we also acknowledge that sometimes harm is done when life is needlessly extended. In our protection of life we must walk compassionately with people as they consider whether or not they wish to begin or continue a treatment that may prolong life but also increase suffering—or merely prolong life but with diminished quality. As Christians, we can count it a privilege to walk with people through these hard places and to bear witness to the gift of life and the hope of our life to come.

D. Promise of the gospel

The Bible teaches that those who believe in Jesus as Savior will spend eternity with him. No distinction is made regarding the cause of a person's death. While the Bible affirms the goodness of this life, it also points us forward to the life yet to come. For many people, waiting for death is difficult, but we believe that the answer to such struggle is not an expedited death but an empowered perseverance, made possible by the sustaining hand of our loving heavenly Father and the hope of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). We wait for death in hope, trusting that "the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us . . . to himself" (2 Cor. 4:14). Peace is not found in controlling how or when the end comes about, but in the One who is with us always and who promises to receive us into his kingdom with this gracious invitation: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:21).

VII. What do I say/do when my parishioners ask about medically assisted suicide?

- Listen and then listen some more.
- Refrain from the need to give your own thoughts or answers right away.
- Help them explore their own feelings. What underlying fear may be at work?
- Ask about family involvement. Have they shared with family? Is there family pressure?
- Consider access to resources. Discern whether the decision being made is due to lack of financial resources or concern about the cost or burden of care.
- Encourage other options (hospice, palliative care).
- Share Christian perspective—honor the preciousness of life.
- Keep showing up and involve other people from the faith community to provide consistent presence/care.

VIII. After a death by medically assisted suicide has occurred

In many ways, a funeral after MAS will be like any other funeral and its planning. It will require sensitivity to different dynamics at play, attentiveness to how loved ones are processing the loss, and a commitment to pointing people to the hope of glory. Romans 8 makes clear that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God: neither life nor death. When caring for grieving family members or preparing for a funeral for someone who died by MAS, we believe that all the promises of God are still true. We hold on to the promise that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39); that God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy (Ps. 103:8); and that salvation is by grace alone, through faith, and comes to us as a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9). A funeral is not the time to cast judgment on a person who has died by MAS, or on their family. Rather, a funeral is a service intended to help a family give thanks to God for the earthly life of a person, to say goodbye and grieve their death, to commend or entrust a person to God's care, and to turn in hope to the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:54—that, because of Jesus, death has been swallowed up in victory.

With the prevalence of MAS in our culture, some people in your congregation may, despite their beliefs, be involved in caring for people who pursue MAS. Physicians have colleagues to whom they refer patients for MAS in order to avoid the moral conflict of participating in MAS. However, a referral is understood as facilitating or supporting the intended path of care for a patient; abstaining from even such limited participation is advisable. Conscientious objection must be protected and supported in spheres where MAS is legislated and supported. Health-care workers may experience moral injury, the emotional harm that comes from working with people who choose MAS. This harm may present itself as compassion fatigue or as desensitization to the dying process. The Christian community should provide support for persons experiencing moral injury. We should also support family members who disagree with a loved one's decision to pursue MAS and who feel hurt and helpless as they watch their loved one die by lethal means.

IX. Conclusion

Across North America many people can request help from a health-care worker to end their life. As medically assisted suicide is legalized in more jurisdictions, we see the number of deaths by MAS increase. Medically assisted suicide is often framed as a type of tragic yet beautiful choice, as a kind of compassionate protection for people—protection from suffering, pain, or disability. Given the growing availability and endorsement of medically assisted suicide, how should Christians think about this matter biblically, within the medical context, and in support of practical Christian living?

The Christian understanding of life is rooted in the incarnational vision given to us in Scripture and exemplified in Christ: life is a gift by the grace

of God. Made in his image, human beings are bestowed special honor by God, who deeply desires to be close to us. We view our lives and all human life as precious. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Receiving a terminal diagnosis is very difficult; the decisions for care and treatment are individual and challenging. In these difficult moments, we affirm that life is precious, so we should not act to end life. Human dignity and value are enduring and intrinsic. Disease and disability do not diminish our value—and in all stages of our lives, we belong to God and to each other. We ask for help, and we give and receive care as our Lord Jesus has shown us.

Our commitment to honoring the preciousness of life is a communal practice. We commit to love one another. Someone who is suffering remains a temple of the Holy Spirit—that is, someone to care for, to comfort, and to love, not to kill. Just as the Lord ministered to Job, Moses, and Elijah in their despair, uniquely providing for each of their needs when they wished to die, so we should minister to people who have lost the will to live. By our loving presence and caring for their practical needs, we can remind suffering souls of their worth as creatures loved by God, with whom God is *actually*—not metaphorically—present.

Though we do not always understand the purpose of suffering, the Christian response to suffering is love, lament, and liturgy. Our inclination is toward life, and we do not act to end a life intentionally—yet we do not idolize life as if this life is all there is. We do not fear death; we wait for death in hope, trusting that “the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus. . . . Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:14, 16).

X. Recommendations

A. That synod affirm the value of human life as a gift from God, intrinsic and enduring, recognizing that, as Christians, we are to honor and care for all lives—our own and others—especially in suffering and despair.

B. That synod remind CRC members, churches, and classes, in accordance with prior synodical reflections, that the appropriate Christian response to suffering, disability, and/or dying people (and their families) is pastoral, including compassionate palliative care instead of acting to cause death (*Acts of Synod 2000*, pp. 686, 707-8).

C. That synod instruct all CRC members to make every effort to ensure that meeting spaces and programming are accessible so that our churches are prophetic witnesses that disability, disease, and deformity do not diminish the value and dignity of every human (*Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 348-52, 490, 702-3, 825; *Acts of Synod 1993*, pp. 381-405, 539, 542-43; *Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 817).

- D. That synod encourage classes to occasionally provide workshops and training on end-of-life issues such as palliative/hospice care, estate planning, and communicating one's values for care to their health-care proxy.
- E. That synod recommend the list of resources appended to this report as helpful resources for members and leaders navigating suffering and/or the end of life.
- F. That synod encourage pastors and church leadership teams to develop and share with local CRC churches a list of reputable local palliative/hospice-care organizations so that they can better support the members in their community in the dying process.
- G. That synod encourage the churches to provide training and resources to people involved in pastoral care for congregations and communities, such as found in Appendix B of this report.
- H. That synod remind CRC members to give generously of their time, treasure, and talents to work that supports people who are vulnerable and suffering, and to support the work of civil government to provide compassionate care so that those who are suffering and vulnerable do not feel pressured to end their lives.
- I. That synod recommit to engagement with public policy makers in advocating for hospice and palliative care that is readily available for every person in their jurisdiction.
- J. That synod commend to the churches the report of this task force as a faithful response to the reality of medically assisted suicide in our time.

Assisted Suicide Task Force

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Medically Assisted Suicide Today

Opinions on euthanasia in Canada have altered significantly in the past forty years, and this is true within various legal, medical, and other bodies. In 1983 the Law Reform Commission of Canada concluded that neither active euthanasia nor aiding suicide should be legalized, and it recommended retention of the present law (which deemed such actions criminal).¹³ Likewise, in 1995, the Canadian Medical Association (which represents doctors in Canada) issued a summary of its policy, saying that CMA members “should not participate in euthanasia and assisted suicide,” a policy that was withheld as recently as 2014.¹⁴ However, while both of these major institutions rejected euthanasia and assisted suicide, a review of legal bills and media showed a concerted effort to legalize these practices, as well as an increasing push to normalize them through law and public discourse.¹⁵ In public opinion polls, there has also been a gradual shift toward greater acceptance of euthanasia, some of which was informed by negative experiences regarding the quality of care received by loved ones at their death.¹⁶

The shift in Canada was driven by a powerful lobby group called Death with Dignity. Individual patients who wanted a medically assisted death put forward legal challenges, with support from some physicians. There were numerous court cases in various jurisdictions that called for the decriminalization of the killing of terminally ill patients. A landmark decision in Canada involved the case of Sue Rodriguez, a British Columbia woman suffering from ALS, who sought to end her life with the assistance of a physician. This activity was deemed criminal under s. 241(b) of the Criminal Code that prohibited assisting someone to die by suicide. Rodriguez claimed the section was unconstitutional, but this claim was defeated by the court. The September 1993 decision upheld the constitutionality of s. 241(b), and assisted suicide remained a criminal act.¹⁷

While that law was upheld nationally in Canada at that time, various sub-national jurisdictions introduced commissions and eventually laws, which attempted to allow for physicians to end the lives of patients who meet certain criteria. After various commissions and committees studied the issue, the Quebec National Assembly introduced (in June 2013) and passed (in June 2014) Bill 52. Despite the existing criminal prohibitions, the province’s legislation established rights and rules for “end-of-life care,” which included — although not exclusively — “medical aid in dying.” MAiD, under

¹³ canada.ca/content/dam/lcc-cdc/documents/lrcc-reports/J31-40-1983-eng.pdf

¹⁴ consciencelaws.org/archive/documents/cma-cmaj/2014-06-CMA-euthanasia-policy-correct.pdf

¹⁵ publications.gc.ca/Pilot/LoPBdP/CIR/919-e.htm

¹⁶ angusreid.org/assisted-suicide/

¹⁷ publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp349-e.htm

Bill 52, was restricted to those “at the end of life” but required all provincially funded hospitals and nursing homes to provide MAiD and required physicians unwilling to perform MAiD to provide referrals.

This national expansion is also present in Canada where a Supreme Court decision in February 2015 (the Carter decision) unanimously ruled that two sections of the Criminal Code (which applies in all jurisdictions) related to consenting to death (s. 14) and aiding suicide (s. 241(1)(b)) were unconstitutional because they prevented competent adults from being able to die with the assistance of a clinician. The court’s ruling effectively required that physician-assisted death be permitted in some form, and the court gave federal and provincial governments a total of 16 months to determine the legislative and regulatory details.¹⁸ The Carter decision limited its consideration to those suffering intolerably from a “grievous and irremediable medical condition (including an illness, disease, or disability).” The decision explicitly excluded considerations of assisted death for minors, mental illness, and less serious medical issues.¹⁹

In effect, this decision required Parliament to decriminalize, for those administering MAiD, the otherwise criminal limitations that prevent murderers from claiming that their victims consented to dying and that prevent individuals from aiding someone to die by suicide. It is critical to note that the Supreme Court of Canada decision did not recognize a blanket, or basic human, right to euthanasia or MAiD but limited it to the conditions noted above.

Since that time, some restrictions on MAiD have been removed. This has occurred through the Trunchon decision in September 2019, and the subsequent legislation, Bill C-7, which introduced Track 2 MAiD. This new track removed the limit that restricted MAiD to a “reasonably foreseeable natural death” in some situations. People with disabilities and serious medical conditions who are suffering can apply for Track 2 MAiD when their death is not reasonably foreseeable. While the court challenges that paved the way for Track 2 were brought by individuals with disabilities, there has been an outcry from the disabled community²⁰ in Canada and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.²¹ Unfortunately this outcry was diminished by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ensuing health crisis that disproportionately affected disabled people. Track 2 MAiD devalues disabled persons’ lives because it supports and facilitates their suicide—not because their death is reasonably foreseeable but because they have a disability. For a suffering person whose death is not reasonably foreseeable, they will not qualify for MAiD in Canada.

¹⁸ justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/ad-am/scc-csc.html

¹⁹ justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/ad-am/p1.html#fn7 (Carter, supra note 1 at para. 127)

²⁰ For a detailed overview of the response from the disabled community to MAiD, see Catherine Frazee, “MAiD resistance in Canada: Sounding the Five-Minute Entreaty.”

²¹ documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/348/81/pdf/g1934881.pdf (p. 13)

The Canadian federal government is also set to expand MAiD in 2027 to those whose sole condition is mental illness,²² and there are calls for MAiD to be expanded to allow for “mature minors” who are children under the age of 18 to be euthanized.²³

Several American states have passed various forms of physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia, with various levels of restrictions and allowances, including Oregon (1997), Washington (2009), Montana (2009), California (2016), Colorado (2016), New Mexico (2021), Vermont (2013), Maine (2019), Hawaii (2018), and New Jersey (2019). At the time of this writing, there are also other states with pending bills seeking to legalize physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia.

While policy surrounding this issue is worked out at the state level in the United States, a 2022 settlement of a federal lawsuit has effectively removed restrictions that limit physician-assisted suicide to residents of Oregon, and MAS is therefore now accessible to those who are not residents of the state.

In short, the legal, legislative, and policy environment surrounding euthanasia has drastically changed since the synodical study of 2000. In addition, the cultural acceptance of euthanasia has also widened, with one Canadian study showing that “four-in-five” Canadians (80%) now say it should be easier to make their own end-of-life decisions, compared to nearly three-quarters (73%) in 2016. This is in comparison to one in five who say there should be greater restrictions to doctor-assisted dying procedures.²⁴ This relatively strong support is also mirrored in American society.²⁵

The theoretical support for euthanasia changes significantly, however, when it is described in greater detail,²⁶ when it applies to persons with mental illness, or when it is understood as a replacement for palliative care or for greater investment in health care.²⁷ It is notable that “62% of Canadians attach a lot of importance to the possibility that the public health-care system will begin to ignore long-term care and chronic disease in elderly people as MAiD becomes more available.”²⁸ Canadians were also deeply concerned that MAiD would deprioritize, or even replace, funding for palliative care and other medical investments.²⁹

These concerns appear to be legitimate, as government authorities have studied and found significant cost savings to the medical system as a result

²² justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/ad-am/bk-di.html

²³ dyingwithdignity.ca/advocacy/mature-minors/#:~:text=Canada's%20law%20on%20medical%20assistance,or%20refuse%20lifesaving%20medical%20treatment

²⁴ angusreid.org/social-values-canada/

²⁵ news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx

²⁶ ropercenter.cornell.edu/polling-choices-end-life

²⁷ cardus.ca/research/health/reports/broad-support-for-maid-in-canada-has-caveats-and-concerns/

²⁸ cardus.ca/research/health/reports/broad-support-for-maid-in-canada-has-caveats-and-concerns/

²⁹ *Ibid.*

of the expansion of MAiD, and there are already calls for MAiD expansion to relieve the burden of care for elderly, disabled, and other suffering people.³⁰

In Canada, MAiD has quickly risen to become the fourth leading cause of death,³¹ and the trend in the proportion of MAiD requests considered ineligible continues to drop, year over year. In 2019, Health Canada reported 8 percent of requests were found ineligible,³² dropping to 4.1 percent in 2021 and just 3.5 percent in 2022.³³ While some might point to the fact that California (a state whose population is almost the same as Canada's), where restrictions on who is eligible for euthanasia are stricter and which has one-tenth the death rate by euthanasia of Canada,³⁴ suggests that it is possible to "manage" these deaths, advocates consider Canada's permissive regime to be ideal.³⁵

Our current context is very different from the context at the turn of the century. With some difference in eligibility and process in Canada and in some U.S. states, a medically assisted suicide is accessible to nearly all people in Canada and the U.S. In Canada, MAiD is not limited to a reasonably foreseeable death, people with disabilities can access a medically assisted suicide, and people are choosing to end their lives with the help of physicians at a shocking rate. Further, public attitude and dialogue have accepted medically assisted suicide as an understandable and acceptable choice.

APPENDIX B

Pastoral Care and the Dying Process: Bible Verses, Hymns, and Prayers for Visiting

Note: We have developed this appendix as a tool to equip lay leaders and persons who have limited experienced with pastoral care at the end of life. Pastoral care is the practical outpouring of our theological commitment to the preciousness of life, the acknowledgement that life can be very difficult and that lament and compassionate action are the correct responses to the difficulties of life. Our dream is that all churches may be filled with skilled pastoral caregivers who accompany and strengthen those who are suffering

³⁰ "Cost Estimate for Bill C-7 'Medical Assistance in Dying,'" Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, October 20, 2020; pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/RP-2021-025-M/RP-2021-025-M_en.pdf.

³¹ canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/annual-report-medical-assistance-dying-2022.html

³² *Ibid.*

³³ cardus.ca/in-the-news/media-coverage/skyrocketing-maid-deaths-must-prompt-urgent-reassessment/

³⁴ tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15265161.2023.2201190

³⁵ See deathwithdignity.org/about, which states, "Our goal is to ensure people with terminal illness can *decide for themselves what a good death means* in accordance with their values and beliefs."

and dying. We suggest adding a list of hospices and grief and patient support groups that are available in your community context.

Introduction

When people experience suffering, they usually don't need more answers or dogma. *They need people* who can be present with them in their distress. They need people who can hear their questions without becoming anxious. They need brothers and sisters in Christ who can help them “find strength in God” (1 Sam. 23:16). As pastors and leaders in the church, we have the opportunity to walk with people in matters of life and death. Pastoral care is about the power of presence, perseverance in suffering, the protection of life, and the promise of the gospel (see section VI of this report).

As spiritual caregivers, we have the remarkable privilege of walking with people through many seasons of life. This includes the end of earthly life. God calls us to carry each other's burdens and invites us to make Christ's presence known through our presence with people. This is a joyful and holy calling, but it can be painful and difficult at times. Words may fail, and we may struggle to know what to do in response to a person's suffering. As spiritual caregivers, we may hear people speak of their desire to die, a desire that is especially common among the elderly and persons who are suffering. We cannot, however, support the taking of life.

People in your congregation may choose not to share their medical conditions with you, so it may be difficult to figure out how to be helpful. If you visit often, they may be more willing to take you into their confidence. You could ask, however, “Given what you know now, when you think about the future, what matters to you? What is most important for us to focus on?” People may have goals of attending weddings or graduations, saying final goodbyes to certain family members, asking for or offering forgiveness, reaching milestone birthdays or anniversaries. Some people just want to revisit an old family farm, or to go to see a lake one last time. Your congregation may be able to facilitate reaching some of those goals. People who are dying often wish to feel closure about various aspects of their lives. If you have developed a close relationship with the person, you may try exploring some of these thoughts with them.

Understanding the dying process

Sometimes death comes abruptly. However, in many cases death is a slow process. It is helpful for elders, deacons, and other visitors to understand the dying process. Common symptoms at the end of life may include pain, nausea/vomiting, difficulties with bowel and bladder function, fatigue, shortness of breath, reduced appetite, depression/anxiety, reduced cognitive function, and/or changing abilities to take in food or water. Health-care workers care for such symptoms by using devices (feeding tube, IV-line, bladder catheter) and medications (pain reliever, antinauseant, laxative, antidepressant) to optimize function and to relieve suffering. These tools may

come with side effects and secondary outcomes that may or may not be desired. There are a series of decisions to be made in this process. It is important to ask questions and to fully understand the treatment and symptom management options, especially as some interventions (like a long-term feeding tube) can prolong life significantly when that may not be helpful or desirable.

At a certain point, providing further nourishment or hydration to a body that is dying is no longer fruitful, so an IV-line or feeding tube can be discontinued. Medications that have been taken for long-term prevention or for the management of a chronic illness can be stopped. When someone can no longer swallow, medications are often administered directly under the skin (subcutaneously) or as a suppository. Decisions to refuse treatment are difficult—often more difficult for family members and caring community members than for the patient. Open and clear communication is important.

Where pain figures prominently, various medications can be used. After optimizing the environment (positioning, pillows, temperature, noise, lighting, etc.), medications targeting the type of pain experienced should be offered (nerve pain, bone pain, joint pain, organ pain). Narcotic pain relievers work by blocking pain signals from the body's receptors. When used carefully, narcotics are very helpful to relieve pain—but may have side effects such as nausea, sedation, or constipation. If one becomes anxious or agitated, a sedative can be helpful.

As a person dies, their organs gradually shut down. The process can occur rapidly over minutes or hours, or it can take days—even weeks. There are periods of reduced consciousness when there may be little to no responsiveness to external stimuli. Often there are also “rally” periods in which an individual may seem to improve or even partially recover. Loved ones can use such times for making meaningful connections. As this time of “twilight” progresses, limbs may become cool, swollen, and “mottled.” Breathing can speed up, then slow, with longer pauses between breaths. An individual may reach out as if to connect with someone or something. Maintaining physical presence and speaking to the person dying are encouraged because a person's sense of hearing often remains intact until the end. Singing or reading of Scripture can be particularly comforting. Death is confirmed when a health-care worker determines that breathing and a heart-beat are no longer present.

Suggestions for visiting aging, terminally ill, and critically injured persons

- Check in on and tend to your own feelings prior to the visit so that you can be a nonanxious presence during your visit.
- Prepare to share a couple of Scriptures ahead of time that may fit for the particular situation. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you in sharing those Scriptures appropriately, and don't be driven by your own agenda.

- Be respectful of the person's bed or chair; they are an extension of the person's personal space. Be mindful that they have lost control of most aspects of their lives and long to control some small things. If possible, sit in a chair that will bring your eye level below theirs; this gives them a feeling of more control.
- If you know your visit must be short, sit down briefly if you can, because the visit is likely to feel longer that way.
- Acknowledge the person's fears, pain, or uncertainty and offer your presence with them in it. A person's pain is what they say it is, so do not try to diminish their experience.
- Listen attentively and without judgment. We often feel the need to comment or give advice; staying silent requires self-discipline. If you feel that you need to comment, words such as "That must be so difficult" or "I wish I could make it all go away" might be helpful responses.
- Consider whether the person is able to communicate their wishes.
- If you pray with them, name their fears/laments in prayer, reminding them that they can bring all things to God in prayer, including their desire to die and for their suffering to end. Remember that when you pray, you are modeling how they and their supporters can pray.
- If family members are present while you visit, invite them to join you in praying, singing, or reading Scripture. Acknowledge their concerns. A comment that may elicit discussion: "It's really hard to hear your loved one talk about dying, isn't it?" Sometimes a family member may use your visit as an opportunity for respite, which can also be a gift/encouragement to them. Don't be offended if they leave the room for a break.
- When the visit draws to a close, ask if there is anything the person needs. Sometimes moving some dirty dishes out of sight or getting a book from across the room can be a great help. Little courtesies, such as leaving the door ajar to their liking, show your care.
- Commit to continuing to walk with the person on regular visits, and follow through on that promise. If you are unable to provide regular visits, consider connecting the person with another church member who is able to show up on a regular basis. It may be helpful for both you and the other visitor to meet together with the person a time or two during the transition.
- Remember that your visit is confidential. Be careful not to share with others any personal details about your visit.
- Don't overstay your welcome. People may want to please you by maintaining a welcome posture, but they may tire easily and need to rest.

Helpful Scriptures to use when visiting someone who is suffering

Deuteronomy 31:8	Psalms 91	2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Deuteronomy 33:27	Psalms 116:1-7	2 Corinthians 4:7-11
Joshua 1:8-9	Psalms 121	2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Job 19:23-27	Isaiah 40:31	Philippians 1:19-29
Psalms 34:18	Isaiah 41:8-10	Hebrews 6:19
Psalms 56:3-8	Isaiah 43:1-3	Hebrews 10:22-23
Psalms 57:1	Matthew 5:4	Hebrews 12:1-3
Psalms 61:1-2	Matthew 11:28-30	James 1:2-4
Psalms 62:1-6	John 14:26-27	1 Peter 5:6-10:6
Psalms 70:5	Romans 5:1-5	Revelation 21:1-4
Psalms 73:23-26	Romans 8:37-39	
Psalms 90	1 Corinthians 15: 51-58	

Hymns

Hymns bring spiritual encouragement. Their lyrics and the melody call us to faith and can connect us to the worshipping body when we cannot attend worship services. When words fail, sing a song or simply play the music. The songs below are some options that may be appropriate.

Be Still, My Soul
By the Sea of Crystal
Children of the Heavenly Father
For All the Saints
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
He Leadeth Me
How Firm a Foundation
In Christ Alone
I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew
Nearer, Still Nearer
Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow
Precious Lord, Take My Hand
The Lord's My Shepherd
When Peace like a River

APPENDIX C

Information about Making Health-Care Decisions

Who Decides?

At present, state governments in the United States and provincial governments in Canada generally allow only an individual person, whether directly or by proxy when the individual lacks capacity, to make nearly all end-of-life decisions.

There are exceptions, of course. Parents are legally designated to make such decisions for minor children. And adults are granted the legal right to name

proxies to make decisions for them when they are incapacitated. Where no proxies have been designated (or no designated proxy is willing and able), most various governments have passed differing laws that designate which relatives (in what priority) can make the decisions. And finally, when an individual has made no proxy designations and there is no willing/able family member, the court can appoint a guardian (who is really an agent of the government) to make decisions.

Special note should be made that, at present, at least, and in most if not all jurisdictions, the right to request medically assisted death (or “death with dignity”) must be made by the individual while competent and cannot be made by a proxy. The laws on this issue may change in the future.

How Are Decisions Made?

As indicated above, in all U.S. states and Canadian provinces, a competent adult is the presumed decision maker as to his/her own health (medical) care, whether those questions involve end-of-life issues or otherwise, and a parent is presumed the decision maker as to his/her minor child’s health (medical) care, although there is a growing list of exceptions to that rule (e.g., abortion, gender-change surgery, etc., where some jurisdictions allow minors to make decisions without consent or even their parents’ knowledge).

However, the specific means by which an adult designates a proxy to make such decisions for them varies by state and province.

In some U.S. states, the legislature has created specific written forms for use to name a proxy. In other U.S. states, the legislatures have allowed for the designations of proxies but have not provided any particular form for doing so, leaving it up to individuals (or attorneys or some internet site) to provide the form. And yet in other U.S. states, the designation of a proxy can also be verbal (not a method to be advised). In Canadian provinces, the governments publish forms as resources but generally do not require the use of those forms.

There is also the matter of terminology. Depending on the state/province, the phrase “health-care proxy” may be replaced by “health-care representative” or “health-care decision maker” or “holder of a health-care power of attorney” or some other phrase, like “attorney for personal care.”

The name of the document used to appoint a proxy also may differ according to the state or province. Names used include “advance directive” (perhaps the most common), “power of attorney for health care,” “medical power of attorney,” and “powers of attorney for personal care.”

There is also a document called a Physician’s Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST), usually used as one’s end of life is imminent (beyond just a possibility). Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders are often part of the POLST provisions.

It is important to note that a “general power of attorney” (sometimes called a “financial power of attorney” or “continuing power of attorney for property”) is usually not regarded as a document that gives medical proxy authority, even if the language used in such a document may seem to be an all-inclusive grant of power from the person signing the document to the person being granted the power. It is typical that medical/health making power must be granted by a document that only deals with medical/health matters. Certainly that would be the case in those jurisdictions that pre-scribe the specific form to be used to designate medical/health proxies.

Use of Advanced Requests in Medically Assisted Deaths in Canada

In Canada the legal framework for the use of advanced requests in medical assistance in dying (MAiD) is continually evolving. Some provinces are taking steps to implement these requests under specific conditions. Advanced requests allow individuals to outline their wishes for MAiD in the event they lose the capacity to consent at the time of administration, which is the current federal standard.

Canada’s federal MAiD law, amended in March 2021, allows for two main pathways:

1. For those whose natural death is reasonably foreseeable, a simplified process applies.
2. For those whose death is not foreseeable, additional safeguards are required.

However, at present, the federal law does not explicitly permit advanced requests for MAiD except under Quebec's new regulations or in specific, provincially legislated cases. Most provinces, such as British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta, continue to follow the federal guidelines, which do not yet encompass advanced requests. However, those provinces are closely monitoring Quebec’s framework and the broader national dialogue on the issue.

Quebec is the first Canadian jurisdiction to allow for the use of advanced requests for MAiD. An advance request for MAiD is different from an advance medical directive. Advance medical directives allow individuals to state what medical care they would accept or refuse in specific situations if they become incapable, but those directives do not cover MAiD. In order to utilize an advanced request, the person must have a serious and incurable illness that will lead to incapacity to consent to care. At the time of the request, the individual must be of full age and capable of giving consent to care, meaning they understand their medical situation and can clearly communicate their wishes. The request must be made freely, without external pressure, and must be fully informed.

The individual must consult with a physician or specialized nurse practitioner to obtain the advance request form, which is available only through these professionals. While not mandatory, individuals may designate one or two trusted persons to ensure that their wishes are known and respected

when they become incapable of consenting. The request must detail specific clinical manifestations associated with the illness. These manifestations will serve as indicators for when MAiD should be administered after the individual loses capacity. The completed request must be signed in the presence of the physician or specialized nurse practitioner, two witnesses (unless made by notarial act), and any designated trusted third persons. The advance request must be recorded in a legally provided register by the physician, specialized nurse practitioner, or notary. Only the registered request is considered valid.

An individual who remains capable of consenting to care can also withdraw or modify their advance request at any time by consulting with a physician or specialized nurse practitioner, who will ensure that the changes are properly documented and updated in the register.

For MAiD to be administered on the basis of an advance request, several conditions must be met, including the following:

- The individual must exhibit, on a recurring basis, the clinical manifestations related to their illness as described in their request.
- They must be in a state of advanced, irreversible decline in capability.
- A competent professional must determine that the individual is experiencing enduring and unbearable physical or psychological suffering that cannot be relieved under conditions considered tolerable.
- A second independent physician or specialized nurse practitioner must also confirm that all criteria are met.

VIRTUAL CHURCH TASK FORCE

I. Background and mandate

Remember what it was like in March 2020? Church leaders in the CRCNA and around the world scrambled to discern how they might continue ministry “online” as the COVID-19 pandemic began to force churches to close their doors for in-person gatherings. Many congregations faced questions they had not had to consider before:

- Can we update our website and livestream our worship services?
- Can we post prerecorded sermons on our church websites, Facebook, or YouTube?

Dave Adamson might be correct as he writes, “COVID-19 lockdowns didn’t start the online church—they just forced it to go mainstream.”¹ Whatever the case, the pandemic ushered in a new reality for nearly all congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

As a result, important questions emerged within the CRCNA about the opportunities, pitfalls, scope, and limitations of online ministry and the concept of a “virtual church” or “digital church.”² Various leaders began wondering about questions like this: Temporarily streaming services is one thing, but does a continued, online-only presence of “church” fit within the parameters of our confessions and polity as a denomination?

Seeing the ministry opportunities that virtual church planting might open up and sensing the call of God to virtual church planting, Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ontario, with the support of Classis Ontario Southwest and in partnership with Resonate Global Mission, began in 2022 to plant “Redeemer Online,” led by Rev. Corey Van Huizen (see redeemeronline.church).

Questions emerged within Classis Ontario Southwest. These questions also came to Synod 2023 by way of an overture sent by the council of Wyoming (Ont.) CRC. Among its three recommendations, the Wyoming CRC council asked synod “to declare that a ‘virtual church’ (i.e., a ‘church’ which by design ‘meets’ only online) is not a church” on the ground that “a ‘virtual church’ does not meet the biblical and confessional criteria for a church in the areas of worship, pastoral care, fellowship, and the sacraments” (Overture 13, *Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 400).

In response, Synod 2023 instructed “the Office of General Secretary to oversee the creation of a report that gives thought to and a theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church: ‘A church

¹ Dave Adamson, *MetaChurch: How to Use Digital Ministry to Reach People and Make Disciples* (Cumming, Ga.: Orange, 2022), p. 3.

² As the task force engaged in its work, it became apparent that “digital church” is a more commonly used term than “virtual church” to describe churches that, by design, meet only online. For the sake of consistency with preceding CRCNA discussions on this matter, however, we will continue using the term “virtual church” in this report.

which, by design, meets only online” —and the report would need to meet the following guidelines:

- a. This report will require input from (at least) a faculty or staff member of Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, and Thrive.
- 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 for each.
- d. This report should be presented to the COD for discernment.

(Acts of Synod 2023, pp. 979-80)

Synod’s response became the mandate for the Virtual Church Task Force, which began meeting in the fall of 2023. The task force submitted a progress report to the COD in February 2024, and the COD approved a recommendation to expand the team’s mandate to “address the important theological, missiological, pastoral, and polity implications of a virtual church” (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 29-30). The COD also expanded the membership of the task force, which now includes the following persons: Rev. Ben Gresik (chair), Rev. Jerry An (ReFrame Ministries staff), Rev. Young-Kwang Kim, Rev. Zachary King (ex officio), Elizabeth Koning, Rev. Steve Kooy, Dr. Derek Schuurman (Calvin University faculty member), Rev. Timothy Sheridan (Resonate Global Mission staff member and reporter), and Melody Van Arragon (recorder).³

II. Introduction to the topic

Reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic, James Emery White makes clear that many Christian leaders in North America now see the pandemic as an “accelerator.” In other words, the pandemic accelerated realities that were already present. He writes, “The pandemic accelerated and widened the effect of two profound cultural changes that hold enormous import for the life and mission of the church: the new reality of a post-Christian world and the digital revolution.”⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic forced all of us “online” in a way that we had not experienced before and accelerated the digital revolution already under way in the world.

As our task force began its work, it increasingly became clear that there were many questions to consider as we explored and discussed our mandate. What opportunities might ministry online open up for us and our mission? What have we already seen God do through the pandemic and

³ A staff member of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (a joint ministry of both Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary) provided consultation for this project as well.

⁴ James Emery White, *Hybrid Church: Rethinking the Church for a Post-Christian Digital Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2023), pp. 4-5.

our efforts to continue ministry online? What might we lose if ministry online is not matched with in-person, face-to-face community?

Our task force had the opportunity to hear firsthand stories from three practitioners within the CRCNA who are engaging with high intentionality in various forms of digital ministry. We were encouraged by these innovative ministries emerging within the CRCNA, and our conversations helped give shape to our discussions by grounding them in the lived experiences of CRCNA ministries.

We heard how God is drawing people to Christ through the ministries of Redeemer Online Church and its efforts to reach lost and unchurched people through its digital content. We heard about the intentional steps Redeemer Online is taking to lead people from being passive consumers of digital content into discipleship relationships and in-person connections with other followers of Jesus in their contexts.

We heard how God has established and grown Living Hope Community Church in Ajax, Ontario, a church planted during the pandemic that began doing all of its ministry online (livinghopecommunity.ca). Living Hope has also begun in-person worship gatherings but continues to offer most of its ministry programs online through digital content and media.

We also heard how Reclaim-App is using digital ministry to connect with people outside the church with its ministries that seek to offer safe spaces of calm and connection with God, with neighbors, and with self (see podcasts at reclaim-app.buzzsprout.com).⁵ Reclaim-App has created digital opportunities for weekly practices that integrate Christian spirituality, holistic wellness, prayer, and conversation. And these have led to ongoing discipleship opportunities with people who want to explore the Christian faith.

III. Discussion of the topic

A. Key terms and scope

It is important to bring some definition to the following key terms we have been using here:

- **church:** the gathering of God's people for the purpose of the worship of God, discipleship, formation, and mission
- **virtual/digital church:** "a church which, by design, meets only online." Our research has revealed that "digital church" is a preferred term because "virtual church" is increasingly being used to describe churches that exist in worlds created by virtual-reality technologies.
- **hybrid church:** a mix of online and in-person opportunities for worship, discipleship, formation, and mission
- **livestream worship:** in-person worship that is shared online in real time (often as part of hybrid church)

⁵ See "Reaching Seekers Online" by Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission (Aug. 30, 2023); crcna.org/news-and-events/news/reaching-seekers-online.

- **ministry, ministries:** the way or ways in which the body of believers lives out its call of discipleship, formation, and mission

The scope of our report is limited by our synodical mandate. Synod 2024 reiterated the limited scope of this report when it adopted the following two recommendations:

That synod note that the mandate of the “Report on Virtual Churches” is limited to virtual churches and not online permutations of traditional in-person churches.

That synod encourage the Virtual Church Team to highlight the portions of their work related to online portions of traditional in-person churches or hybrid churches. *(Acts of Synod 2024, p. 903)*

B. The marks of the true church as articulated in the Belgic Confession

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession outlines the marks of the true church when it declares the following:

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults.

Our task force discussed the implications of this article for virtual churches; we also interviewed church planters Corey Van Huizen (Redeemer Online Church) and Mark Jallim (Living Hope Community Church), digital church practitioner and advocate Jeff Reed, and Calvin Theological Seminary professors Mary Vanden Berg, Ron Feenstra, and Lyle Bierma. We concluded the following:

Pure preaching of the gospel is something that can be done by virtual churches, under the supervision and oversight of ordained officebearers, as is done in physical churches.

Pure administration of the sacraments seems to be more complex. On the one hand, nobody we interviewed had any theological reasons to believe that online administration of the sacraments is impossible. On the other hand, there are important considerations to keep in mind:

- The elements administered should be real, tangible elements and not virtual representations of the elements.
- Of the two sacraments in the CRCNA, the administration of the Lord’s Supper in public worship has proven to be the easier to adapt to the virtual church setting. We continue to commend to the churches the wisdom offered by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in its important article on church polity and online sacraments.⁶ This article is a call to continue to reflect on our theology of the sacraments in our public worship services.

⁶ See “Church Polity and Online Sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church” by Kathy Smith (Mar. 7, 2020); worship.calvin.edu/resources/articles/church-polity-and-online-sacraments-christian-reformed-church.

- The administration of baptism in virtual settings is less well explored. The matter of “pure administration” has conventionally been understood to refer to the use of approved liturgical forms and theological teaching and the authorization of the presiding officebearers. In-person administration by an ordained pastor or elder who shares it virtually could help ensure that these characteristics of pure administration are carried out.

The practice of church discipline seems to be fraught with additional challenges and dynamics that many experience in physical, in-person churches. It was noted by our task force that many congregations in the CRCNA already struggle with this practice, given the limited time in which members engage with each other and the changing dynamics around congregational engagement. Our task force sensed that virtual churches would face additional challenges in the practice of church discipline, perhaps most notably with regard to the ability in digital spaces to curate and project an image of oneself that may or may not resemble one’s embodied self. One practitioner suggested that his experience has demonstrated a higher intentionality and increased opportunity for practicing discipline than he originally anticipated through the virtual church connections he is forming.

On the whole, our task force agreed that it is not impossible for a virtual church to embody the three marks of a true church, as outlined in the Belgic Confession. However, it is critical that virtual churches be very intentional in explaining how they will administer sacraments in good order and how they will engage church discipline, given the challenges we have noted.

C. Additional reflections on the teachings of the Belgic Confession

Article 27 defines the holy catholic church as “a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” This church “is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.”

This article seems to imply that the invisible church is spread and dispersed throughout the world in the forms of individual Christians and visible local congregations. Can this also apply to a virtual church of Christians gathering online for worship, discipleship, and fellowship?

Article 28 calls believers “not to withdraw from [this church], content to be by themselves, regardless of their status or condition” but dutifully “to join this assembly wherever God has established it.”

Might this admonition not to withdraw apply to someone who is unable to participate in a physical church but can join a virtual church that gathers online?

Moreover, when considering the phrase “wherever God has established it,” how might we interpret God's establishment of a church in a digital age? Might there be room to consider digital platforms as spaces where God can gather his people?

D. Theological perspectives

As our task force met, we began to identify theological questions and implications for a virtual church. According to our mandate, we engaged faculty members of Calvin Theological Seminary with our questions. During our interviews with three CTS faculty members, we discovered four things important to note.

First, while some members of our task force initially wondered how the doctrine of the incarnation might have implications for virtual churches, we learned that from a theological perspective there really is not a 1:1 relationship between Jesus' incarnation and the shape of the church, so theorizing about implications of the incarnation for virtual churches could seem like a theological stretch. As Ron Feenstra pointed out, even people in front of their screens participating in a virtual church are physically embodied as they do so.

While we appreciate this kind of concern for theological precision, our task force noted that the incarnation of Jesus is an "extraordinary endorsement" of embodied human existence and community.⁷ Moreover, as is practiced in missiological conversations, the incarnation of Jesus is a powerful invitation to an embodied presence in our local communities as we follow Jesus on mission.

Second, all agreed that virtual churches offer a missional opportunity to reach people with the gospel who may not, for various reasons, have access to a physical, in-person gathering of Christians in their community.

Third, while at times we wondered as a task force if virtual churches might promote a modern form of Gnosticism, we learned that there are no theological reasons to believe that virtual churches are inherently Gnostic or would necessarily lead to a modern form of Gnosticism. We recommend that, wherever possible, people meet in virtual spaces that allow for real names, real voices, and real images of the participants rather than the use of completely virtual avatars or "handles" that may be completely different from reality. We also note the need to be on guard against any tendency towards neo-Gnosticism in virtual worlds.

Fourth, from a theological perspective, all of the faculty we interviewed indicated, in varying degrees, that while virtual church may not be the ideal way in which the body of Christ *ordinarily* gathers for worship, formation, and mission, there are no confessional or theological reasons to declare that this way of gathering as a church is not a church.

E. Insights from a media studies perspective

Our task force had the opportunity as well to consider the expertise of and research done in the area of media studies by Quentin Schultze. The following is a summary of some helpful wisdom we gleaned from this interaction.

⁷ See Craig M. Gay, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Academic, 2018), p. 176.

The church has been disrupted by significant shifts and developments in technology in the past, and it is important to recognize this historical reality so that we approach the advances of our digital age well. For example, the development of print technology in the 16th century and the development of the automobile in the 20th century had massive implications on the church and its ministry. There is a tendency during such times for both utopian and dystopian responses. We need to be careful not to fall into either one of these reactionary tendencies.

The digitization of media is both bringing people together in new ways and pushing people farther apart—at the same time. It is important to discern the impact that this push-and-pull dynamic might have on our ministry efforts. In today's consumerist society, digital tools, while offering connection, can accelerate the trend toward echo chambers and polarization. While they can help bring together people who otherwise could not meet, they can also cater to individual preferences, leading to fragmented communities. This reality clashes with the church's fundamental value of God gathering his diverse community, encompassing all ages and experiences, through his Son, Jesus Christ, in and by his Spirit. It is important to discern the impact that this push-and-pull dynamic might have on our ministry efforts.

Different technologies offer help for different applications. Media studies would encourage the church to think about the specific technology it is using, what the purpose of that technology is, and what the potential consequences of using the technology might be. In essence, all media platforms are value-laden and include biases that will inevitably shape the participation and experience of the users. Churches should consider that online meeting platforms that were designed for business, academic, or entertainment purposes may not necessarily serve the church well.

There is wisdom in learning to discern the function that is needed for ministry settings and to find the media technology that can best fit that function. We note John's words in 2 John 12: "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face. . . ."

In times of technological disruption, experimentation is essential. There are not necessarily good or clear answers for many of the questions we might ask. However, leaving space for experimentation and learning to evaluate those experiments with ministry rubrics that help ministry leaders reflect on and evaluate ministry experimentation in the digital world can be invaluable for growth in wisdom and learning. We would continue to commend Quentin Schultze's work on the kinds of questions we should be asking.⁸ Ministry leaders should be aware that experimentation comes with risks of problems and failure, so it should be done with caution and high intentionality.

⁸ See "Lost in the Digital Cosmos: Trying to Ask the Right Questions" by Quentin Schultze (Feb. 16, 2000) at christiancentury.org/article/lost-in-the-digital-cosmos.

F. Insights from a neuropsychology perspective

Our task force also had the opportunity to interview noted neuropsychologist Warren Brown and to hear of his emergent research on cognition and neuropsychology. The following is a summary of some of the wisdom gleaned and significant concerns raised through this conversation.

There are real limitations placed on our experience of community if our experience of church takes place solely through digital media. It is difficult to experience the reality of being an integrated and relationally connected body through online interactions. Without physical, bodily interaction, an important element of the human experience of relational community is missing.

It is difficult for online communities to serve as a full expression of the shared life of the kingdom of God in their local context, something that seems vital to the church's mission in the world. Without an embodied community in a shared physical space, important elements of this vocation are difficult to experience.

Studies are indicating that online spaces present real limitations on some basic human functions such as empathy, emotional regulation and expression, the imitation and modeling of Christian behavior, the building of mutual trust, and the expression of appropriate care. The experience of a virtual church will likely be that there is a much lower ceiling for these kinds of activities and interactions than an in-person church gathered in a shared physical space. Discernment and wisdom are needed to acknowledge this limitation.

G. Insights from some CRCNA practitioners' perspectives

As a task force, we had opportunities to interact with three different CRCNA practitioners engaged in virtual church ministry right now, and all of these practitioners are connected to and supported by Resonate Global Mission. Two are planting churches, and the third is building community through online and digital engagement. The following paragraphs share insights and wisdom we gleaned from these conversations.

It is clear that there are some people who can access an experience of Christian community online through digital media who may not want to or may not be able to do otherwise. This population can include (1) people who are spiritually far from the church and unlikely to enter a physical church building; (2) people who have had a negative, harmful experience with Christianity or the church; (3) younger generations who are natively online and spend a lot of time online; (4) persons with disabilities; and (5) people who are in contexts where they face persecution and the threat of violence if they associate with a Christian community or gather in-person.

It is clear that important missional opportunities are being discovered and explored by engaging with people online through digital media. Some examples we heard about include the following:

- Digital media increases the capacity to reach beyond a particular people group/community/geographical location.
- Digital media tends to reach people who would not/could not attend a conventional church.
- Digital media can help people experience faith in a new setting and in a new way.

It is also clear that some real pitfalls and challenges are being experienced and navigated. Among those mentioned are the following:

- Digital media and online engagement can generate passive consumers of content.
- It can be challenging to have high intentionality in follow-through engagement with people who use digital media and online content.
- It can be challenging to develop care and “one another” interactions in online spaces.
- It can be challenging to engage in discipleship and discipline with people who are physically distributed in many places but engage together through digital and online media.

For ministry practitioners discerning how to engage in digital media and online community in a way that leans into some of these opportunities and seeks to bridge some of these challenges, the following insights may be helpful:

- Design content that is aimed at people who are disconnected, disaffiliated, and unlikely to attend physical, in-person churches.
- Offer people opportunities to indicate that they want more engagement, and be sure to follow up with them in a timely fashion (for example, invite them to “subscribe” to some of your online content).
- Offer possibilities like email lists, comments, responses, and/or giving opportunities as next steps beyond subscribing/following that indicate a desire for more engagement.
- Consider inviting people who are engaging to join with you in one-on-one discipleship conversations. One practitioner does this to engage in spiritual coaching and in gospel-centered discipleship, depending on the interest level of the person being engaged.
- Practitioners spoke of the surprising capacity of text and video calls within which genuine pastoral care can happen and be experienced.
- Encourage people who engage deeply to find a way to connect with others and to consider gathering in-person with other Christ followers in their context.

IV. Summary of conclusions

As we reflect on the interviews we conducted, the reading we did, and the discussions and discernment we engaged in as a task force, we want to summarize our conclusions.

Blessings, opportunities, and challenges

It is clear that there are blessings and opportunities emerging for ministry leaders who are engaging with virtual church ministry. New groups of people are being reached with the gospel who are not being reached through physical, in-person churches. Content is being developed by CRCNA practitioners that aims to contextualize the gospel and Christian faith for digital media and for online contexts. We have much to learn from people who are on this missional edge in our denomination. Disciples are being formed, and even the beginnings of new communities of Christ-followers are emerging through intentional efforts to use digital media in the formation of online communities. For these and many others, we give thanks.

There are challenges and limits to virtual churches. Some important aspects of human functioning and some elements of relational communities are hindered by experiences that are exclusively online. Some core elements of church experience, like the practice of mutual care and discipline, are difficult to experience through online communities. Many questions do not have clear answers at this point as the church continues to navigate the massive disruptions and changes brought on by the acceleration of the digital revolution. We are very much still living in the midst of quickening developments. Questions about the advancements of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and the experience of the metaverse and virtual reality are just some of the emergent realities that are raising numerous questions.

V. Recommendations to Synod 2025

In light of our findings and the summary of our conclusions, we offer the following recommendations to Synod 2025.

- A. That synod acknowledge that while churches “preferably” gather in person for worship, fellowship, and mission, there should be room for intentional and ongoing experimentation within the CRCNA for digital ministry, including the planting of virtual churches.⁹
- B. That synod further encourage classes and calling churches to pray for, partner with, and offer intentional support for church planters who are navigating the unique challenges of digital ministry.
- C. That synod encourage classes and emerging church plants within the CRCNA that are experimenting with digital ministry and virtual churches to network with each other for shared learning and discernment.
- D. That synod direct the office of General Secretary to work with denominational agencies to be a resource to classes and churches that are considering how best to support virtual churches and virtual-church planting. This would include, but not be limited to, helping these classes and/or churches network with others in our denomination who are also experimenting.

⁹ It is important to note that virtual churches would fall under the Church Order rules for emerging churches and would require the supervision of a local church council, as outlined in *The Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* regarding Church Order Article 38.

E. That synod encourage virtual-church plants, along with their parent church(es), to provide a clear ministry plan to their classis, including especially how they plan to fulfill the marks of the true church in their context.

F. That synod declare the mandate of the Virtual Church Task Force fulfilled and dismiss the members with thanks.

Virtual Church Task Force

Rev. Ben Gresik (chair)

Rev. Jerry An (ReFrame Ministries staff)

Rev. Young-Kwang Kim

Rev. Zachary King (ex officio)

Elizabeth Koning

Rev. Steve Kooy

Dr. Derek Schuurman (Calvin University faculty member)

Rev. Timothy Sheridan (Resonate Global Mission staff member, reporter)

Melody Van Arragon (recorder)

TEAM TO CLARIFY DISTINCTIONS

Team to Clarify Distinctions in Synodical Pronouncements, Decisions, Reports, Positions, and Advice

I. Background and mandate

In 2021, Classis Chatham (now Classis Ontario Southwest) overtured synod to “clarify the distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice and the extent to which they bind the churches” (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 350-51). Due to COVID-19 pandemic delays and a lack of time at Synods 2022 and 2023, action on this overture was deferred until Synod 2024 (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 401-2). Synod 2024 adopted the following response:

1. That synod appoint a small group to report to Synod 2025 to clarify the distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice and the nature and extent to which each is “settled and binding” on members, officebearers, and churches.

Grounds:

- a. Interpretations made with respect to the extent to which the “pastoral advice” set forth in the 1973 report on homosexuality is binding have led to turmoil and questions about the actual status of such advice.
 - b. In 1995, Overture 2 from Classis Wisconsin asked for clarification of the meaning of the phrase “settled and binding.” Synod 1995 defeated the majority report’s recommendation on what the phrase means but did not further respond to Overture 2’s request for clarification (*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 749-751, 753).
 - c. The statements adopted by Synod 1975 (Report 47: Synodical Decisions and the Confessions) “expressing the use and function of synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters and their relation to the confessions” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 44) are not uniformly interpreted by those who read them.
 - d. The potential impact of how the above statements are understood is too important at this time in our denomination’s history to seek a quick answer even from an advisory committee of twenty-six very competent people.
 - e. Recent decisions of synod have led to uncertainty and “angst” about how to interpret pronouncements of synod.
 - f. The decisions to be made by Synod 2024 may have significant influence on how the statements of Synod 1975 are understood, so there is wisdom in waiting for these decisions.
2. That synod declare the above recommendation and grounds to be the mandate for the task force.

(*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 936)

In keeping with the Rules for Synodical Procedure, the officers of synod met in summer 2024 and appointed the following members to this task force: Drew Sweetman (chair), Josh Christoffels (reporter), Harold Caicedo, Kyle Dieleman, Sonya Grypma, and Joel Vande Werken (who served as a staff consultant after being appointed as director of ecclesiastical governance in mid-November).

When the team began to meet and digest the material, it was easy to see how clarity is needed about the settled and binding nature of what synod has decided. When Synod 1973 commissioned a study committee on this question, it said that “there is no clear understanding as to how [synodical pronouncements and declarations] fit into our confessional structure” (*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 65-66). Even though Synod 1975’s ten-page report “Synodical Decisions and the Confessions” (*Agenda for Synod 1975*, pp. 595-604) sought to clarify the settled and binding nature of synodical pronouncements, questions remain. An overture to Synod 1995 sought further clarity on the matter, but synod defeated a recommendation proposing that full agreement with synodical decisions was not required by all members of the church (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 753).

To fulfill our mandate, we will first discuss how synodical decisions might pertain to members, officers, and churches before looking more specifically at the settled and binding nature of the various “categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice.”

II. Distinction between members, officebearers, and churches

Our team was asked to clarify the nature and extent to which synodical pronouncements are settled and binding with regard to members, officebearers, and churches. We note that synod has also tasked the Office of General Secretary to “provide theological reflection and advice” on church membership and to report back to Synod 2026 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 866), so we have attempted to avoid overlap with the mandate of that task force in our own work.

Officebearers have a higher standard than other members because, to be ordained and installed, they are required to sign their name confirming that they agree with the Covenant for Officebearers. They attest that the doctrines of the CRCNA’s three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—“fully agree with the Word of God.” Officebearers promise that they “heartily believe” the doctrines of these confessions and will “promote and defend” them faithfully, conforming their “preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.” Officebearers also have rules and procedures according to the Church Order that they promise to follow in the event of difficulties.

Unordained members of the church, on the other hand, do not sign their name to a covenant, but they verbally agree to certain statements when they make profession of faith and if they present children for baptism. Because the CRCNA has a variety of synodically approved forms for baptism and

profession of faith (and because Church Order Art. 59 does not mandate profession of faith in all cases when someone becomes a member), the exact commitments inherent in these questions vary from one setting to another. In general, members agree that they acknowledge or affirm that the confessions of the CRC do indeed faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture.¹ On these occasions members also affirm their willingness to accept the guidance and discipline of the church through its officebearers and the decisions of its assemblies. What is clear is that the confessions are seen as authoritative, and their authority requires a substantial level of agreement in the CRCNA from all members.

It is also important to note the extent to which the decisions of synod are binding on the churches. Because local congregations are governed by officebearers, it might seem at first glance that the same standards of agreement would be required of churches as of officebearers. But it is also possible to recognize a distinction between the agreement required of officebearers individually and that required of churches (that is, their officebearers collectively). Thus churches submit credentials to each classis meeting, testifying that they (collectively) “faithfully adhere to the doctrinal standards” of the CRC and “diligently attend to ministry” within the classis and denomination. This statement reflects a collective commitment to the witness and service of the wider body of Christ in the CRC that goes beyond the agreement or disagreement of individual officebearers with the confessions and with decisions of the denomination, and includes even such practical issues as financial support of the CRC’s ministries (see *Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 810-11; *Acts of Synod 1990*, pp. 704-6).

III. The role of the confessions

Our mandate from Synod 2024 does not include instructions to clarify any language regarding the confessions, confessional issues, or the like. The same is true for what it means to be credal.² Thus we enter into only a brief discussion here regarding the confessions. To frame this report on other various categories and the extent to which each is settled and binding, three main points regarding the CRCNA confessions are worth noting here.

First, the Reformed tradition has long held the books of Scripture “and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith” (Belgic Confession, Art. 5). Thus Scripture is all that is necessary for the knowledge of salvation, since “everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it” (Art. 7). As a result, “we must not consider human writings—no matter how holy their authors may have

¹ See the questions asked in the following liturgical forms found on the denominational website (crcna.org): Service for Baptism (1976), Service for Baptism II (1976), Form for Profession of Faith (1932), Form for Profession of Faith (1976), Form for Profession of Faith (2013), Form for the Public Profession of Faith (2016), Form for New Members (2016).

² Subscription to the creeds may seem uncontroversial; however, that is not always the case. For example, what is meant by the statement that Christ “descended to hell” has been the subject of much theological discussion and debate.

been—equal to the divine writings” (Art. 7). The CRCNA has clearly noted this theological principle and held that “the confessions are subordinate to Scripture” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 596, 601).

Second, what is understood as confessional is subject to change and revision and, in fact, has been altered. An obvious example of an explicit change in the confessions is in Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Synod 1998 directed a study of Q&A 80, which led Synod 2004 to declare that Q&A 80 “can no longer be held in its current form as part of our confession” (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 629). Thus Synod 2006 directed that three paragraphs of Q&A 80 remain in the text but be placed in brackets with a footnote explaining that these parts “are no longer confessionally binding on members of the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 711). Of course, other examples, such as Article 36 of the Belgic Confession on the civil government could also be cited. Therefore, because confessions are subject to Scripture and are to be read as historical textual documents, what has been considered confessional has necessarily changed over time.³

Third, the confessions serve a variety of purposes in the life of the CRCNA: expressions of faith, public testimony to the world, forms of unity, instruments for instruction, juridical functions, and missionary purposes (*Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 596-97). The confessions are also understood as the standard from which our other denominational decisions flow and by which they are regulated (Church Order, Art. 1-a). Thus the assumption is that all synodical decisions should be consistent with the Word of God as summarized in the confessions of the church. Within this framework, the CRC’s congregations, officebearers, and members covenant to worship, live, serve, and testify together of the salvation that is ours in Christ.

IV. Categories of synodical decisions

Before defining the various categories of synodical pronouncements, we note that any given report, and synod’s response to that report, may include a diversity of types of statements (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 600). This is particularly relevant as we seek to apply the decisions of synod today, because, for example, specific items adopted by synod as “pastoral advice” may, either explicitly or even implicitly, contain statements or assumptions that more accurately fall into the category of what we will be calling “doctrinal affirmations” (see section IV, A and the Appendix of definitions below). There is, then, always a measure of wisdom needed to interpret and apply even statements that synod has explicitly made as summarizing the church’s understanding of a particular issue.⁴

³ On the historical textual approach to reading the confessions, see *Acts of Synod 1959*, pp. 183-84; *Acts of Synod 1961*, p. 88; *Acts of Synod 1998*, p. 427.

⁴ For further examples of this point, see *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 40-41, and the discussion found in the document “Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom at Calvin College,” *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 136-76.

Second, the category of “report” is not included below since it is already clearly defined as a document from a committee that is legally before synod (Rules for Synodical Procedure V, A, 4). Reports are not usually adopted by synod in their own right but are received for information or recommended to the churches. While they often articulate a deeper explanation and rationale behind any given topic, only the recommendations that synod actually approves are settled and binding.

We also note that the categories of synodical decisions do not deal with ordinary items that synod might have to approve, such as board appointments, financial decisions, or commending the work of the ministries of the CRC. The focus, in line with previous synodical studies on this issue, has to do with doctrinal and ethical decisions.

As the study committee reporting to Synod 1975 observed, “Synodical decisions are as varied as the life of the church” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 597). That synod defined six different categories of synodical decisions (p. 44). Synod 2024, however, listed a different set of categories for this team to define: “pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 936). Rather than using those exact categories, many of which overlap in meaning, we thought it might provide better clarity and simplicity if future synods would rely on the following broad categories and explanations of synodical decisions. The 1980 report on divorce and remarriage, for example, illustrates these categories by stating in its “Guidelines for the Ministry of the Church” that those guidelines “reflect the demonstrable teaching of Scripture” and that churches “must apply the teaching of Scripture to the specific situations and concrete cases” that come before them (*Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 41, 480-85).

A. Doctrinal affirmations

Doctrinal affirmations are official, declarative statements that affirm Scripture or the confessions in response to questions that have arisen. Not all doctrinal affirmations are “confessional,” but synods may declare or recognize them as confessional interpretations or as having confessional status. They can deepen and broaden the doctrines that are found in the confessions, or they can be additions to issues not found in the confessions (see examples in *Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 598-600). Doctrinal affirmations are settled and binding for officebearers, churches, and members, though we recognize that, over time, synod may change the level of commitment expected (including consequences for nonadherence).

B. Adjudicatory decisions

These are decisions that arise from particular disputes coming from the churches. They are decisions in response to appeals or protests or when the Judicial Code is invoked. These apply to particular situations (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 44) unless synod specifically decides that they have universal and binding application. They may also provide precedent for future decisions.

C. Doctrinal applications

These decisions apply Scripture and the confessions to contemporary contexts or situations. They provide ways of further expressing the faith of the church but are not considered additions to the confessions. Doctrinal applications include guidelines for further study, contemporary testimonies (*Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 699-700), and pastoral advice. Though rare today, some of the CRC's communications to governments (what Synod 1975 categorized as testimonies or letters) have functioned in this way as well. Doctrinal applications should be received with respect and are more than mere suggestions. Officebearers are expected to teach and guide members in line with these decisions. Members should similarly expect pastoral care consistent with the decisions. These decisions are settled and binding but allow for discernment in the way they are applied in local contexts.

V. Applying synodical decisions to the churches

Church Order Article 29 makes clear that decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies are "settled and binding" unless they conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order. We see the two words *settled* and *binding* as largely complementing each other: because synodical decisions are not intended to be debated endlessly, they obligate churches and members "to live up to the decisions"⁵ of the denomination's assemblies. As Henry DeMoor observes, this requires "respect [for] the decisions of the broader assemblies . . . publicly and privately . . ." and "especially in . . . official duties of preaching, teaching, and providing leadership."⁶

At the heart of this group's mandate, however, is a fundamental question: What do synodical decisions mean for CRC officebearers, churches, and members, and *how* do synod's decisions bind the leaders and members of our local congregations? In some ways, the framework of synodical decisions ties into questions of discipleship and discipline: from a positive standpoint, our confessions and synodical decisions should invite church leaders and members to a common set of beliefs and practices. From a somewhat negative standpoint, the church must consider the appropriate consequences when either officebearers or members undermine the beliefs or practices that connect us to one another in our denominational covenants.

Perhaps it will be helpful to offer some examples. Our confessions clearly teach the appropriateness of infant baptism (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 74; Belgic Confession, Art. 34). Officebearers should be expected to hold this teaching "without reservation" and to "promote and defend" this doctrine in their ministries. However, while officebearers should be expected to defend infant baptism as the most faithful interpretation of Scripture, this

⁵ Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary: An Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969), p. 124.

⁶ Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive, 2020), p. 167.

does not require that they completely deny that biblical arguments can be made for credobaptism (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 2). Members in general, however, are bound to a somewhat different standard. In expressing a “commitment to” the creeds and confessions of the CRC (Church Order, Art. 59-b), confessing members believe that the doctrines “faithfully reflect” the teachings of Scripture (as one early Reformed theologian put it, “insofar as you have heard, learned, and confessed them”⁷). But in at least in one case, synod gave the right for a local consistory to allow a couple of Baptist persuasion to remain members in good standing in the CRC, provided they did not undermine the beliefs and practice of covenant baptism in their local context (*Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 63). Similarly, we recognize that many of our Hispanic churches are currently wrestling in a similar way with the validity of Roman Catholic baptism for their members, despite our “settled and binding” position that recognizes such baptisms (Church Order, Art. 58; Belgic Confession, Art. 34).

Similar examples could be given for other categories of synodical declarations. On matters that are subordinate in authority to the confessions, even officebearers have permission to disagree with a particular synodical proclamation (as evidenced by their ability to record a negative vote). While these statements remain binding, in the sense that officebearers and members must “abide by . . . synodical deliverances” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 44), and churches are expected to participate collectively in the work done by the denomination whose name they bear, cooperation with such synodical pronouncements is governed by a sense of mutual respect and trust (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17) rather than the “agreement” required by the confessions.

Because both the original overture (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 350-51) and the mandate for this task force (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 936) mention recent synodical decisions about human sexuality, it seems important to briefly address those decisions here. As with many other synodical pronouncements, the statements of synod on matters of sexuality contain a mixture of decision types. Some of the decisions related to sexuality matters are “pastoral advice.” Other decisions, such as the understanding that same-sex sexual activity is an example of the “unchastity” condemned in Scripture, or the assertion that temptation to a particular sin is not in itself sinful, flow from our interpretation of the confessions as the biblical and theological “baseline” which define the CRC’s understanding.⁸

It should be noted, however, that a particular doctrinal affirmation, though binding on all officebearers, need not dictate the same pastoral application in every situation. Similarly, a confessional commitment that views all same-sex sexual activity as sinful does not lock the church or individual members into a particular course of pastoral care in matters beyond those

⁷ The original quote comes from Jacobus Koelman (1632-1695); it was adopted by the CRC as part of its General Regulations of 1881, Art. 59.

⁸ For further discussion of this point, see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 363, 365-66.

on which synod has specifically spoken⁹ any more than the CRC's decisions on divorce require the same approach to every remarriage (see *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 40-41). Because Synod 2022 saw its decisions as consistent with the declarations of past synods, it can be assumed that the pastoral advice of those synods still holds and that local churches have significant freedom for pastoral engagement, provided the specific decisions of synod are heeded.

We believe this approach does justice to both the expectation that churches, officebearers, and members should respect all synodical pronouncements while still recognizing the very real distinctions that exist between categories of synodical decisions as well as between officebearers and members of the church. The principle of the original authority of the local assemblies (Church Order, Art. 27-a) dictates that local leaders do have significant authority to disciple members in ways that make sense in a particular situation, and should be able to do so with the trust of fellow officebearers and members of the CRC. But in the end, as synod has previously said, both officebearers and members *are* expected to “abide by . . . synodical deliverances” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 44) as an expression of our common witness to Jesus Christ in our contemporary world.

VI. Conclusions

Synod has requested that this team provide some additional clarity to the definitions of synodical pronouncements, and to their relative binding weight on officebearers, churches, and individual members. We believe that such clarity is indeed important for the CRC to better understand what, precisely, we have covenanted to believe and to do together for the kingdom of God. To summarize, it is the conclusion of this group that matters that are “settled and binding” are those which have been discussed, debated, and adopted by synod and therefore obligate the churches to live up to the decisions the churches have made together. Local churches and classes “abide by” these decisions—that is, they act in conformity with them and use them as guides for their ministry. Officebearers covenant to teach, preach, and act in alignment with synodical pronouncements, even if they are only obligated to agree with the doctrines taught in the creeds and confessions. Individual members agree to accept the spiritual guidance of the church as part of their commitment to respect their leaders and join with them in carrying out the ministry of the church, and they agree to “acquiesce” in those decisions which they cannot actively support.

We also want to recognize that this team assignment comes, in part, because of an increasing number of relational challenges that cannot be met with administrative solutions. As our recent history demonstrates, even categories requiring little formal agreement can feel like a betrayal of denominational unity if a spirit of mutual trust is not present.

⁹ Matters that do bind churches and officebearers can be found, for example, in the list presented in the *Acts of Synod 2024* on page 891.

The biggest contribution of this report, then, might be to ask the question, What can we do to build mutual trust so that the body of Christ (or at least the part of Christ's body that is the CRCNA) can move forward to do the ministry God requires of us? Our denominational structure teaches us to consider the decisions of assemblies with respect and humility, and our conscience guided by the Holy Spirit constrains us to seek points of agreement that foster our unity and strength as the body of Christ. There is great value in the CRC understanding that does not force agreement with every doctrine or practice but allows for continued learning and growth into the matters we confess for both officebearers and other members. Identifying categories of synodical pronouncements cannot create those conditions; they can only be helpful insofar as those categories serve the goal of identifying our common areas of ministry. That task, in turn, requires mutual submission to one another that can come about only when we have first of all submitted ourselves to Christ. We must patiently and humbly seek the wisdom that comes from the Spirit to recognize how we can faithfully apply the shared understanding of Scripture that our confessions offer to us.

VII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Drew Sweetman (chair) and Joshua Christoffels (reporter) when the report of this team is discussed.

B. That synod take note of the challenge of maintaining trust in the churches in our present cultural context, recognize the inadequacy of administrative categories to maintain harmony in our collective ministry as a church, and encourage all churches, officebearers, and individual members to seek those things which lead to peace and mutual edification (Zech. 8:16; Rom. 14:19).

C. That synod recognize the three broad categories of doctrinal affirmations, adjudicatory decisions, and doctrinal applications as defined in this report and encourage future synods to utilize these categories.

Ground:

Using these broad categories will provide clarity and uniformity around our settled and binding positions.

D. That synod receive this report and its definitions, commend these items to the churches as a faithful explication of the various categories of synodical pronouncements, and dismiss the team with thanks.

Team to Clarify Distinctions in Synodical Pronouncements,
Decisions, Reports, Positions, and Advice

Drew Sweetman (chair)

Joshua Christoffels (reporter)

Harold Caicedo

Kyle Dieleman

Sonya Grypma

Joel Vande Werken (staff consultant)

Definitions of Terms Used in This Report

Doctrinal affirmations (sometimes called pronouncements, positions, decisions, and deliverances): An official statement or declaration made by synod, which expresses decisions on matters of doctrine, ethics, church policy, or other important issues. Doctrinal affirmations are authoritative and are meant to guide the beliefs and practices of the church community.

Adjudicatory decisions: Decisions that arise from particular disputes coming from the churches in response to appeals or protests or when the Judicial Code is invoked. Synod may decide that an adjudicatory decision has a universal and binding application.

Doctrinal applications (includes what synod has called guidelines for further study, contemporary testimonies, or pastoral advice): Decisions that apply Scripture and the confessions to contemporary contexts or situations. Doctrinal applications are ways of further expressing the faith of the church but are not considered additions to the confessions. They are settled and binding but allow for discernment in the way they are applied in local contexts.

Advice (also called “pastoral advice”): Strong recommendations provided to help guide, counsel, or support churches. This term is used to describe three types of advice, with distinct purposes. First, advice for providing *pastoral counseling* and care of members (e.g., regarding marital divorce, same-sex attraction). Second, advice for supporting members with *pastoral concerns* (e.g., persons struggling with faith concerns and the authority of Scripture regarding a new societal trend). Third, advice on how to provide advice in a *pastoral manner* (e.g., how to provide a caring posture in controversial discussions). Synodical advice carries the weighty authority of the expertise of the authors of a study report, for example, as well as of synod’s adoption. While it is not strictly mandatory for churches to follow synodical advice, they are to receive it with due respect, and they normally act in harmony with it. However, when the purpose of the synodical advice is to provide the scriptural or confessional basis for the advice given, the statements are binding.

Report: A report is a document submitted by a board, committee, or agency of an assembly indicating the work performed in response to assembly mandates and presenting recommendations for assembly action (Rules for Synodical Procedure V, A, 4).

Settled: A matter is settled when it has been discussed, debated, and adopted by synod. The settled matter is considered final. It is not subject to reversal or modification unless new and sufficient grounds are presented to demonstrate that it conflicts with Scripture or the Church Order.

Binding: When decisions are made by ecclesiastical assemblies, the church community is obligated to adhere to those decisions. Those decisions are binding.

Abide: To act in conformity with a synodical decision, via one's personal conduct, teaching, preaching, publishing, discipleship, pastoral care, and church discipline.

Acquiesce: To commit to abide by a synodical decision, even when in personal disagreement with that decision. Officebearers and church members are duty-bound to respectfully receive synodical decisions as bearing the weighty authority of synod, recognizing that "the well-being of the church is fostered when there is substantial unity with respect to all the decisions of synod" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 602).

OVERTURES

OVERTURE (DEFERRED FROM SYNOD 2024)

OVERTURE 75 (DEFERRED FROM 2024)

Evaluate Polity to Clarify Relationship of Assemblies (Deferred from 2023)

Classis Zeeland overtures synod to appoint a study committee to evaluate our church polity in light of the Scriptures, our theology, and our history, with the goal of clarifying the relationship between the council, classis, and synod. This should take particular note of the authority of the church and its various assemblies in light of the issue of discipline and excommunication on the local level, and church discipline and disaffiliation at the classical and synodical levels. The biblical and theological underpinnings should be analyzed first, turning then to recommendations for a proper polity that is biblically faithful and historically informed and addresses the issues the church is facing today. Based upon those conclusions, recommendations for structural changes should follow, including recommendations for changes to Church Order that reflect the biblical and theological and polity conclusions.

Grounds:

1. There is considerable confusion over the nature and authority of church assemblies today. This is causing chaos in the church and must be addressed.
2. These difficulties are deep and serious and can only be appropriately addressed by agreement at the biblical and theological level first, and then applied to our polity, Church Order, and practice.
3. Local churches and classes lack the time and resources to handle such an extensive biblical, theological, and historical task. It involves all our churches, so it must be addressed at the synodical level.
4. The task is significant in terms of weight, content, and impact, and it requires a full study committee to do it justice.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURES TO SYNOD 2025

OVERTURE 1

Permit Transfer of Grace Community Chapel, Teaneck, New Jersey, from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson

Classis Hudson, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overtures synod to permit the transfer of Grace Community Chapel (Teaneck, N.J.) from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson. The request originated from the Grace Community Chapel council and was approved by both classes.

Grounds:

1. Classis Hudson recently adopted a unique bicultural and bilingual approach regarding the composition of churches and ministry leaders within the classis. Grace Community Chapel also has a unique bicultural and bilingual identity in how they do ministry, and that fits well with Classis Hudson's mission, purpose, and goals.
2. Geographically, Cornerstone Church of New York, an emerging congregation and church plant of Grace Community Chapel, is located in the borough of Queens in New York City. New York City and Long Island ministries are all geographically distributed into Classis Hudson.
3. Classis Hackensack and Classis Hudson have agreed that this transfer is in the best interest of Grace Community Chapel and their affiliates.

Classis Hudson
Jeremy Mulder, stated clerk

OVERTURE 2

Allow Transfer of Grace Community Chapel, Teaneck, New Jersey, from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson

Classis Hackensack, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overtures synod to allow the transfer of Grace Community Chapel (Teaneck, N.J.) from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson. The request originated from the Grace Community Chapel council and was approved by both classes.

Grounds:

1. Classis Hudson recently adopted a unique bicultural and bilingual approach regarding the composition of churches and ministry leaders within the classis. Grace Community Chapel also has a unique bicultural and bilingual identity in how they do ministry, and that fits well with Classis Hudson's mission, purpose, and goals.
2. Geographically, Cornerstone Church of New York, an emerging congregation and church plant of Grace Community Chapel, is located in the borough of Queens in New York City. New York City and Long Island ministries are all geographically distributed into Classis Hudson.
3. Classis Hackensack and Classis Hudson have agreed that this transfer is in the best interest of Grace Community Chapel and their affiliates.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila Holmes, stated clerk

OVERTURE 3

Amend Church Order to Prohibit Concealed Handguns at All Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario, overtures Synod 2025 to amend the Church Order to prohibit concealed handguns at all ecclesiastical assemblies, regardless of local civil laws.

Grounds:

1. The consistent testimony of Scripture is to reject trust in weapons and the use of violence to protect ourselves or further the mission of the church (Ps. 20:7; Isa. 30:15-17; 31:1; Matt. 5:38-42; 26:52; John 18:11; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:20-23).
2. The one time that Jesus seems to advocate for carrying a weapon, he limited the disciples to only two swords. The type of sword indicated was commonly used for hunting, harvesting, and as a multipurpose tool. This interpretation is clearly supported later in the text: when Peter pulls out his sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant, Jesus rebukes him, saying "No more of this!" and "Put your sword away!" (Matt. 26:51-52; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:36-38, 49-51; John 18:10-11).
3. Lethal force is the responsibility for governments, not individuals (Rom. 13:3-4; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 105).
4. Early Christians did not defend themselves but laid down their lives willingly as a powerful and compelling testimony of their faith in God for protection and as witnesses of the gospel.

5. Many studies indicate that the presence of handguns does not lead to safer spaces; instead, the opposite is true. Examples from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed_carry_in_the_United_States:
 - a. A 2019 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that strengthening firearm regulations is associated with decreases in workplace homicide rates.¹
 - b. Another 2019 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that states with right-to-carry laws were associated with a 29-percent higher rate of firearm workplace homicides.²
 - c. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* found that right-to-carry laws led to an increase in overall violent crime.³
6. In a world where gun ownership sometimes rises to the level of idolatry, the prohibition of handguns at ecclesiastical assemblies will serve as a testimony to the church's trust in the Lord for life and well-being, and the commitment to peace.
7. Until recently it was uncommon for U.S. states to allow the free and unrestricted carrying of concealed weapons. Legislative changes across the U.S. in recent decades have dramatically increased the number of concealed weapons in the public sphere. Such changes have made urgent the need to address this issue.⁴

Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church,
Ancaster, Ontario
Ed Witvoet, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to Classis Hamilton at its February 22, 2025, meeting but was not adopted.

¹ Sabbath, Erika L.; Hawkins, Summer Sherburne; Baum, Christopher F. (Feb. 2020). "State-Level Changes in Firearm Laws and Workplace Homicide Rates: United States, 2011 to 2017." *American Journal of Public Health*, 110 (2): 230–36.

² Doucette, Mitchell L.; Crifasi, Cassandra K.; Frattaroli, Shannon (Dec. 2019). "Right-to-Carry Laws and Firearm Workplace Homicides: A Longitudinal Analysis (1992–2017)." *American Journal of Public Health*, 109 (12): 1747–53.

³ Donohue, John J.; Aneja, Abhay; Weber, Kyle D. (15 May 2019). "Right-to-Carry Laws and Violent Crime: A Comprehensive Assessment Using Panel Data and a State-Level Synthetic Control Analysis." *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 16 (2): 198–247.

⁴ A graphic depiction of the spread of "shall carry" and unrestricted carry of concealed weapons can be found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed_carry_in_the_United_States.

Healthy Pastoral Spouses

Note: The following overture was adopted by both Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain.

Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain overture synod to encourage each of the churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses in their church.

I. Background

Over the past decade, significant attention has been given to the spiritual health of pastors in our denomination. Resources from Thrive's Pastor and Church Support, including grants for learning and mentoring, are valuable assets that promote health and longevity in the service of our pastors.

Less attention has been given to the spiritual health of the spouses of pastors. While the current biennial conferences that are provided for spouses can be a time of encouragement and refreshment, very little is available for these spouses in the interim between the conferences. Spouses often find their own sources of care, sometimes creating independent groups for mutual encouragement. However, this can be difficult, especially for spouses who live in isolated locations. Sadly, these are the spouses who often need the most connection and care.

A. The Unique Role of Pastoral Spouses

Spouses of pastors live in a unique space in the congregation. They are not employees of the church, though they sometimes experience expectations as if they were. They are members of the church, but they occupy a more visible position than other members.

They are the one person in the church who does not have a pastor. While regional pastors may be available to support the pastors, spouses are often not included in that care. So the pastor has a pastor, the members have a pastor, but the spouse has no one.

Furthermore, they are personally affected by the decisions of the council in the same way the pastor is, but they often have less opportunity to communicate and participate in the decision-making process.

B. Healthy pastors, spouses, and churches

Churches, pastors, and their spouses live together in a system where each is affected by the other. When one entity in the system is unhealthy, the others are also affected. The correlation between the health of a pastor and the health of the church is well documented, with the health of the spouse less so. However, from observation, a pastor's health is affected by the health of the spouse, which affects the health of a church. There is a symbiosis between each part of the system.

Other than the calling of God on the pastor, the spouse's needs and opinions are usually the greatest influence on a pastor. Speaking generally, "If momma ain't happy, no one's happy." A church who wishes to support the health and longevity of the pastor will be motivated to promote the health of the pastor's spouse as well.

C. Resources for soul care

Each pastoral spouse is unique, which means the best method of soul care is unique to each individual. There is no one plan that can cover the needs of all spouses. As indicated in the graphic below, there are many various opportunities and resources for the soul care of an individual.



No one is better able to determine the right type of soul care than the pastoral spouse. A one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the needs of the individual. The church will be benefited by supporting spouses to find the best type of support for their own situation. The classis can serve as a means of communication between the churches, creating a network that would allow people to connect and work together. Regional pastors can follow up through contact with pastors to make sure that spouses are aware and have access to resources. Church visitors/advocates can ask about the health of the spouse along with the health of the pastor.

II. Overture

In conclusion, Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain overture synod to encourage each of the churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses in their church through the following actions:

A. Encourage each church to provide at least \$500 each year for resources for soul care for the pastoral spouses in their church. The best form of soul care would be determined by the pastoral spouse.

B. That synod create a fund to supplement those churches who cannot afford this addition to their budget.

C. Regional pastors and church visitors are directed to ask after the health of the pastoral spouse in their contacts with pastors and churches.

Grounds:

1. Healthy churches depend on healthy pastors and healthy spouses.
2. There are minimal resources currently available that promote the health of the spouse.

Classis Central Plains
Jonathan Spronk, stated clerk

Classis Rocky Mountain
Shawn Richardson, stated clerk

OVERTURE 5

Rewrite *The Banner* Mandate

I. Background

There has been an increasing tension in the CRC between many (though not all) of its members and *The Banner*. It is no secret that the CRC is home to more theologically progressive and more theologically conservative members, as is the case in most large denominations. Though many progressive members think *The Banner* sometimes represents their position and sometimes does not, many conservative members (but not all) think it rarely, if ever, represents their position.¹ Though *The Banner* is tasked with encouraging dialogue and representing various views, many rather conservative and traditional members of the CRC (again, not all of them) do not find their views adequately represented.²

¹ This statement is supported by informal polling and personal discussion among the framers of this overture.

² For example, Jessica Menn Anderson has written at length presenting a conservative appraisal of *The Banner*. Though the writer(s) of this overture do not agree with everything she has written, she provides a sample of the incongruity that many conservatives experience on a regular basis with *The Banner*. It should be noted that part of her reason to disaffiliate with the CRC was her experience of reading *The Banner*. Her nine-part series can be found at the following links (accessed 1/24/25):

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-an-introduction;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-02-8-signs;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-3-a-fuller;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-4-polishing;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-5-catching;

II. Discussion

In light of the divergent perspective of *The Banner*, the following synodical mandates are not being met to a satisfactory degree, which will be commented upon in turn.

(2) provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,³

Since *The Banner* regularly provides for writing that goes *against* the convictions of many CRC members, it fails to be edifying and encouraging. Many members of the CRC report feeling disillusioned not only with *The Banner* but with the CRC as a whole after reading the latest issue. Unfortunately, as a result, many have stopped reading *The Banner* altogether, and many councils no longer provide the latest issue to their churches.

(3) stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage;

Though *The Banner* regularly stimulates critical thinking by presenting challenging viewpoints, many members and pastors of the CRC see these viewpoints as out of line with our confessional heritage. Many people desire *The Banner* to provide more grist for embracing our confessional heritage, rather than questioning it. To be sure, critical thinking is important, but it is not more important than the unity of the CRC. Therefore *The Banner* should better reflect a desire to *align* with our confessions.

[II, A, 2] Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the church and encourages biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.

Similarly, IV, G of the mandate says,

Selection of authors should aim at equity of representation (U.S./Canada, minorities, men/women, younger/older, conservative/progressive, etc.).

Many conservative members of the CRC think that their perspective is *not* presented adequately. Since these members believe their position to be “biblical and Reformed,” its exclusion is doubly distressing.

[IV, I] Nothing that serves the interest solely of one individual, organization, or group in contrast to other individuals, organizations, or groups or in neglect of the general interest of the churches should be published.

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-6-my;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-7-the;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-8-the;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-9-reconsidering

³ thebanner.org/content/synodical-mandate (accessed 1/13/25). All of the following mandate quotes are taken from the same source on 1/13/25 or 1/14/25.

Many members of the CRC think *The Banner* generally serves the interest of the more progressive members.

[II, A, 3] Edifying readers so as to encourage them to grow in Christian maturity and faith and to live out their faith in daily life.

Much content in *The Banner* does not just fail to represent certain perspectives, but it also spends resources on unedifying topics, like emoji use⁴ and wristwatches.⁵

[II, A, 4] Providing a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues.

Some conservative potential contributors have noted that their submissions have been rejected by the editorial team while more progressive articles are printed in their stead. This is not a point that can be proved in this overture, but it seems to many that *The Banner* has a bias toward more progressive rather than more conservative articles, which may be substantiated by the experience of conservative submitters who are regularly rejected.

In addition to the above reflection on *The Banner* mandates, the following articles are presented as problematic (in addition to those mentioned in footnotes 2, 4, and 5), though they are by no means representative of an exhaustive list. The point of this list is to demonstrate that *The Banner* has now built a reputation for publishing material that is not in accord with the theological core of the CRCNA.

1. Convenience abortion is described as only “likely . . . probably” murder: “Non-mother-saving abortions are *likely* murder, and so in its directness, seriousness, and widespreadness should *probably* be a non-negotiable for Christian support” (emphasis added).⁶ For conservatives, convenience abortion is unequivocally murder. To say *anything* short of this is seen as opening the door to more “conversation” about killing babies and, as such, is unconscionable.

⁴ “I’m a boomer who has started to use emojis. Is that a bad thing?” (posted Nov. 27, 2023). Note that this entry is presented under the column “Big Questions.” For many, this is a trivial matter, and it does not warrant discussion in a magazine that should be centered on the eternally weighty discussion of Christ and his Church. See thebanner.org/columns/2023/11/im-a-boomer-who-has-started-to-use-emojis-is-that-a-bad-thing (accessed 1/24/25).

⁵ “Hodinkee” (posted June 3, 2022). Note that this entire post—like the one referred to the footnote above—says nothing about God. It could fit perfectly well in an atheist magazine. Furthermore, the post recommends the following: “Now that I’ve told you about Hodinkee, you can spend hours clicking around, watching, and reading about one of humanity’s most important and interesting inventions—the wristwatch.” A church magazine should recommend—and only recommend—spiritually edifying activities. Otherwise, the magazine in question is merely a magazine. *Note well*: “Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26b). See thebanner.org/mixed-media/2022/06/hodinkee (accessed 1/24/25).

⁶ “Is Abortion a Non-Negotiable Factor in a Christian’s Voting?” (published Oct. 19, 2020); thebanner.org/columns/2020/10/is-abortion-a-non-negotiable-factor-in-a-christians-voting (accessed 1/24/25).

2. *The Banner* rejected the conservative “The Abide Project” from advertising. However, the progressive “Better Together” group was allowed to advertise.⁷ When questioned, *The Banner* editor removed the ad, given the “perceptions [of Better Together] and out of courtesy to our readers.”⁸ Note that this explanation fails to recognize that Better Together’s position of allowing for same-sex activity is a progressive position. Rather, the reason the ad was removed was simply “perception” and “courtesy.”
3. *The Banner* regularly assumes or supports an egalitarian position,⁹ which may give the impression that the complementarian position is prohibited, or that the egalitarian position is the standard, but this is not the CRC’s position.¹⁰
4. *The Banner* publishes pieces that misrepresent the conservative position. The conservative position claims that certain *views* or *theological positions* are not welcome in the CRCNA (like the advocacy of homosexual activity, for example). However, *The Banner* publishes the sentiment that the conservative positions declares certain *people* unwelcome, which is a position held by no one. For example, “To me it feels like it [the CRCNA] has put up a sign that hurts to look at: ‘You are not welcome here.’”¹¹

The above information indicates that *The Banner’s* mandate is ineffective at facilitating a denominational magazine that unifies our church under one theological banner (hence the original inspiration for the name).¹² The mandate is geared toward allowing a diversity of opinions, but the result is dissatisfaction among many. Therefore *The Banner* should be retooled as a

⁷ “Better Together ad in The Banner??” by Lloyd Hemstreet (CRC minister of the Word); [youtube.com/watch?v=0sG0NxiSyK0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sG0NxiSyK0) (accessed 1/24/25).

⁸ “Clarification Statement from the Editor” (published May 2, 2023); thebanner.org/columns/2023/05/clarification-statement-from-the-editor (accessed 1/24/25).

⁹ “Penny Preaches: God Gives Good Gifts to Everyone!” (published Jan. 17, 2025); thebanner.org/mixed-media/2025/01/penny-preaches-god-gives-good-gifts-to-everyone (accessed 1/24/25).

¹⁰ “Women in Ecclesiastical Office”; crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/women-ecclesiastical-office (accessed 1/24/25).

¹¹ “The Church at War” (published Feb. 7, 2025); thebanner.org/columns/2025/02/the-church-at-war. The strawman of this piece continues by claiming that Neland Avenue CRC, in contrast to the CRCNA, teaches that “we are loved—every one of us.” This is as if to say conservatives reject John 3:16 and God’s love for all via common grace. But, of course, this is not the case. Again, the author claims that his church, in contrast to ours, alone has the metaphorical sign: “All are welcome in this place”—as if the CRCNA does not welcome those who disagree to attend their services. The truth is, of course, that the CRCNA’s position is to welcome *all* people, as *all* are made in the image of God and under his loving common grace so that some might hold fast to the truth and forsake lives of sin. Some, of course(!), will reject this offer. But that does not mean it is not offered to everyone. Those who reject the offer of the gospel are not afforded membership, but this is not a rejection of the person. Rather, the person is rejecting Christ (John 14:15; 15:10).

¹² thebanner.org/about-us/history

mechanism for discipleship and unity. It makes no sense to use ecclesiological energy to foster more division in a time like ours. Rather, *The Banner* should be something that new believers can read and profitably understand, youth can be disciplined by, and our denomination can rally behind.

III. Overture

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Artesia, California, overtures Synod 2025 to decide the following:

A. Create a committee to rewrite, in full, *The Banner* mandate. The new mandate should be written in such a way as to foster strict adherence to our confessional documents, rather than debate about them. Furthermore, the mandate should require that *The Banner* produce nothing but edifying material that promotes unity around our confessions, faithfulness to Christ and his gospel, and affection for our Savior, rather than merely entertaining articles. The unbiased news reporting element of *The Banner* should remain unchanged.

B. If the current staff of *The Banner* are not excited about this new direction, they should be dismissed after adequate time is given for them to acquire new employment, as determined by the committee.

Council of First Christian Reformed Church, Artesia, California
Kandi Anema, clerk of council

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 11, 2025, meeting of Classis Greater Los Angeles but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 6

Amend the Synodical Mandate and Guidelines of *The Banner*

Introduction

The synodical mandate of *The Banner* is guided by four main tasks:¹

- (1) Inform readers about what is happening in the CRC as well as the church at large,
- (2) Provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,
- (3) Stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage; and
- (4) Offer tools to help readers find fresh awareness to seek, learn, worship, and serve as Reformed Christians in contemporary society.

¹ The Synodical Mandate and General Responsibilities for *The Banner* can be found on *The Banner's* website: thebanner.org/content/synodical-mandate. See also *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 49-50.

The Banner holds general responsibilities to these various groups of people:

- its subscribers and readers in the Christian Reformed Church
- the ecclesiastical assemblies (councils, classes, synod) of the CRC
- the official agencies of the CRC

Summary: According to the synodical mandate, *The Banner* is a CRC publication intended for CRC members. As stated on *The Banner* website cited above, “*The Banner* is a publication of the Christian Reformed Church in North America rather than an independent magazine.”

II. Background

As directed by Synod 2014, the CRCNA Board of Trustees (BOT) was called upon to review the 1998 synodical mandate concerning *The Banner* (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 573-74). One of the grounds for this was “It is appropriate to review mandates from time to time.” The BOT recommended changes to the synodical mandate of *The Banner* to give greater clarification, and those were approved at Synod 2015 (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 641; see *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 49-50). What is highlighted in the overtures concerning *The Banner* in 2014-15 was concern for *The Banner*’s adherence to the publication’s synodical mandate. What was not addressed in the review of the synodical mandate was the online presence of *The Banner*.

As reported to Synod 2024, *The Banner* website averages more than 85,000 pageviews per month, *The Banner* app has more than 10,000 pageviews per month, and there are increased efforts to engage on various social media platforms (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 51-52), such as Facebook and X (formerly called Twitter).

At the time of writing this overture, *The Banner*’s Facebook page states that it is “The Official Magazine of the Christian Reformed Church.” To the casual observer of this page, this would imply that *The Banner* represents the voice of the denomination on a public platform. *The Banner* also has a presence on X. Again, *The Banner* represents the denomination on a public platform. The reality is that people outside of the denomination view the publication as officially representing the denomination.

The Banner has indicated the publication’s commitment that it is a place where controversial articles can be posted.² This is to spark conversation and be a place where the many voices of the denomination can be heard. *The Banner* has also committed to be an “anti-echo chamber” publication. This is to create a “kitchen table” location for members of the denomination to have their diverse voices heard.³

Concerns about the balance and representation of the many diverse voices of the denomination have grown in the past decade. There are concerns

² Shiao Chong, “Why We Publish ‘Controversial’ Articles,” *The Banner*, Sept. 2022. Also found at this link: thebanner.org/columns/2022/09/why-we-publish-controversial-articles.

³ Shiao Chong, “Anti-echo Chamber,” *The Banner*, November 2024. Also found at this link: thebanner.org/columns/2024/11/anti-echo-chamber.

with how *The Banner* represents the denomination on public platforms despite the lack of clear guidance on this in the synodical mandate. Sibley (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church's council reached out to *The Banner*, specifically to editor in chief Shiao Chong, with their concerns about *The Banner's* presence on social media and how the publication represents the denomination. Chong's response indicated that it is not the responsibility of *The Banner* to promote the official positions of the denomination. According to the synodical mandate, this is of course correct. This gives *The Banner* license to represent the denomination without any mandates to do so or for upholding the positions of the denomination.

Division and a loss of trust in our denominational institutions are realities we are facing as a denomination, reflected in part by reduced giving. There have been repeated calls for unity, and rightly so. Now is the time to rebuild trust and unity within the denomination. Taking steps regarding our denominational publication is just one small part of that. The COD reported a decision made in May 2024 that *The Banner* should become self-sustaining by 2027 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 624). The goal is to remove ministry shares from the publication. A problem that could occur with this transition is a greater sense of freedom for the publication to adhere to the publication's commitments, which would not properly address the growing concern and loss of trust.

Summary: There are concerns with how *The Banner* adheres to its current synodical mandate. With these concerns in mind, one wonders how *The Banner* can also represent the denomination on a public platform, despite not having a synodical mandate to do so or to hold *The Banner* accountable. The commitment to publish controversial articles and be an anti-echo chamber conflicts with the reality of representing the CRC in public spaces via social media. The kitchen table analogy implies a space of privacy where different opinions can be heard. A publication that is read by those outside of the denomination and which posts in public spaces negates this "kitchen table" analogy.

III. Overture

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to amend the synodical mandate and guidelines of *The Banner* (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~) to reflect its representative public nature as follows (see Appendix for reference of the current synodical mandate):

A. Under "The Mandate of *The Banner*," add a fifth item that says:

(5) represent the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication.

B. Under "General Responsibilities," amend point A, 2 to say,

(2) Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church ~~in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the~~

~~church~~ and encouraging biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.

C. Under “General Responsibilities,” add a fourth item that says,

D. To represent the CRCNA to the broader church and world from a faithful Reformed perspective according to our confessions and synodical decisions and as its representative publication, providing clear statements regarding the official position of the denomination in any article or report dealing with controversial or diverse viewpoints.

D. Under “Freedom of Editorial Staff,” amend point E to say,

~~E. Provide a biblically prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation of trends within the church and society and of actions, decisions, policies, programs, etc., being considered by or already approved by ecclesiastical assemblies and agencies,~~ with proper acknowledgment and respect for the official positions of the CRCNA and within the confines of our confessional covenant commitments.

Grounds:

1. The synodical mandate has not addressed the publication’s presence on social media. The mandate does not include guidelines for representing the denomination outside of the members of the denomination. The reality is that those outside the denomination already consider the publication as a representation of the denomination at large. In a digital age, the publication is readily available to anyone globally with internet access. The guidelines should reflect this reality.
2. *The Banner* has committed to publishing controversial articles that do not represent the denomination. While it is necessary for any publication to consider and allow for diverse viewpoints, as the magazine of the CRCNA it should represent our denomination’s official confessional and biblical positions faithfully and acknowledge any articles which are in conflict with them clearly so as to avoid the current confusion within and outside our denomination.
3. Since *The Banner* does represent the CRC, the publication should do so in a way that accurately fulfills the synodical mandate to think critically on various issues in ways that are in line with the existing regulations under “Editorial Integrity,” point A: “A. *The Banner* materials should be faithful to Scripture and the confessions.”
4. In the midst of growing distrust, now is the time to work toward unity.
5. *The Banner* is working toward financial independence from ministry shares. This transition time is a good time to review the mandate. It is appropriate to review synodical mandates from time to time.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

APPENDIX

The Mandate of *The Banner*

Adopted by Synod 2015 (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 641)

The Banner is a publication of the Christian Reformed Church in North America rather than an independent magazine. Accordingly, the editorial staff, led by the synodically appointed editor in chief, is accountable to the church for the style and content of this magazine. This accountability to the church is realized in a number of diverse, sometimes overlapping, and at times conflicting responsibilities to various groups and structures within the denomination.

All these responsibilities are governed by *The Banner's* synodical mandate to

- (1) inform readers about what is happening in the CRC as well as the church at large,
- (2) provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,
- (3) stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage; and
- (4) offer tools to help readers find fresh awareness to seek, learn, worship, and serve as Reformed Christians in contemporary society.

Guidelines for *The Banner's* Accountability and Freedom

I. Lines of accountability

Lines of accountability have been established by previous decisions of synod and CRC Publications. For the editorial staff, accountability runs through the editor in chief, who is directly accountable to the following:

A. The Council of Delegates, the body mandated by synod to publish this denominational periodical. This accountability includes the following:

1. Reporting periodically on editorial activities and decisions.
2. Reporting reactions, criticisms, and suggestions received from readers and churches.
3. Recommending needed changes in policies and procedures.
4. Carrying out all approved policies and procedures.

B. The executive director, the administrative head appointed to manage and coordinate the work of denominational staff. This accountability includes the following:

1. Keeping him/her informed of possibly sensitive or controversial issues being addressed and listening seriously to any advice offered regarding such issues. The executive director should, at his/her discretion, consult with other CRC ministry leaders.
2. Being fiscally responsible.
3. Following approved personnel procedures.
4. Working cooperatively with Ministry Support Services.

II. General responsibilities

In addition to this direct accountability, the editorial staff carries general responsibilities inherent in the nature of a denominational magazine:

- A. To its subscribers and readers in the Christian Reformed Church for:
 - 1. Reporting in an honest and unbiased manner information about activities affecting the church.
 - 2. Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the church and encourages biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.
 - 3. Edifying readers so as to encourage them to grow in Christian maturity and faith and to live out their faith in daily life.
 - 4. Providing a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues.
- B. To the ecclesiastical assemblies (councils, classes, synod) of the CRC for:
 - 1. Keeping church members informed about important decisions taken.
 - 2. Reporting significant trends or policy directions.
- C. To the official agencies of the CRC for:
 - 1. Presenting and explaining their ministry on behalf of the churches, making sure the information disseminated is accurate.
 - 2. Keeping church members informed about important changes in their programs and personnel.
 - 3. Encouraging church members to support and participate in the ministries being carried out.

III. Freedom of editorial staff

In order that it may carry on these diverse responsibilities, the editorial staff must be granted the freedom to do the following:

- A. Inform its readers and subscribers about what is occurring in the church (including relevant problems, needs, and concerns) even though some persons, congregations, or agencies may prefer that such information not be disseminated.
- B. Investigate and determine the facts regarding any occurrence in the church that appears to merit reporting to readers.
- C. Lead and encourage a responsible discussion of the issues important to the life of the church through editorial comment and publication of articles that represent the various views held within the church.
- D. Permit people of the church to voice their views and reactions even though some of these views may be unacceptable to others in the church.
- E. Provide a biblically prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation of trends within the church and society and of actions, decisions, policies, programs, etc., being considered by or already approved by ecclesiastical assemblies and agencies.

IV. Editorial integrity

The following guidelines for editorial judgment will be used in determining what materials (editorials, articles, news stories, etc.) are published in the pages of *The Banner*:

- A. *The Banner* materials should be faithful to Scripture and the confessions.
- B. *The Banner* materials should edify and educate readers.
- C. Truth must be written but always in love.
- D. Criticism must be constructive and fair.
- E. Editing of materials should always maintain the intent of the author while making the writing more effective in presenting the author's views.
- F. No author should be demeaned by editorial comment or by the way an article, column, letter, etc., is presented.
- G. Selection of authors should aim at equity of representation (U.S./Canada, minorities, men/women, younger/older, conservative/progressive, etc.).
- H. Nothing deliberately inflammatory, insulting, or divisive should be published.
- I. Nothing that serves the interest solely of one individual, organization, or group in contrast to other individuals, organizations, or groups or in neglect of the general interest of the churches should be published.
- J. *The Banner* should give preference to CRC authors.
- K. Heads/titles should not be misleading or sensational; they should accurately reflect the heart of the story/article.

OVERTURE 7

Synodical Advisory Committee regarding Denominational Boards

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2025 to create a new Synodical Advisory Committee whose sole purpose is to interview and make specific recommendations to synod for all proposed denominational board positions to be voted on by synodical delegates (boards of institutions, agencies, and ministries, and the Council of Delegates), including new appointments as well as reappointments.

- A. This newly created advisory committee would have a stated mission with a stated focus to ask core Christian identity, belief, and ethical questions of each prospective nominee appointment and reappointment.
- B. Each nominee would be required to fill out a standardized questionnaire prior to being interviewed by the advisory committee, which the committee would work from to ask more in-depth follow-up questions,

- including the following: How would you articulate the gospel? What is your understanding of the Reformed faith? What are areas of concern you have in the CRC? What are areas where you've seen God at work in the CRC? How might the agency/institution you are called to serve on bless the work of God's kingdom in the CRC? How would you apply the Reformed faith to this particular board you'd be serving on?
- C. The boards affected would be the Council of Delegates, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Historical Committee, the Ecumenical Interchurch Relations Committee (EIRC), and the Loan Fund.
 - D. All prospective nominees would be interviewed either in person or via videoconference call by the advisory committee prior to synod or during synod, and if they wish to serve on a respective board they must make themselves available to the advisory committee for interview, to be arranged by the General Secretary's office.
 - E. The advisory committee will make its recommendations to synod (e.g., red light, yellow light, green light), but ultimately synod must deliberate and then vote on the committee's recommendations regarding all prospective board nominees.
 - F. Boards that have their nominees rejected by synod will not be permitted to "vacancy-fill" those positions and so would be actively encouraged to present to synod at least two prospective nominees per board position to be filled.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA, as a confessionally Reformed denomination, has a growing desire to have a firm confidence in the makeup of our denominational boards as to its members' biblical, ethical, and theological understandings, beliefs, and practices.
2. Synodical delegates (ministers, elders, and deacons), as officebearers in the church, have a specific interest in the biblical, ethical, and theological understanding, beliefs, and practices of its various board members, which requires greater involvement in the approval process.
3. Presently the names of board nominees provided to synodical delegates are total "unknowns" to many/most of the delegates (particularly to the elders and deacons), and yet they are being asked to essentially "rubber stamp" the names of nominees provided to them by the various agency boards.
4. The denominational board committees usually tasked with coming up with prospective nominees are often concerned with a multiplicity of variables and therefore do not always have a focus on the biblical, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices of nominees, which ought to be of primary importance for a denominational board position.
5. Synod has a particular interest in its boards' (which oversee and govern the work of our agencies and institutions on a more detailed basis than

- synod is able to do in one week) being an accurate reflection of the will and convictions of synod.
6. Denominational board members serve at the will of synod, not the will of the agencies and institutions they serve, and ultimately are accountable to synod, so they must have the confidence of synod.
 7. Other Reformed denominations (e.g., the Presbyterian Church in America) have such (General Assembly) advisory committees that do such interviews and make such recommendations for prospective members of its boards.
 8. Boards can often become largely self-perpetuating, creating an unhealthy insularity to them, and therefore also increasing the likelihood of their being unresponsive to the authority and will of synod on biblical, ethical, and theological issues.
 9. The denominational agencies and institutions exist to further the work of Christ's kingdom through the CRCNA, which is why they are CRCNA agencies and are not stand-alone nonprofit Christian agencies with boards not appointed by synod.
 10. Greater diversity in the CRC has meant that delegates to synod no longer have the traditional ways of getting to know other people in the denomination, so a new way now needs to be created to build community across the CRCNA and facilitate a spirit of fellowship and greater trust.
 11. There presently is a need for training of board members; such an interview process would help to support and validate new board members in their new endeavor/calling.

Classis Zeeland
Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURE 8

Celebrate the 1,700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed

I. Background

The Council of Nicaea met in the year A.D. 325 from May until the end of July and formulated an ecumenical creed (the Nicene Creed) to which the Christian Reformed Church subscribes. But why did that council meet? Here's a brief history, as taken from *A History of the Christian Church* by former Calvin Theological Seminary church history professor D.H. Kromminga, Th.M. (pp. 56ff):

Arius was a pupil of Lucian of Antioch and became a presbyter in Alexandria. He was highly esteemed, but his views of the Person of Christ at length roused his bishop, Alexander, to opposition and contradiction. Arius taught, that the Son, or Logos, was indeed the

firstborn of all creatures and the agent in creating the rest, but that He at the same time was not eternal but was Himself created. In the incarnation, he held, this Logos, or Son of God, had entered a human body, taking the place of the reasoning spirit which in ordinary cases animates and indwells our human bodies. Thus the Christ, as Arius thought of Him, was neither fully God nor fully man. The bishop Alexander of Alexandria, on the other hand, was fully convinced, that the Son of God was eternal, uncreated, and in essence like the Father. Thus they clashed.

Alexander held a synod which condemned Arius and his friends, but Arius asked and received aid from Eusebius, his old fellow-pupil of Lucian of Antioch. This man was at that time bishop of Nicomedia, which had been the imperial residence since the days of Emperor Diocletian. Arius soon found shelter with this prominent and powerful bishop, while both parties spread the dispute by writing to other bishops about it. Then [Emperor] Constantine defeated his brother-in-law Licinius in 323 and took over the rule of the East also. In the interests of the unity of the Church, which was so much desired by him, he sent a bishop from Cordova in Spain, called Hosius, to Alexandria with a letter advising to drop the dispute about this unprofitable question. Naturally the parties to the dispute thought it far from unprofitable, and the quarrel went lustily on.

Constantine then decided to try his expedient of settlement by a meeting of bishops. Since he was now sole ruler of the whole Empire, these bishops came from the West as well as from the East, though from the West there were only a few among the more than three hundred. This council met at Nicea in 325 and, from the greater importance of the question which it was called upon to determine, it has always been held to be the most important of the seven ecumenical or general Councils, of which it was the first. There were three parties. A handful stood with Arius. Another handful stood with Alexander. But the great majority of the members of this council had not given the question at issue much thought and had no clear opinions about it. Yet the Council came to a decision in a rather short time under the controlling influence of the Emperor.

The Arian party presented a creed soon after the opening of the Council, which was promptly rejected. Then Eusebius of Caesarea presented the creed of his church, which, however, dated from before the controversy and did not touch on the issue. This creed the Council took and amended so that it spoke on the issue. It was changed so that it now declared that the Son was begotten, not made, and is of one essence with the Father, while it now expressly condemned the Arian assertions that there was a time when He was not, and that He was made of things that were not. Thus altered, this creed expressed the common view of all the West and also a minority in the East.

The Nicene Creed has become one of the defining creeds for the CRCNA and remains so today in 2025.

II. Overture

Therefore Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2025 to use the occasion of the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed to celebrate the doctrinal clarity provided for Christ's church in that creed, and to provide further instruction for our churches on the important doctrinal teachings found in that creed.

The celebration and instruction of this creed could take the shape of a synodical worship-service focus, a series of articles written in *The Banner*, an instruction that denominational agencies teach and celebrate all the doctrines found in that creed, or any other possible observance.

Classis Zeeland,
Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURE 9

Update the Covenant for Officebearers to Include the Belhar Confession

Classis Hackensack overtures Synod 2025 to include the Belhar Confession in the paragraph concerning contemporary testimonies in the Covenant for Officebearers (para. 5) so that it reads as follows:

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of the Belhar Confession and Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony as current Reformed expressions of the Christian faith that form and guide us in our present context.

I. Explanation

Synod 2017 adopted the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony for the Christian Reformed Church. As such, the Covenant for Officebearers should be updated to include it alongside the singular mention of the witness of Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony.

II. Background

"The Belhar Confession is a gift from the church to the church. By highlighting God's call to unity, justice, and reconciliation, the Belhar reminds us that when we profess our faith in Christ, we do so as part of the global church. And belonging to the global church comes with responsibilities, each part being accountable to the others" (from the CRC's website: crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/confession-belhar).

While preparing our delegates to sign the Covenant for Officebearers in accordance with Synod 2024's guidance, we discovered that the document

had not been updated to include Synod 2017's adoption of the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony.

This paragraph that is currently found in the Covenant for Officebearers, adopted in 2012, reads as follows:

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

III. Overture

We humbly request that this paragraph be updated to include the Belhar Confession so that all delegates may rejoice in the gift that it is and in the guidance that it provides to the church.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila Holmes, stated clerk

OVERTURE 10

Reaffirm Authority of Local Consistory in Baptism

I. Summary of Overture

Classis Grand Rapids South overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

A. Eliminate any confusion that may have been caused by *Acts of Synod 2024*, Article 76 (p. 891), by reaffirming that the authority of granting baptism is held with the local consistory.

B. Affirm that the local consistory is best able to discern and make a decision regarding all the facts (including their faith) surrounding a request by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

C. Note that Article 56 of the Church Order provides that the primary criterion for baptism of a child is that the "the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members."

II. Introduction

Synod 2024 adopted the following (*Acts of Synod 2024*, Art. 76, pp. 891-92):

Response to Overture 67 (Deferred from 2023); Overtures 23, 25-26, 30-31, 33-34; Communications 8, 12, 28 (majority report)

C. Recommendations

1. That synod instruct churches who have made public statements, by their actions or in any form of media, that directly contradict synod's decision regarding unchastity to repent and to honor their covenant commitments to the CRCNA. Actions demonstrating this repentance would include the following:

- A statement to classis indicating repentance.

- A removal of any public statements opposed to the teaching of the CRCNA regarding chastity, including materials designed to teach against or otherwise contradict the denomination's position.
- A commitment not to ordain as officebearers individuals who are in a same-sex marriage or in a same-sex relationship not in keeping with a holy Christian sexual life.
- A commitment not to publicly instruct against the denomination's position in "preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living," as promised in the Covenant for Officebearers.
- A commitment not to recognize same-sex marriage as ecclesiastically valid, either in officiation or any manner of blessing a wedding rite or a baptismal rite (see Church Order Art. 56, 69-c; Supplement, Art. 69-c; Supplement, Art. 69-c; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 82, 85).
- A commitment that officebearers not serve in any organization designed to specifically advocate against the teachings and confessions of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

- a. Our desire is for the restoration of noncompliant churches under the truth of God's Word and our shared confession (1 John 1:9-10; Gal. 6:1).
- b. When synod declares an interpretation of a confession, that interpretation is "settled and binding."

All of the overtures and communications addressed by synod in Article 76 address matters of discipline, except Overture 26, which asks synod to "Require a Letter of Repentance from the Consistory of Eastern Avenue CRC" for a baptism they allowed of a child of a married gay couple.

We accept synod's decision in Article 76 entirely, except for the following statement, which we believe is in conflict with existing Church Order:

"A commitment not to recognize same-sex marriage as ecclesiastically valid, either in officiation or any manner of blessing a wedding rite or a baptismal rite."

We understand and agree with this statement as it applies to the "wedding rite," since that is a definite action contrary to our Church Order which can be objectively verified. However, applying this statement to the "baptismal rite" is problematic because our Church Order recognizes there are a number of factors involved that only a consistory can discern.

According to Article 29 of our Church Order, decisions of synod (such as in Art. 76 above) are settled and binding "unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order." Although Synod 2024 addressed Article 76 to churches "that directly contradict synod's decision regarding unchastity," the sentence about the "baptismal rite" seems to be binding on all churches. The sentence appears to be a blanket prohibition of

baptism being offered to children of same-sex couples, and thereby it takes away the authority of a local consistory to discern how God is working in a particular situation. This understanding would place it in conflict with statements from our Church Order about the authority of a local consistory to make decisions about baptism of children of all parents in keeping with Reformed polity over the generations. Following are three statements from the CRCNA, Church Order, and *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* which demonstrate this:

- “The profession of faith and membership in good standing of at least one parent are necessary for pledging covenantal promises to raise the child” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 392).
- “The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory” (Church Order Art. 55).¹
- “The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism. The consistory shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible. Upon their baptism, children shall be designated as ‘baptized member’” (Church Order, Art. 56).

III. Understanding of Baptism by the CRCNA

By means of a study committee nearly a decade ago, the CRC sought to understand how the church should respond to same-sex marriages. The majority report of the 2016 Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage was received by synod as information, and only the minority report was recommended to the churches as pastoral guidance (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 917-18). Ironically, it is in the majority report where this information is found (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 392):

May a church baptize the infants and young children of a same-sex married couple? The Church Order states that “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism” (Church Order Art. 56). In baptism, God makes covenant promises to that child. The profession of faith and membership in good standing of at least one parent are necessary for pledging covenantal promises to raise the child to know God’s love for the child in Christ.

The *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* further clarifies the above statement: “Church Order Supplement, Articles 78-81 specifies that if a confessing member is under formal discipline with their membership privileges suspended, such a person is not able to present a child for baptism.”²

¹ See also Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRCNA, 2020), pp. 305-6.

² *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRCNA, 2019), p. 210.

Looking at this issue from only the above information may lead one to conclude that a church may not baptize children of a same-sex couple. However, it is important to understand (1) the biblical and theological nature of baptism, (2) church polity, and (3) discipline.

A. Biblical and theological nature of baptism

Synod 2011 endorsed the work of its Faith Formation study committee, a committee that explored the Scriptures and our theological tradition relative to a number of issues involved in Faith Formation, including baptism. The following excerpts provide an important grounding for this present overture to Synod 2025 (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 552, 554-55, 563).

“The marvelous grace of God given through Jesus Christ and conveyed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of baptism. Through this sacrament God takes the initiative and declares that we belong to him. It is God who acts through baptism, working to nourish, sustain, comfort, challenge, teach, and assure us. . . .

The inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant of grace is ingrained in God’s plan of redemption. Covenant infants have a relationship with God (see Ps. 22:9-10; 71:6; 139:13; Jer. 1:5), and therefore covenant blessings are promised to them (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). . . .

Baptism is not intended to be a private action, but one that takes place within the worshiping community. God speaks publicly about the covenant position of the one being baptized. The recipients of baptism are publicly welcomed as members of the covenant community. And the community responds with its vows to receive baptized persons in love, to pray for them, and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers (see forms for baptism of children and baptism of adults). The covenant community lives out its vows by loving, praying for, encouraging, teaching, mentoring, and offering models of grace-filled, faithful living to every member of the congregation. . . .

At baptism, parents make important vows about their role in the faith development of their children, specifically to instruct their children in the Christian faith and to lead them by example to be Christ’s disciples (Deut. 6:4-9). . . .

Clearly, baptism is the action of God, it signifies the covenant of grace at work, and it includes both parents and the worshiping community whose belief and example will nurture this child’s development. **But** who is best able to discern a parent’s state of faith? According to our polity, the local church consistory has this responsibility.

B. Church polity

Article 56 of the Church Order states that “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism.”

Moreover, when seeking to understand those who enter into a CRC congregation from another denomination, “the Christian Reformed Church acknowledges that the sacrament of holy baptism is the sacrament of the church universal and, therefore, honors the administration of it by any Christian church.”³ This commentary is based on Article 58 of the Church Order: “The baptism of one who comes from another Christian denomination shall be held valid if it has been administered in the name of the triune God, by someone authorized by that denomination.”

Not only does the CRC recognize baptism as the sacrament of the church universal; the responsibility belongs to the local church and her consistory (Church Order Art. 55).⁴

Again, one of the reasons the consistory is responsible is that the local church is better able than classis or synod to discern the state of a person’s faith. Faith is not simply “all or nothing” — you either “have it or you don’t.” No, people who bring a child for baptism are all over the faith spectrum of discipleship and the need for discipline. Some have a faith that can move mountains; some have a lot of doubts, but they embody the faith beautifully; some give strong intellectual assent to theological truths, but their way of life lags behind. Which of these people is “persistently reject[ing] the admonition of the consistory” and needs to be “suspended from the privilege” of bringing a child to baptism (Church Order Supplement, Art. 78-81, b)? The Church Order clearly indicates that the local consistory is responsible for discerning whether a person can receive God’s sacramental promises in faith and can (along with the faith community) disciple a child.

C. Discipline

From both a biblical basis and our theological tradition as well as from our church polity, it is clear that baptism is the action of God, that we consider baptism a sacrament of the church universal (i.e., not just the CRC), that the children of believers are to be baptized and the worshiping community provides commitment as well, and that the local consistory holds the authority.

Therefore, no child of a same-sex couple should be barred from baptism if the local authority — the consistory — has given its consent. Moreover, even if a parent or parents of the child are under the discipline of the church, they should still be considered believers — and the children of believers are to be baptized.

So, what do we do about the requirement that at least one parent should be in good standing (i.e., not under discipline), as indicated in Supplement, Articles 78-81, b? Consider these scenarios:

- A lesbian married couple got pregnant. This caused them to wonder about the future. They attended an Alpha program (a Christ-centered reach-out experience used by a number of Christian Reformed

³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁴ See also *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 305-6.

churches), and both women eventually decided to follow Jesus. They want their child to be baptized. What does the consistory do?

- One or both parents are not under discipline, for the elders have yet to move formally to that state.
- One or both parents are under discipline for any of a variety of reasons, not necessarily due to sexuality issues, and the elders know that situation well enough to make a judgment to proceed.
- Any other of a myriad of human situations and scenarios.

What do we do when we face these various scenarios? How do we administer discipline?

We should reaffirm that the local consistories have the authority to provide discipline and are best able to discern and make a decision regarding requests by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

IV. Overture

Therefore Classis Grand Rapids South presents this overture to Synod 2025:

A. That Synod 2025 hereby eliminate any confusion that may have been caused by *Acts of Synod 2024*, Article 76 (p. 891), by reaffirming that the authority of granting baptism is held with the local consistory.

B. That Synod 2025 affirm that the local consistory is best able to discern and make a decision regarding all the facts (including their faith) surrounding a request by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

C. That Synod 2025 note that Article 56 of the Church Order provides that the primary criterion for baptism of a child is that the “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members.”

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA understands that baptism is the action of God.
2. Confessing members must present their children for baptism, signifying that God’s covenant applies to each child.
3. The worshiping community responds to baptism with vows that they must follow.
4. Baptism is a sacrament of the church universal.
5. The church discipline of a member is not intended to, nor does it, compel a person to cease being a believer.
6. The Church Order recognizes that the sacraments are “administered upon the authority of the consistory” (Art. 55).⁵
7. Church Order Article 56 clearly supports this action.

Classis Grand Rapids South
Gary Bekker, stated clerk

⁵ *Ibid.*

Reverse Requirement to Re-sign Covenant for Officebearers**Overture**

We, Classis Ontario Southwest, overture that Synod 2025 reverse the decision made by Synod 2024 requiring each classis to require all officebearers to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis.

Grounds:

- a. Re-signing the Covenant of Officebearers is not, as some have argued, a reaffirmation of our ongoing commitment to the creeds and confessions. Synod is asking officebearers to remake the covenant. To put a signature on the covenant is to remake the covenant. To use an example from marriage, some have likened this to saying “I love you” to our spouse all the time . . . but synod’s decision is actually asking officebearers to say “I do” over and over again. This decision is not about fulfilling our vows. Rather, it is asking people to make them again.
- b. Synod is therefore breaking covenant with the officebearers of the denomination. The only reason to make a covenant over again (the same one) is if it has been determined that somehow the first covenant has become invalid. So in requiring officebearers to remake the covenant, synod is invalidating the word of each and every officebearer in the denomination.
- c. The consistent argument that has been given, in light of the recent decisions of synod, is that nothing has changed in our understanding of the creeds and confessions. It has just clarified a bit further what the church has always believed and how the church has always understood what the confessions teach. If nothing has changed, then there should be no reason to require people to make a commitment to something they have already committed to.
- d. This decision not only targets those who synod feels have broken covenant with the denomination by going against the creeds and confessions. It also targets those who have been consistent in upholding the creeds and confessions. And even for those who synod feels have been unfaithful, the proper response is not to require re-signing the covenant but to forgive. To use an example from marriage again, if a spouse is unfaithful, the relationship does not find the capability to move forward if the spouse makes the covenant all over again. It only works with forgiveness and the rebuilding of trust.
- e. This decision has been made from a perspective of distrust, with the argument being that this decision might help to rebuild trust. But that is not the case, especially since the decision requires officebearers to re-sign the covenant on a yearly basis. It would seem, therefore, that trust is never going to be reestablished. We will just continue not trusting each other and requiring each other to keep making the same promise

over and over again. Trust cannot be built by enforcing conformity. Trust can come only by taking someone at their word and then, hopefully, watching as they are faithful to what was promised.

- f. This decision has created even more disunity in the church than was already there due to the recent decisions of synod regarding the Human Sexuality Report. Instead of just division between those who disagree on the issue of human sexuality, this decision now creates disunity between people who agree with synod's decisions on human sexuality. There is already enough conflict and division in our denomination without the need to add more.

Ron Middel, stated clerk
Classis Ontario Southwest

OVERTURE 12

Remove the Word 'fully' from the Phrase 'fully agree with the Word of God' in the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

The Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) offers a means to encourage ongoing, vital engagement of officebearers with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions. However, the phrase "fully agree with the Word of God" has been interpreted in different ways. Taken literally, it has kept otherwise interested and qualified people from serving in local ministry leadership positions. We have the following questions and requests.

A. Provide guidance on the covenant's language

The CRCNA Office of General Secretary has been inundated with requests regarding clarity on the language of the CFO. While various documents and videos have been provided, there are differing views on what weight those pronouncements carry. Synod should make a definitive declaration.

B. Create a framework for flexibility and affirmation

1. Encourage leaders to affirm the confessions "to the best of their understanding" and to agree not to teach anything in contradiction to the creeds and confessions.
2. Develop educational resources or programs that enable leaders to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of the creeds and confessions over time, as they grow in their understanding of Reformed theology.

C. Address the challenges faced by non-English-speaking churches

1. Many churches engaging in cross-cultural ministry, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts, face additional challenges in training leaders to fully grasp and affirm the CRC's creeds and confessions. Language

barriers, differences in theological-education access, and cultural distinctives can make it difficult for otherwise faithful and qualified leaders to affirm the covenant in its current wording.

2. Synod should explore ways to provide additional support, such as theological resources translated into multiple languages, culturally contextualized leadership training, and a clear framework for how non-English-speaking leaders can faithfully engage with the CFO.

D. Address the needs of people serving in post-Christian contexts

1. What pathways or accommodations might be provided to new leaders who honor and uphold the spirit of the covenant without requiring them to affirm the confessions in a manner that feels overly rigid or premature, given their context and experience? We want people from non-CRC backgrounds (and in post-Christian contexts) to be able to lead if they are qualified biblically, even if they are not ready to say “fully agree.”
2. We wonder, “How can the phrase ‘fully agree with the Word of God’ be understood in ways that maintain the integrity of our confessional standards while allowing for the growth and understanding of leaders from non-CRC backgrounds?”

This overture is rooted in a desire to see the CRC grow as a faithful and missionally effective denomination. By addressing the challenges in the phrasing of the current CFO, we can strengthen our commitment to theological integrity among new leaders serving Christ’s church in an increasingly diverse world.

II. Overture

Classis Arizona overtures Synod 2025 to remove the word “fully” from the phrase “fully agree with the Word of God” in the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

1. Challenges in finding viable leaders in new and unchurched contexts: In Arizona, CRC churches are breaking into new mission fields and engaging unchurched populations and communities with little or no connection to the traditional CRC. While Christ has provided gifted and qualified leaders for service in these churches, these leaders often struggle with the language of the CFO, particularly the requirement to affirm that the confessions “fully agree with the Word of God.”

The burden of finding leaders who can sign the covenant without hesitation is heavy in such contexts. If the current wording of the covenant is interpreted rigidly, some churches in new mission fields may struggle to seat a full council. This creates a significant barrier to fulfilling our calling to raise up leaders and make disciples. The reality is not a lack of qualified and faithful leaders but, rather, a system that does not adequately account for the backgrounds, experiences, and theological journeys of those God is calling to serve.

2. The call to discipleship and leadership development:
Our churches feel a deep calling to disciple new believers and raise up leaders, which necessarily involves granting measures of responsibility as members of the leadership team. Many of these emerging leaders are new to the Reformed tradition and have not had the time or opportunity to fully grasp the CRC's creeds and confessions. However, they are faithful and growing disciples of Christ who are committed to serving the church.

The current wording of the CFO, if strictly adhered to, creates a tension: it may exclude individuals who honor the spirit of the covenant, have no strong disagreements with the confessions, and are eager to grow in their understanding, but who cannot yet affirm with full confidence that the confessions "fully agree with the Word of God." This tension unnecessarily hinders the church's mission to develop leaders.
3. Integrity with hospitality:
The CRC has historically upheld its commitment to theological integrity through the Covenant for Officebearers and previously through the Form of Subscription. At the same time, the church is called to engage new contexts and cultures with hospitality, patience, and encouragement. The proposed approach balances these commitments by maintaining doctrinal fidelity while fostering growth and development among emerging leaders.
4. Challenges with the term "fully agree":
For those who are new to the CRC or unfamiliar with its creeds and confessions, the requirement to affirm that these "doctrines fully agree with the Word of God" can be a significant hurdle. Even the most seasoned believer may hesitate to make such an unequivocal statement without years of theological study and reflection.
5. Respect for the spirit of the covenant:
Many emerging leaders have no strong points of disagreement with CRC confessions. They honor the spirit of the covenant and wish to serve faithfully, but their hesitation centers on the language of "fully agree," which may feel premature or overly restrictive.
6. Theological humility:
The Reformed tradition acknowledges the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating God's Word. While our confessions faithfully summarize biblical truth, no human document is infallible. Leaders should be invited into a process that emphasizes learning, growth, and alignment with the Word of God, rather than an immediate and absolute affirmation of every doctrinal statement.

Classis Arizona
Anthony DeKorte, stated clerk

Repeal the Annual Signing of the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

A covenant is an eternal promise, often of a religious nature, made by one entity to another. It unites that entity to the other in perpetuity. Scripture uses this word with more weight than that of a promise, with the implication being that a covenant is made to God, even when it relates to another human, and is therefore of greater significance than other commitments made between fallible humans. Covenants made by God become something that is unwaveringly true, even if they have not yet been proven or witnessed. For example, we trust the covenant made to Noah, even though the Earth *could* still flood in its entirety. God does not need to restate his covenant at the start of every hurricane season.

The covenant of baptism is a covenant that is carried out in the church and that is made by God to the one being baptized, and to God by the parents and community. It is understood to have lifelong significance. We believe in this covenant so much that people joining our churches, even after a lifetime of ungodly living, can belong as baptized members, if they had previously been baptized, and even if their baptism was performed in a different denomination. The covenant of baptism is for life, and we consider it contrary to Scripture to be rebaptized.

When a human makes a covenant with regard to another human, that act is not meant to be taken lightly, as demonstrated in the covenant of marriage. In this instance, both individuals make a covenant to God to be committed to each other, and there is no need for recommitting oneself year after year. The covenant of marriage does not expire, and we indeed mean it when we say “till death do us part.”

These examples and others demonstrate that *covenant* is a word reserved for establishing a lifelong reality; a paradigm shift in oneself that is unchangeable and irrevocable, except where permitted by God, who is the recipient of our covenants, and therefore should be treated with reverence and used only in times of greatest necessity.

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin, in book 4, chapter 13, titled “Vows, and How Everyone Rashly Taking Them Has Miserably Entangled Himself,” highlights the detriment of making statements that cannot, or even may not be kept, and especially discourages a person or persons in power from obligating other persons to make a vow: “This happened when they [persons in power] eagerly devised vows by which a greater and stricter obligation might be added to the common chains. We have already shown how so-called ‘pastors’ in their presumptuous rule of the church have corrupted the worship of God in ensnaring miserable souls with their iniquitous laws” (4.13.1).

While we are not considering officebearers to be making their commitment under duress or without autonomy, it would defy the nature of a covenant, which is made to God, to diminish the commitment of the officebearer by suggesting that an annual renewal of a solemn vow is necessary.

Calvin further argues that, when considering whether to make a vow, it is wise and prudent to include a time period during which the vow will be kept. He says, “For though I dare not prescribe anything about number or time, anyone who obeys my advice will undertake only sober and temporary vows. . . . If you bind yourself with a perpetual vow, either you will fulfill it with great trouble and tedium, or else, wearied by its long duration, you will one day venture to break it” (*Institutes* 4.13.6). Since we defy Calvin’s advice and the Covenant for Officebearers is a lifelong commitment, we should exercise all the more consideration and, as this overture addresses, exercise caution in how it is administered.

Should we have listened to Calvin’s advice for a temporal Covenant for Officebearers, then a re-signing for each term of office would be appropriate. But, given that our covenant is binding for life, to re-sign is to diminish its nature and question our integrity, contradicting our Scripture (Matt. 5:37).

Synod 2024 decreed that the Covenant for Officebearers should be re-signed annually in order to reaffirm one’s subscription to the statements therein. According to our ecclesial wisdom and historic perspective, this would dictate that the commitment made by signing the Covenant for Officebearers should also have a time limitation. Since we do not wish to have the covenant expire, our own theological view indicates that we should refrain from diminishing the gravity of our commitment by obligating a renewal through re-signing.

In summary, the nature of a covenant, according to our theological and scriptural understanding, and the obligation to make such a covenant in order to serve in the local church no longer align with the policies regarding the Covenant for Officebearers determined by Synod 2024.

II. Overture

We, the council of Covenant CRC Winnipeg, overture that synod:

A. Repeal the decision of Synod 2024 requiring an annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers.

B. Amend Church Order Article 5-a to the following:

All professors, ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons, when ordained and/or installed in office, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers, and on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall *reaffirm* the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

1. The Church Order's current obligation to sign the Covenant for Officebearers is as a footnote to the Covenant for Officebearers, and should be more plainly stated.
2. These offices are already obligated to sign the Covenant for Officebearers and that requirement is not clear in Article 5.
3. The Synod 2024 policy change regarding the Covenant for Officebearers does not align with our theological and scriptural understanding of covenant and therefore should be repealed to better reflect what is expected from those who sign the Covenant for Officebearers.
4. To use the word *covenant* for something that is intended to be re-signed detracts from the significance of the word used in the Bible, in the sacrament of baptism, in marriages, and in our foundational understanding of God's relationship with humankind.
5. Scripture holds us Christians to account for our statements summarized in Matthew 5:37 ("All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one"). And to obligate re-signing diminishes the trust held between officebearers, which is based in the Word of God.
6. Affirming our established Covenant for Officebearers is already a prevalent practice in our denomination through actions such as standing and reciting. To re-sign diminishes the trust put in the word of our fellow officebearers, at their initial signing.
7. Claims of recent contradictions to the intended use of the Covenant for Officebearers are not justification for calling into question the integrity of the vows made by thousands of officebearers across the CRCNA. This council has not heard any firsthand accounts of this happening, and even if that were the case, the sins of a few do not justify sacrificing the integrity of all others.

Council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Rod Harris, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the September 17, 2024, meeting of Classis Lake Superior but was not adopted.

Resolve Inconsistencies in Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a

I. Background

As outlined in the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the gravamen process allows officebearers to express a personal difficulty with a point of doctrine/teaching contained in the confessions. This process has raised concerns regarding its application in the contemporary church context. Specifically, the process can unintentionally disqualify individuals with a deep commitment to Christ and the church but with limited or nuanced disagreements with specific confessional statements. The effect has been to narrow the pool of qualified candidates for the offices of elder and deacon, undermining the various gifts essential for the church to thrive in its mission.

Since Synod 2024 tightened the gravamen process, the council of Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church (PACRC) has attempted to function with less than a full slate of elders for the first time in its 64-year history. Our council is short on members because the gravamen process prohibits many of our longtime members, who have varying degrees of agreement with the confessions, from being council members. In effect, the council of PACRC has lost access to the leadership of some of our most experienced and devoted church members. In the past, when they disagreed with the confessions, they did not seek to undermine them but humbly submitted to the church's teaching. They exemplified Paul's teaching that "love bears all things." They bore with the teachings of the church despite their differing views. However, according to the current gravamen procedures, humbly submitting to the church's teaching even when officebearers disagree with the teaching is not enough, despite exemplifying a life marked by worship of God through loving God and neighbor and displaying the fruit of the Spirit.

For many congregations, the gravamen process is perceived as overly rigid. It requires a level of theological precision that is daunting for individuals who are otherwise well-suited for leadership. This rigidity can inadvertently discourage faithful, godly members from serving in church offices, even when their disagreements are minor or do not undermine the CRCNA's core confessions. As currently practiced, the process risks placing undue emphasis on doctrinal exactness at the expense of recognizing spiritual maturity and gifting.

Due to these issues and challenges, the PACRC council reviewed the changes made to the Church Order at Synod 2024 and identified some internal inconsistencies that require resolution to help churches better serve in ministry.

II. Overture

The council of Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church of Palo Alto, California, overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

A. Find that Supplement, Article 5-a of the Church Order is internally inconsistent and in need of revision.

Grounds:

1. Delegates to synod must be officebearers in the CRCNA, and officebearers must sign the Covenant for Officebearers adopted by Synod 2012.
2. Synod 2024 required that signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers must affirm, without reservation, the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA, meaning they must have no difficulty or settled conviction contrary to the doctrines contained therein (including what synod has declared to have confessional status).
3. Synod 2024 stipulated that officebearers who find themselves unable to continue as signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers shall present any difficulties to their council by submitting a confessional-difficulty gravamen.
4. Synod 2024 required that officebearers who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen must recuse themselves from being delegated to broader assemblies, including classes and synod.
5. Synod 2024 stipulated that officebearers who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen may resolve their difficulty by submitting a confessional-revision gravamen.
6. Synod 2012 stipulated that only signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers may adjudicate a confessional-revision gravamen.

It is therefore nearly impossible, if not entirely impossible, for confessional-revision gravamina submitted by members with confessional difficulties to be adopted by synod, since it is not permissible for synodical delegates to share any difficulty that may have motivated such a confessional-revision gravamen.

B. Provide a revision that remedies the inconsistencies in Supplement, Article 5-a. Such a remedy may include one or more of the following:

1. Revise the nature of the affirmation required of signers of the Covenant for Officebearers (cf. Supplement, Art. 5-a, A, 1).
2. Rescind or modify the definition and procedures governing confessional-difficulty gravamina.
3. Define a third type of gravamen, distinct from confessional-difficulty and confessional-revision gravamina.
4. Permit those with active confessional-difficulty gravamina to be delegated as voting members of broader assemblies, including classes and synod, as was the case prior to Synod 2024.

Synod may identify additional revisions that, alone or in combination with one or more of these actions, provide the required remedy.

Grounds:

- a. From time to time, the Christian Reformed Church has revised the Belgic Confession and clarified its interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism, as it did in 2022. However, with the current requirement of all delegates signing the Covenant for Officebearers as agreeing without reservation with the confessions as interpreted by the church, it would be impossible for a synod to make any more revisions unless most delegates had signed gravamina of revision about the proposed change.
- b. The intent of Synod 2024 was to ensure adherence to the creeds and confessions by delegates to the ecclesiastical assemblies. Requiring such strict adherence was a departure from the practice of the church and prevents the representation of the views of the entire church from being present in assemblies.
- c. The Covenant for Officebearers states that the undersigned heartily agree with the confessions. Church Order states that signing it means agreement without reservation to the confessions, including what synod has declared to have confessional status. There are many people in agreement with the confessions that are not in agreement with recent synodical interpretations. To state that signing a document means more than the document states or references is misleading.
- d. The confessional interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism that is supposed to be understood by the signer of the Covenant for Officebearers is only discoverable by reading the Church Order and looking for the interpretation on the CRCNA website, which, after references, sends the reader to the *Acts of Synod 2024*. That is unduly burdensome.
- e. The requirement for officebearers to agree without reservation to recent synodical interpretations prevents many people with integrity from signing the Covenant for Officebearers. As a result, some churches will not be able to constitute a functioning council. This policy will cause such churches to disaffiliate even when they would rather not, and it also encourages people to violate their sincerity by signing it.

Council of Palo Alto (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church
Tim Lindemulder, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 4, 2025, meeting of Classis Central California but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 15

Seat Delegates from Classes That Have Not Implemented the Annual Signing of the Covenant for Officebearers

We, Classis Ontario Southwest, overture that Synod 2025 seat delegates from classes that have not implemented the annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

- a. Synod 2024 did not include a timeline for implementing this re-signing on an annual basis (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 928).
- b. The authority of synod to direct classes to take actions such as requiring the annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers remains in question because the relationship between assemblies is still under study.
 1. When Synod 2024 deferred Overture 75 asking for a study committee to clarify the relationship between assemblies (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 928-29),
 - a) synod noted that “there is considerable confusion over the nature and authority of church assemblies today . . . [which] is causing chaos in the church and must be addressed” (ground 1),
 - b) synod reasoned that the task force requested by Overture 76 had greater urgency, and,
 - c) synod reasoned that “a study committee will benefit from the work of a task force to address discipline and disaffiliation and from the opportunity to observe how intervening synods apply the Church Order in these cases” (ground 6).
 2. Synod 2024 adopted Overture 76, asking for “a task force to develop Church Order procedures to discipline officebearers, including disaffiliation initiated by a major assembly” (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 929-31).

Ron Middel, stated clerk
Classis Ontario Southwest

OVERTURE 16

Revise the Guidelines for the Gravamen Process

I. Background

Synod 2024 revised the gravamen process for officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). Prior to Synod 2024, officebearers who had a difficulty with a doctrine contained in our confessions were able to submit a confessional-difficulty gravamen and to continue serving, provided they did not teach against or oppose the confessions of

the CRCNA. This allowed members to sign the Covenant for Officebearers and serve as ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons even if they lacked a settled conviction about a specific confessional doctrine. A confessional-difficulty gravamen provided a way to have discipleship conversations with an officebearer as they used their gifts while ensuring they would not create disruption or conflict in the congregation. No time limit was placed on this process, and many officebearers who submitted gravamina served their terms faithfully and fruitfully without fully resolving their confessional difficulties.

Synod 2024 made a number of changes and clarifications to the process for confessional-difficulty gravamina. While many of these brought helpful clarity and instruction, we believe some will be harmful to the health of congregations. These specific changes are as follows:

- As part of [the gravamen] process the council shall... set a reasonable timeline for the resolution of the confessional difficulty. The total timeline shall not exceed three years from the time the difficulty is received by a council (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 877).
- Gravamina may only be submitted by a current officebearer “subsequent to their ordination” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 875). This precludes anyone with a confessional difficulty from serving as an elder or deacon.

While we uphold and value the confessions of our denomination, we believe this change will not be a healthy or productive one for congregations in the CRC. First, discipleship in many churches in the CRC is more focused on biblical literacy, spiritual disciplines, and living out our faith. There has been a decreasing emphasis on teaching the confessions. For better or for worse, laypeople who serve as officebearers are often unfamiliar with the details of our confessions. Signing the Covenant for Officebearers has become a commitment to serving under and submitting to the doctrinal standards, rather than a full affirmation of those standards.

Second, there are many people who meet the qualifications for officebearers but may have questions or lack a settled conviction about specific aspects of our confessions. We suspect that the timing of these changes was intended to specifically address positions on human sexuality. However, there are people who have questions about infant baptism, reprobation, or the perseverance of the saints. Under the changes made by Synod 2024, such people would be disqualified from serving as officebearers.

Third, by submitting a gravamen, a potential officebearer is committing oneself to not contradicting the confessions or what synod has declared to have confessional status. In other words, an officebearer will keep their reservations to themselves. The congregation is protected from conflict or teaching that is not aligned with our confessions. When the former gravamen process was followed, it rarely, if ever, resulted in conflict or false teaching.

Fourth, the local council is in the best position to make decisions about gravamina. The council knows the personality and history of the congregation as well as the officebearer who submits the gravamen. On a case-by-case basis, the council can determine by prayer and the Holy Spirit whether an officebearer's gravamen presents a threat to the congregation. These are decisions that should be made by those "on the ground" in our local congregations.

Fifth, many CRC congregations are finding it difficult to find a sufficient number of council nominees each year. These changes to the gravamen process make that task even more difficult, especially when people are willing to serve but have a confessional difficulty that they agree to keep private.

II. Overture

A. The Council of Ferrysburg Community Church of Spring Lake, Michigan, overtures synod to revise the guidelines for the gravamen process to give discretion to local councils in the following ways:

- Councils may set their own timelines for the resolution of gravamina.
- Councils may nominate elders and deacons who have a confessional difficulty but are willing to submit to the gravamen process outlined by Synod 2024.

B. We also ask that synod update the Church Order Supplement, Article 5 to reflect these changes. We make this overture with the understanding that officebearers who have submitted a gravamen may not be delegates to broader assemblies of the CRC.

Grounds:

1. The changes to the gravamen process eliminate gifted, godly people from service as officebearers simply because they lack a settled conviction at just one point of doctrine.
2. By definition, a gravamen precludes an officebearer from contradicting or disparaging the teachings of the confessions, thereby preventing harm or conflict within the congregation.
3. Local councils are in the best position to make decisions about gravamina and should be given discretion in accepting and dealing with them.
4. The changes to the gravamen process make the difficult task of finding a sufficient number of council nominees even more difficult.

Council of Ferrysburg Community Church, Spring Lake, Michigan
Sara Meiste, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the February 20, 2025, meeting of Classis Muskegon but was not adopted.

Create a New Category of Gravamen

I. Background

For many years the Article 5 Supplement to the Church Order defined a *confessional-difficulty gravamen* as “a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions” (Church Order 2023, p. 14).

Before Synod 2024 there were multiple interpretations of how the confessional-difficulty gravamen worked and functioned within the church.

Some believed that officebearers could file a confessional-difficulty gravamen and serve as an elder or deacon, even if their theological perspective differed from that of the CRC. These individuals agreed not to speak out about the issue or cause division.

Many small CRC churches in small communities have members from diverse theological perspectives. In the past, when individuals such as these were the best potential nominees for council, they were asked to serve in leadership. They used the confessional-difficulty gravamen to acknowledge their theological differences while serving with integrity. Many served admirably in this capacity. For example, a Reformed Baptist elder committed to supporting the CRC church’s stance on paedobaptism even though it was not their preferred interpretation, and they refrained from creating division.

Others viewed the confessional-difficulty gravamen as Synod 2024 later declared—that it is intended only for persons whose theological perspectives have changed or who have developed uncertainty about specific topics. It has not been meant to accommodate settled convictions.

After Synod 2022’s decision to make the traditional view of sexuality a confessional matter, many used the confessional-difficulty gravamen to circumvent synod’s decision. Following the 2022 Frequently Asked Questions guidance, they filed a confessional-difficulty gravamen and publicly opposed the CRC’s actions. This public opposition violated previous understandings of the confessional-difficulty gravamen. This situation necessitated action. Synod chose the narrower interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen and amended the Church Order to clarify this understanding. A three-year window was established for existing council members to address the issue or resign, with a goal to create unity within the denomination on LGBTQ+ matters.

This action, however, has adversely affected many smaller CRC churches with members from diverse theological backgrounds. While their leadership agrees with Synod’s 2022–2024 decisions, they may have Reformed Baptist council members already serving or may be struggling to find new individuals willing to serve because they have lost the flexibility previously

available under the broader interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen. Their potential nominees or existing council members agree with synod's recent decision and do not want to create division, but they also want to serve with integrity and cannot "without reservation" agree to all of the statements in the Three Forms of Unity.

II. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures synod to create a new category of gravamen called a *confessional-submission gravamen*, adding the following definition and regulations to Church Order Supplement, Article 5:

A confessional-submission gravamen: A gravamen in which an elder or deacon expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions. The individual agrees to publicly support the teachings of the CRCNA and to avoid creating division in the church.

Regulations concerning the procedure for a confessional-submission gravamen:

1. *Vetting process:* This process begins during the elder and deacon vetting stages. Potential nominees must clearly communicate any theological differences to the current CRC council during the nomination process. All subsequent steps must be completed before the individual can be nominated to the congregation.
2. *Council evaluation:* The council must evaluate the weight of the theological difference and decide if it is wise to proceed, considering the number of other qualified candidates, the character of the nominee, and the makeup of the congregation. If the council deems it appropriate, they may ask the nominee to file a confessional-submission gravamen.
3. *Commitment of the nominee and leadership:* Filing a confessional-submission gravamen entails the following commitments:
 - a. The nominee agrees to publicly support CRC teachings and not create division within the church.
 - b. The local church council and classis shall remove the individual from office if they fail to uphold their commitment.
 - c. The nominee voluntarily forfeits the right to vote on theological matters related to their confessional-submission gravamen at broader assemblies (e.g., council, classis) and the right of delegation to synod.
4. *Approval process:* All confessional-submission gravamina must be reviewed by the Classical Interim Committee (CIC). The committee must concur with the council's decision before the nominee can be presented to the congregation. Consideration shall be given by the CIC as to whether the aggregate gravamina within a given council would influence the functional nature of the confessional standards

within that local congregation. If the CIC is uncertain, it may refer the matter to classis for a decision. If the classis cannot reach a conclusion or if the nominee or their council disagrees, the matter may be brought to synod for resolution.

5. *Broader assemblies participation:* Elders or deacons who have filed a confessional-submission gravamen shall not ordinarily be delegated to classis. If an exception is necessary, their seating requires prior approval from the Classical Interim Committee. The CIC and the classis stated clerk must inform the president and vice president of classis of the confessional-submission gravamen before the meeting, enabling them to determine whether the individual is ineligible to vote on any matters presented at the meeting. Officebearers who submit a confessional-submission gravamen are not eligible for delegation to synod.

Church Order Supplement revision

A revision to the “Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant of Officebearers” is necessary:

1. The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church as being doctrines taught in the Word of God. “Without reservation” means that an officebearer does not have a difficulty or hold a settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions (except those noted in a confessional-submission gravamen). This includes what synod has declared to have confessional status.

Grounds:

- a. This proposal allows local elders and deacons to serve CRC congregations with integrity, even if they cannot fully affirm all aspects of the Three Forms of Unity, as permitted under the broader interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen prior to Synod 2024.
- b. It enables CRC congregations to function in diverse contexts, with the understanding that this is not intended as a normative practice but rather as an exception when necessary. Local leadership is best positioned to determine appropriateness based on their knowledge of the nominee and the congregation.
- c. The process is transparent, involving classis to prevent misuse. The potential nominee’s willingness to give up their right to vote on issues related to their theological differences mitigates the activism we saw after Synod 2022. Clear disciplinary measures are in place for noncompliance, ensuring the integrity of the process and the denomination.

Classis Columbia
Brad Vos, stated clerk

Amend Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a**I. Introduction**

This overture is to add to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a to show a distinction for discipling elders and deacons in the local church who may have a confessional-difficulty gravamen. Though elders and deacons are honorably in equal stature with ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors, the nature of their service is different with regard to their term of service and the church's support. Elders and deacons serve by volunteering as officebearers. The church is under no obligation to support them financially to serve in these roles, and their time is far more limited to ministry than is the time of ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors. Ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors don't have defined-term time limits. Elders and deacons are also examined differently than commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word are.

II. Overture

A. That synod adopt the added verbiage to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a, B, 2, c (with additions indicated by underline) to allow elders and deacons to be disciplined through their confessional-difficulty gravamen in accordance with their term limits as volunteering officebearers.

c) Set a reasonable timeline for the resolution of the confessional difficulty. The total timeline shall not exceed three years for ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors from the time the difficulty is received by a council, or exceed two term limits that elders and deacons are allowed to serve by their council (Art. 25-a) from the time the difficulty is received by their council.

Grounds:

1. This amendment helps churches to allow elders and deacons who are called by the Lord to serve at the council's decision for an appropriate length of time of service (Art. 25-a).
2. This provides a suitable time frame to disciple them to know and accept the confessions within the time frame that they have committed to serve as an elder or deacon.
3. This applies *only* to elders and deacons, *not* to ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
4. The service of these officebearers affects *only* the local church for the length of time designated by the council as appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership (Art. 25-a). This does not affect the classis or synod because these officebearers cannot be delegated to classis or synod while they have a confessional-difficulty gravamen.

5. Elders and deacons serve in a volunteer role of leadership and do not always have the same time or resources to learn about the confessions and creeds as do ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
6. This also allows a council to engage the service of younger elders and deacons who can be mentored by the council.

B. That synod adopt the added verbiage to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a, B, 4 (with additions indicated by underline) to allow elders and deacons to be disciplined through their confessional-difficulty gravamen in accordance with their term limits as volunteering officebearers.

4. The confessional-difficulty gravamen is resolved when the officebearer either . . .
 - a) affirms the creeds and confessions without reservation, or
 - b) submits a confessional-revision gravamen, or
 - c) resigns from office as a minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, or
 - d) as an elder or deacon, completes the current term of their service determined by their council, after which time they may not be reinstated unless they affirm the creeds and confessions without reservation.

Grounds:

1. This amendment helps churches retain elders and deacons as officebearers who are called by the Lord to serve as needed in the local church.
2. This provides a wonderful way to disciple elders and deacons within the committed time frame of their installation to know and accept the confessions without reservation.
3. The service of these officebearers affects *only* the local church for the length of time designated by the council as appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership (Art. 25-a). This does not affect the classis or synod because these officebearers cannot be delegated to classis or synod while they have a confessional-difficulty gravamen.
4. Elders and deacons serve in a volunteer role of leadership and do not always have the same time or resources to learn about the confessions and creeds as do ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
5. This also allows a council to engage the service of younger elders and deacons who can be mentored by the council.

Classis Southeast U.S.
Vivy Cassis, stated clerk

Create a ‘Formal Act of Confessional Submission’

Classis Toronto overtures synod to do the following:

To create the category of a “Formal Act of Confessional Submission.” This act, conducted within the local council, would be a means through which an officebearer who has submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen and has completed “a process of learning” regarding the confession in question, and whose *intellectual* difficulties are *not resolved*, has the potential to decide whether to make a Formal Act of Confessional Submission or to resign from office.

Grounds:

1. This act of the will would be an expression of synod’s hopes to seek “alignment to the shared confessions.”
2. This act would acknowledge the holistic nature of the convictions we hold as human beings—namely, that we sometimes believe based on intellectual discovery (i.e., *the mind*), but we also hold convictions based on intentional act of *the will*. In fact, this is clearly stated in Scripture, such as in 1 John 3:23, which says, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”
3. This act would avoid a false view of the fall that operates behind the current process connected to the confessional-difficulty gravamen—namely, that one’s individual intellectual activity is somehow less fallen and holds a unique authority in contrast to one’s will or heart. Can we—and do we not often—willfully accept items by faith when even our *hearts* and *minds* say differently?
4. This act would also acknowledge the manner in which our convictions are shared in community. What *we believe* together has a unique authority in contrast to what *I believe* on my own. For example, we as a denomination affirm the ecumenical confessions and the Reformed confessions. This act of the will intentionally declares a *unity* of faith with the church of all ages and places while also *uniquely and distinctly locating* ourselves in unity with Reformed churches within the larger body of Christ.
5. This act would provide a new and middle way to respond to the multitude of *reasons* for which individual believers may find a multitude of *confessional difficulties* across the multitude of Reformed theological *topics* currently creating a potentially infinite number of reasons to disqualify leaders and disaffiliate churches from our denomination. Our history proves this to be more than possible, and it appears to be our likely future. There is a middle way between *compromise* and *separation*. This is not a means of taking exception. It is an act of humble submission to our shared confessions.

6. This act would encourage *more study* of the confessions as well as honesty about encountered difficulties. Without such an act of submission, leaders are more likely to avoid studying the confessions lest such an exploration cause the end of one's leadership or split the local church.
7. This act would offer a means of the very full, honest, robust, and shared alignment to the confessions that our churches seek (see "Synod 2024 FAQ Document," crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ).

Classis Toronto
Tilly Berg, stated clerk

OVERTURE 20

Retract Decision that Gravamen-Submitting Council Members May Not Serve at Classis or Synod

I. Overture

We, the council of The Journey in Longmont, Colorado, overture synod to retract the decision that council members who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen to their council are not eligible to serve in classical or denominational roles and functions.

II. Reason for Overture

Since the inception of the Christian Reformed Church, we have held that original authority resides with the local council as stated in Church Order Article 27-a: "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; *the authority of councils being original*, that of major assemblies being delegated" (emphasis added).

While both classes and synods have authority, as stated in Article 27-b—"The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the classis"—that authority is delegated authority by the local council.

If an officebearer submits a confessional-difficulty gravamen to his or her council and the council determines that his or her confessional-difficulty gravamen does not impede his or her ability to serve on the council—and by that, to serve as that council's delegate to classis or to serve in classical or denominational functions—then the classis and denomination should honor the authority of the local council by allowing that person to serve in classical and denominational capacities.

It is the local council that knows the officebearer the best. The local council knows the officebearer's character, integrity, and motivation, and it is the classis and denominational agencies' responsibility to honor the authority

of the local council by honoring those it recognizes as officebearers and their capacity to serve.

Council of The Journey, Longmont, Colorado
Jeff Peila, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 4, 2025, meeting of Classis Rocky Mountain but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 21

Provide Steps of Accountability toward Churches and Classes in Defiance and Open Rebellion

I. Preamble

Classis Iakota is concerned about the open rebellion that is taking place in the CRCNA. We believe steps are needed both in individual churches and classes—actionable steps of accountability that will help us to more deeply covenant together in our shared confessions.

II. Background

For many years the CRCNA, along with most other Christian denominations, was caught up in the debate about human sexuality. This debate, which had been publicly debated denomination-wide since 2013, centered particularly on the question of whether same-sex sexual activity was among the actions that constituted unchastity and thus was prohibited as sinful according to question and answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Synod launched two study committees to address these questions, and the second committee's Human Sexuality Report was "recommended . . . to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 919). Synod 2022 also affirmed "that 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declare[d] this affirmation 'an interpretation of [a] confession' (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 920). The whole Human Sexuality Report does not have confessional status, but the identification of same-sex sexual activity (whether in a so-called same-sex marriage or outside of one) as prohibited behavior does have confessional status as it is our denomination's understanding of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108. The only sexual activity that is permitted is between one man and one woman in the context of a biblical marriage.

Following the decisions of Synods 2022-2024, the CRCNA has faithfully determined that it is vital for the communication of the true gospel of Jesus Christ that all in leadership positions of pastor, elder, deacon, teacher, board member, trustee, staff, and standing committees, must submit to

God's Word and our three confessional forms of unity, by promoting and defending the denomination's position without exception by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

Synod 2024 instructed all classes to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 928). Furthermore, synod decided that when an officebearer signs the Covenant for Officebearers, it is a statement that he or she has no difficulty or settled convictions "contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions," and that "this includes what synod has declared to have confessional status" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 876). Thus, as we go forward, every classis will be in agreement with the rest of the denomination, and we can rebuild trust with one another as we are all in one accord as the church should be.

Regarding congregations and officebearers that have made public statements against what synod declared to be a confessional matter, Synod 2024 declared that such congregations and officebearers are to be placed on limited suspension after the conclusion of Synod 2024. This suspension includes "a loss of ability to send delegates to classis, synod, the COD, or the CRCNA agencies. Officebearers under limited suspension may attend classis with the privilege of the floor but not as a seated delegate" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 887).

However, there are several instances in which synod's clear instruction has been disregarded (public meeting minutes can be provided to the advisory committee):

- Classis Alberta North seated delegates from churches that are in protest as voting delegates (Oct. 18-19, 2024, Minutes, Art. 3).
- Classis Grand Rapids East said that "full delegations from all congregations shall conduct the ordinary business of classis, but for matters that clearly involve our denominational ties . . . the full delegations by majority vote appoint an *ad hoc* committee to make the necessary decisions during the classis meeting" (Sept. 19, 2024, Minutes, Art. 1.3).
- Alger Park CRC has said that they "will not require those who wish to serve as elders and deacons to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if they cannot do so 'without reservation'" (vimeo of congregational meeting, Jan. 19, 2025).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Heritage Fellowship CRC which calls for the seating of voting delegates who by synodical definition are under limited suspension and who by synodical decision may not vote at classical meetings (Oct. 9, 2024, Minutes, Art. 7).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Fellowship CRC and Willowdale CRC which in the name of protecting the original authority of the local council as well as honoring the authority of the classis, asks classis not to adopt or enact what they consider to be "over-reaching decisions" by Synod 2024. To "not enact" here means (1) ongoing seating of delegates regardless of limited-suspension status

and (2) that there would be no requirement to sign the Covenant for Officebearers for the next two years (Oct. 9, 2024, Minutes, Art. 8).

- The council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ontario, has appealed the decisions of Classis Toronto to Synod 2025, noting that their classis meeting was not duly constituted.

The argument of Classis Toronto, for example, is that since authority originates from the local council, neither classis nor synod have the authority to require officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if the sending council disagrees. If such is the case, then all classical and synodical decisions and instructions are regulated to advisory status only.

And so we see that this argument goes beyond the debate about sexuality; it goes to the heart of what it is to be a confessional denomination. If the doctrines in our confessions may be publicly opposed in a way other than the gravamen process to amend those confessions, then we are not a confessional church, since then our confessions are merely a statement of heritage. Similarly, if synodical decisions can be disregarded, then we are no longer a denomination but, rather, something akin to a “network” or club.

III. Overture

Therefore we overture Synod 2025 quickly and decisively to address the matter of congregations and classes in a state of defiance by means of the following:

- A. Declaring to Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, Toronto, and any other churches and classes that have done similar actions in this past year that their decisions and actions constitute open and defiant rebellion.
- B. Inviting these churches and classes to repent from their rebellious action and be restored to a confessional understanding of faith and practice.
- C. Receiving overtures from these churches and classes as communications only.
- D. Recognizing that, absent of repentance that is communicated in writing by the date of Synod 2025, as law and covenant breakers these churches and classes have cast themselves into the state of limited suspension and are in need of special discipline. The goal of this special discipline is to bring them back into fellowship with the CRCNA following the outline of Church Order Article 84.
- E. Having Synod 2026 judge if special discipline has done its good work to bring these bodies back into fellowship.

Grounds:

1. It is the task of the local classis to bring local churches and officebearers into compliance with our unified confessional ministry. That is not happening in all classes.
2. The principle of authority originating in the congregation does not negate synodical pronouncements.

3. Churches and classes similarly do not have the authority to ignore or change synodical instructions.
4. Titus 3:10-11 (ESV) says, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Synods 2022-2024 have given more than two warnings.
5. These churches and classes have not followed all three aspects of Church Order Article 83, which instructs the church to apply special discipline when officebearers “violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.”

Classis Iakota
Bernard Haan, stated clerk

OVERTURE 22

Celebrate the Repentance and Return of Disciplined Members

I. Preamble

Luke 15 records for us three parables of Jesus regarding the recovery of something lost. In the first parable, the owner of a flock of a hundred sheep leaves ninety-nine and finds the lost one. Upon returning home with his prize, “he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep’” (v. 6).

In the second parable, a woman loses one of her ten silver coins. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and finds it. Upon finding it, “she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (vv. 9-10).

In the third parable, a young man requests his share of his father’s inheritance and squanders it in a foreign country. Once destitute, he repents of his folly and returns to his father’s home with the intention of becoming a servant in the household where he was once an heir. Upon the return of his son, the father runs to his son, welcomes him, and hears his son’s plea of repentance. In return, the father says “to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate” (vv. 22-24).

Should we not also celebrate when our brothers and sisters who were once lost return to us?

II. Overture

We, Classis Northcentral Iowa, overture synod to have a feast of some kind to celebrate the repentance and return of those brothers and sisters who came under discipline as defined by the *Acts of Synod 2024*.

Grounds:

1. The return to the flock, to the household, of those who were once lost is a joyful thing, and we should make this clear.
2. The motive of discipline is not separation but reconciliation. A celebration of reconciliation makes this wholeheartedly clear.

Classis Northcentral Iowa
Steven Mulder, stated clerk

OVERTURE 23

End ‘In Communion’ Relationship with Reformed Church in America

I. Background

According to the 2014 Pella Accord, we are to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504). At that time, the accord naturally meant that ministers from the CRCNA and the RCA could pursue and accept calls in both denominations with a shorter and easier process, and thus something like a “free exchange” of ministers was codified in Church Order Articles 8 and 12 (see Supplements).

However, in the past several years, it has become apparent that the CRCNA and the RCA are not as closely aligned in belief and practice as they might have been in 2014. The “presenting” doctrinal divide has to do with human sexuality. The RCA at present keeps as its official stance the traditional and more importantly biblical understanding of marriage as consisting of one man and one woman and the understanding that sexual activity belongs only within the boundaries of such marriage.

However, in practice, many RCA pastors and congregations teach to the contrary and promote same-sex marriage as a legitimate option for Christians. This is because the RCA has a constitutional system that limits the authority of synods. The CRCNA, on the other hand, not only declared same-sex sexual activity to be unchaste behavior, but also stated that this understanding has always had confessional status in our denomination—and thus officebearers and congregations who disagree are now placed on limited suspension until they repent of their errors or disaffiliate from the denomination. The CRCNA is enacting discipline on this matter, and the RCA is not.

As evidence of this growing divide between the CRCNA and the RCA, same-sex-affirming CRC pastors and churches have left for the RCA.

RCA belief and practice is unique and therefore no longer in communion with the faith or life of the CRC. We expect that division to become more apparent in the years to come and that the free (or expedited) exchange of ministers from both denominations will prove more and more problematic.

II. Overture

Therefore Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2025 to begin the process to remove Article 8-b and other applicable sections (e.g., Supplement, Art. 12-c) from the Church Order and to update the relevant rules, in order to treat the Reformed Church in America ministers, ministries, and churches the same way that all ministers and ministries are treated from other denominations—thus ending the “free exchange” of ministers agreement, the Pella Accord (2014), and the status of being “in communion” with the RCA.

Such transfers of ministers will now require the same labor that is required from any other denomination that is not currently in communion with the CRC. RCA ministers serving on loan to the CRC are required to comply with synod’s decisions by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Article 38-h and Supplement).

Grounds:

1. Our covenantal polity and practiced faith no longer align with the RCA as much as they once did (see Overture 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 450-54). The RCA has no provision that decisions of assemblies are considered settled and binding (see Church Order, Art. 29).
2. In many of our communities the Pella Accord that once connected us to local expressions of the body of Christ now actually separate us from those same local expressions who have themselves left the RCA over biblical convictions.
3. Ending our fellowship and communion with the RCA allows for a formal avenue to address and seek fellowship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Kingdom Network, and other churches that have recently left the RCA.
4. If this overture is adopted in 2025 and implemented in 2026, ministers and congregations will have sufficient time to make adjustments.

Classis Iakota
Bernard Haan, stated clerk

Review the CRCNA's Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches

I. Background

For a large part of our history the CRCNA has taken an active role in ecumenical organizations. In the past we have been a member church of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). In 1953 the REC was faced with the question of whether or not to join with another organization, the World Council of Churches (WCC). The REC decided to refrain from this merger because the WCC permitted “essentially different interpretations of its doctrinal basis, and thus the nature of the Christian faith,” and it represented “itself as a community of faith, but is actually not this” due to member churches holding “basically divergent positions.”¹

In 1988, synod discussed whether the CRC should join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), but the motion was defeated (*Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 564). In 2002 synod reversed course and decided to apply for membership in the WARC, believing that the CRC could affirm its purposes and that the CRC could make an impact on the WARC (*Acts of Synod 2002*, pp. 485-86). After applying, our membership was soon accepted. Along with the recommendation to join the WARC, synod also decided to instruct the Interchurch Relations Committee to present a comprehensive review of the CRC's membership in the WARC to Synod 2008. This review was to include an evaluation of the fruitfulness of the CRC membership in the WARC and, in particular, whether that membership was beneficial both to the CRC and the WARC. This review was to include recommendations regarding continued CRC membership in the WARC (*Acts of Synod 2002*, p. 486).

That comprehensive review never happened. When synod met in 2008, plans were in the works for a merger between the REC and the WARC. At the recommendation of the Interchurch Relations Committee, synod decided not to complete the comprehensive review because of the anticipated merger (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 462). At a meeting at Calvin College in June 2010, the merger officially took place, forming the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). To our knowledge, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church has never officially voted to join WCRC after the merger.

II. Concerns with the WCRC

We are concerned with a number of positions taken by the WCRC. We certainly recognize, as synod and our Ecumenical Charter makes clear, that membership in an ecumenical organization does not necessarily imply endorsement of doctrinal positions or strategies made by that organization. Yet the WCRC's general secretary or appointed spokesperson often speaks to news outlets as representative of the thousands of members who belong

¹ Peter De Klerk and Richard De Ridder, eds. *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church* (1983), p. 329.

to the WCRC. The WCRC constitution gives them this authority: “The executive committee . . . authorizes the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council.”² We question whether we can still affirm the purposes of the WCRC based on the following areas of concern:

1. Questionable doctrinal statements:

- The WCRC has signed on to the *Joint Declaration on Justification* with Roman Catholics, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, and the Anglican Communion.³ This statement confuses justification with sanctification, accepting the idea that since faith produces works, we are then saved by our good works. The statement also says, “We rejoice together that the historical doctrinal differences on the doctrine of justification no longer divide us.”⁴ We wonder how this statement can be true, since there is no repudiation of the historical positions and councils of these churches. The question then arises: What would the thousands of our Reformed ancestors whose lives were snuffed out in the Reformation have said to such a statement?
- The WCRC has signed *The Wittenberg Witness* with the Lutheran World Federation, stating that the Reformed and Lutheran churches no longer have any need for separation and that our differences are not church dividing.⁵ Does this statement take into account the theological differences about the sacraments, our theology of worship, and our systems of church government?
- The 2017 General Assembly of the WCRC adopted the *Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women*, which agrees with only one of the CRC’s denominationally recognized positions on women in office and outrightly contradicts the other.⁶ A Facebook post from the WCRC has launched the #OrdainHer campaign, falsely stating that the views of complementarian churches “stem from outdated beliefs about women’s inferiority and their perceived incapacity to lead as ordained ministers.”⁷

2. Political and economic policy positions that are too specific for the institutional church and include simplistic answers to complex problems.

Many of these decisions can best be left to Christian freedom:

² Art. X.G.2; wcrceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Constitution_and_Bylaws_2017-EN.pdf. See also Jordan Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel* (2010), p. 66.

³ wcrceurope.org/jddj/

⁴ As presented in an appendix to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations report to Synod 2017 (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 352).

⁵ wcrceurope.org/resource/wittenberg-witness/

⁶ wcrceurope.org/justice/ordination-of-women/

⁷ World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), “Journey for Women’s Equality and Ordination,” Nov. 1, 2024; facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=973681844805075&id=100064898042276&_rdr.

- The WCRC holds to the Accra Confession.⁸ The confession rejects the patenting of genetically modified organisms: “Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain” (Art. 8). It denounces specific governments and institutions: “The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with the international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic, or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners” (Art. 13). It also rejects economic policies that “privatizes those gifts of God meant for all” (Art. 25).⁹
 - A letter signed by the general secretary of the WCRC asks G20 nations to initiate a progressive wealth tax, financial transaction tax, and carbon tax at national and global levels, reintroduce capital gains and inheritance taxes, and reintroduce reparations for slavery and other social and ecological debts.¹⁰
 - The WCRC made a statement calling for peace in West Asia after Israel’s 2024 offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran’s retaliatory strikes that asks for
 - an immediate ceasefire by all involved parties.
 - an end to the ongoing genocide.
 - the cessation of all military support to Israel.
 - full compliance with the guidelines of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice.¹¹
3. A greater emphasis on social justice instead of the church’s primary calling of gospel proclamation and witness. This emphasis has overshadowed the witness of the CRCNA.

III. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures synod to create a task force to present a comprehensive review of the CRCNA’s membership in the WCRC and report back at the latest to Synod 2027. This report will include the following: (1) an analysis of the concerns of this overture, (2) a recommendation for synod’s approval or disapproval of continued membership in the WCRC, and (3) the draft of a written communication from the CRC synod to the WCRC about these concerns.

Grounds:

1. Such a review was approved by Synod 2002 as a part of joining WARC (the predecessor to the WCRC) but was never completed.

⁸ wcrceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AccraConfession-EN.pdf

⁹ See Jordan Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel*, p. 61.

¹⁰ thebanner.org/news/2020/08/world-communion-of-reformed-churches-among-four-groups-asking-g20-leaders-for-economic

¹¹ <https://wcrceurope.org/world-communion-of-reformed-churches-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-amid-escalating-violence-in-west-asia>

2. Such a review would give clear guidance to the church regarding advisability of maintaining membership in the WCRC and whether or not to officially sanction its work.
3. A communication of concern helps the CRC to live out its original purpose for joining WARC: “It may reasonably be presumed that the CRC can make an impact on WARC and, through it, on other churches of Christ” (*Acts of Synod 2002*, p. 486).

Classis Illiana
Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk

OVERTURE 25

Focus on Officebearer Training

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to direct the Office of General Secretary to direct Thrive ministries to focus on officebearer training in the coming year, including collating and developing materials to be used at the classical and congregational levels that incorporate the Covenant for Officebearers, the creeds and confessions, church polity (including the Church Order), and the practical aspects of ministry including visitation, assessing needs, discipleship, and discipline. The training should also include a review of the unique nature of the individual offices and their respective spheres.

Grounds:

1. Scripture, our confessions, the Church Order, and the CRC form for ordination/installation all hold a very high view of the offices of the church. While we take seriously the training for ministers and commissioned pastors, we have often neglected the training of elders and deacons. The act of discipling an individual prior to ordination for all offices, including those of elder and deacon, shows the church respecting this high view of office and honoring those being ordained by preparing them for service in Christ’s kingdom.
2. Such a task, done well, is too substantial for an individual congregation to take on.
3. Our Reformed heritage has a high view of church office and expects to have well trained and equipped leaders for the church.
4. Educational materials for officebearer training would be of immense value to the local church for generations to come, significantly strengthening their ministry with well-equipped and trained leaders.
5. Many other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have a long standing practice of such training with great benefit. We can learn from them (and surely borrow from well-designed and -tested practices).
6. Many of these resources already exist and could be reviewed and collated or summarized for practical use in each of our congregations.

7. Due to a shift in culture, there is a growing lack of biblical and theological knowledge in the membership of our churches. To educate office-bearers through discipleship to properly prepare them for service in Christ's church is critical.

Classis Heartland,
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

OVERTURE 26

Identify, Train, and Maintain Individuals with a License to Exhort

I. Background

The past several years have proved that ministers of the Word are retiring from full-time ministry at a far greater rate than ministers of the Word are ordained into full-time ministry. The latest *Forum* published by Calvin Theological Seminary (Winter 2025) brings to light other circumstances that cause ordained ministers to transition out of ministry and points out the lack of individuals to fill these positions.

II. Overture

Therefore we, Classis Heartland, overture Synod 2025 to encourage every church within the CRCNA to identify, train, and maintain an individual with a license to exhort in their church by Synod 2027. Such an individual is to meet all the requirements of Church Order Article 43-b.

Grounds:

1. Raising up leaders in the faith who can faithfully preach and teach God's Word for the purpose of continuing discipleship is important for the faithful growth of the local church.
2. It is necessary for the work of pastors and classis to aid in identifying and raising leaders for the body of Christ, by praying, training, and encouraging the gifts of ministry.
3. God's Word commands that every church have a teaching elder who leads the flock of Christ.
4. This effort leads to greater accountability for local church leaders' faith and life.
5. This encouragement provides an opportunity to establish a disciplined course of training for the discipleship of all who are licensed to exhort and commissioned pastors, and for the motivation to seek further ordination in the CRCNA.
6. This effort provides opportunities for more churches to be planted in the local classis.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

Add a Supplement to Church Order Article 3

I. Overture

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to add a supplement to Church Order Article 3 to include a discipleship/educational component for all offices, including those of elder and deacon. This training would benefit the church and the individual by equipping officebearers with the tools needed to fulfill the tasks of the offices to which they have been called. Therefore we recommend that synod adopt the following addition to the Church Order as Supplement, Article 3:

The church shall complete training prior to or within six months of ordination for all officebearers, including a study of the Covenant for Officebearers, the creeds and confessions, church polity, and the ministry tasks for their particular office so as to ensure that individuals are prepared and equipped for the weighty tasks that each office requires.

Grounds:

1. Scripture, our confessions, the Church Order, and the CRC form for ordination/installation—all hold a very high view of the offices of the church. While we take seriously the training for ministers and commissioned pastors, we have often neglected the training of elders and deacons. The act of discipling an individual prior to ordination for all offices, including those of elder and deacon, shows the church respecting this high view of office and honoring those being ordained by preparing them for service in Christ's kingdom.
2. On the topic of equipping the saints, H. DeMoor says, "The offices . . . are organs of Christ's gracious rule; they constitute . . . the presence of Christ enabling his people to fulfill their calling; their authority is an *administered* authority which remains the authority of the Lord of the church; [and they exist] to equip the saints for ministry" (as quoted in *Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 286, from DeMoor's book *Equipping the Saints*).
3. The official acts of the church can be performed by elders in "circumstances of special need" (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 289; see pp. 288-90). If in some circumstances the official acts of the church can be performed by elders, there is a definite need for discipling and further training for the office. This is all the more critical in a period where there is a growing shortage of ministers, where elders will be increasingly called upon to perform more acts of ministry.
4. For some individuals the issue is not a lack of willingness to serve in the offices of elder or deacon but, rather, a sense of inadequacy as they feel ill-equipped for the tasks required by the office.

5. Due to a shift in culture, there is a growing lack of biblical and theological knowledge in the membership of our churches. To educate officebearers through discipleship to properly prepare them for service in Christ's church is critical.
6. Educational materials for officebearer training would be of immense value to the local church for generations to come, significantly strengthening their ministry with well-equipped and trained leaders.
7. Many other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have a long-standing practice of such training with great benefit. We can learn from them (and surely borrow from well-designed and -tested practices).
8. A person's faith is not fully formed once that person becomes a member of the church or once that person is nominated to serve in the office of elder or deacon. If we take training seriously for secular vocations, how much more for spiritual vocations. Those called to fill the offices of elder and deacon should be eager to grow and develop in faith formation, that they may serve Christ and his church to the best of their ability, to God's glory and his people's good.
9. Many of these resources already exist, but the local church often lacks the time or expertise to assemble them in a cohesive plan. They could be reviewed and collated or summarized for practical use in each of our congregations with long-term benefit.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

OVERTURE 28

Envision Two Distinct Christian Reformed Churches

I. Process

In a concrete demonstration of respect for the weighty issues raised in this overture, and to give greater confidence in the result by way of full transparency, it is requested that the officers of Synod 2025 make the following ruling about procedure before the June session begins:

1. Two advisory committees, one made up of synodical delegates from the U.S. and one made up of delegates from Canada, will deliberate in committee independently and also report on this overture on the floor of synod independently.
2. At the time of the voting on this overture, the tally of votes by the delegates' country of origin will be made known (i.e., the votes in favour and against among the Canadian delegates, and the votes in favor and against among the U.S. delegates).
3. The outcome of the deliberation and vote by delegates will be referred to the churches for confirmation. Each church in the U.S. and Canada will

- be asked to vote on this ecclesiastical reorganization. Each church's decision is to be reported to the Office of General Secretary by November 1.
4. If a majority of either Canadian or U.S. churches supports the reorganization, the overture shall be considered passed.

II. Context

Canadian members of the CRCNA have, for many years, been discouraged by the ways in which ministry in Canada has been overshadowed or hindered by the binational nature and structure of the denomination. Off and on there have been calls for a separate CRC Canada, but the response has typically been to make structural changes (such as those resulting from the 2022 Structure and Leadership Task Force [SALT] report) that do not address the core problem. That is, structural changes have not allowed Canadian members, ministry leaders, churches, and classes to have full direction of ministries and resources to equip us to be more fully effective in our own context. With the increasing differences between our two countries, it is past time for the CRCNA to restructure into two sister denominations.

III. Overture

The Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario, overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

- A. Envision the CRCNA as two distinct Christian Reformed Churches, one in Canada and one in the United States.
- B. Make the changes necessary for this ecclesiastical reorganization to be accomplished.
- C. Task the U.S. Ministry Board and the Canadian Ministry Board with re-writing the relevant joint ministry agreements to ensure continued cooperation and collaboration among agency staff.

Grounds:

1. The differing ministry contexts in each country (historical, cultural, and political) require different missional and ministry approaches with the full support of autonomous denominational structures.

Canada and the United States are different countries, with different political, religious, educational, media, and social cultures, which lead to different assumptions and approaches in diverse matters from politics to health care, from criminal justice to patriotism. Christ's followers in each country are called to bring the gospel to bear on all aspects of life in community and to preach the good news in a way that speaks to the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. Fulfilling that calling faithfully requires contextualization by those who understand the culture from within and have the authority to make final decisions about what effective ministry looks like. In many ways, being a cross-border denomination is more harmful than helpful to the Canadian church.

For example, separate Canadian and U.S. CRC denominations will better enable effective missional initiatives and local church witness within

Canada. In recent months, differences and tensions between our two countries have increased. The average Canadian (87%, according to recent polling) bristles at talk of using economic coercion to force Canada to become the 51st state. In such a context, being a minority partner within what is seen as an increasingly evangelical American denomination is harmful to our outreach.

It is difficult, within our present denominational structure, for Canadian ministry to establish itself as distinctly Canadian. This is not a new challenge; it was publicly named already back in 1957, the denomination's centennial year, in a document published by two Canadian CRC pastors, Revs. Francois Guillaume and Henry A. Venema:

Everything that applies and is good for the United States is not necessarily applicable and good for Canada. We must find a way in which each of our Church sectors fully realize their own respective rights and powers. We have our own Classes. Our own national particular synods are absolutely necessary unto these things. . . . Let us postpone it no longer.¹

Since 1957, the struggles and tensions have continued in different ways, from the failure of Synod 1999 to adopt a regional synod proposal, to the repeated loss of ministry leaders in Canada.² While the current structure that came out of the SALT report has addressed many concerns, it ultimately has not been able to satisfy all the requirements of contextualized ministry. For instance, in spite of the existence of the Canadian Ministry Board within the Council of Delegates (COD), Canadian members still have no direct means to oversee, guide, or correct our shared ministries in Canada.

2. Separate Canadian and U.S. denominations are necessary to ensure that all decisions which affect ministry in Canada are made by Canadian ministry leaders.

At present, the final authority on matters of ecclesiology and ministry is the annual denominational synod. This body's delegates, generally reflective of the numbers of members in each country, are 78 percent from the U.S. and 23 percent from Canada. This imbalance is slightly mitigated but still strongly reflected in the composition of the COD. It is to be expected, and is the case, that when discussing and voting on policy and ministry direction, the decisions generally reflect what is preferred and fitting for ministry in the U.S. While this is understandable, it leaves Canadian churches and our shared and individual ministries at a dis-

¹ Francois Guillaume and Henry A. Venema, *The United States and Canada in the Christian Reformed Church* (Toronto, Ont.: Pro Rege Publishing Company, 1957), p. 47.

² Ray Elgersma, "Why I Changed My Mind about the CRC's Bi-Nationality" [Letter to the editor], *Christian Courier* (2024, Mar. 4); Christiancourier.ca.

tinct disadvantage. In numerous examples, both past and present, ministry in Canada has suffered because Canadian needs were given a lower priority to CRCNA goals and objectives.

For example, a recent policy decision of the COD was that, in the light of faltering revenues for denominational ministries, actions taken to reduce staff or programs “should be as similar as possible on each side of the border when a specific agency program is impacted.” The policy further notes that “even if [revenue decline] is a country-specific issue, many times there will be implications for joint ministry.” What is missing is a parallel policy that recognizes differentiation based on context, to provide balance and guidance in cases where ministry priorities in the two countries differ. The Canadian Ministry Plan of 2004 was shelved when, during a time of fiscal restraint, the denominational structures put a higher priority on cross-border sameness over country-specific ministry needs.

Currently, decision making is divided into two spheres: ecclesiastical (synod) and ministry/operations (the COD). This is inconsistent with a Reformed emphasis on integration of word and work, something that is especially valued in the Reformational heritage within the Canadian church. Furthermore, experience in Canada shows how theological decisions affect operations (e.g., Indigenous ministries, justice ministries, and the purpose and use of gravamina). By integrating theological deliberations and ministry operations at a Canadian synod, this problematic and unnecessary dividing wall can be removed.

3. Restructuring to create denominations in each country is the best way to ensure proper governance and accountability within the CRC in Canada.

Members of Canadian churches who want to have some input into Canadian ministries are told they should speak to their classis delegate to the Council of Delegates. This person, chosen by delegates at one classis meeting, may or may not be known by church members, and the delegate may or may not take forward any suggestions or concerns that they receive or hear. There is no formal and transparent process, such as overtures, that Canadian members can use to have a more meaningful voice in decisions about priorities and directions for ministry in Canada. While concerns are acknowledged, there is no clear way of knowing if they are taken seriously. There is no clear process of accountability back to members of churches. Appointment of a delegate to the Council of Delegates by a classis is a weak form of accountability when the desired goal is dynamic, shared ministry from local to regional to national levels.

An additional governance structure problem is the inherent conflict of interest in the exercise of duty of care. Members of the Canadian Ministry Board wear two hats. They have a responsibility to protect the best

interests of Canadian CRC congregations, and they have a responsibility to protect the best interests of the whole CRCNA. Much of the time those interests may converge, but there are times when the best interests of the two may not be the same. In those moments their first priority is to the whole COD (i.e., they are required to go along with a decision of the whole COD, even if there is strong evidence that another decision would serve the interests of Canadian churches better). An example is the inability of the members of the Canadian Ministry Board to seriously consider the merits of separate U.S. and Canadian denominations. They have acknowledged that speaking in favour of that would constitute a breach of their duty of care to the larger COD. They may be genuinely convinced that the binational system serves Canada better; but, if they did not think so, they would be unable to pursue their views because it would violate their primary duty of care obligation to the COD.

It is unfair to put people in positions where they have a conflict of interest. Good governance in responsible institutions finds ways to prevent such conflicts. A Canadian CRC with a Canadian synod to deliberate and make decisions for ministry in Canada would provide the Canadian Ministry Board with a clearer mandate, more specific directions from a wider membership, and more robust accountability.

4. The creation of country-specific Christian Reformed denominations will create deliberative and collaborative spaces with the full authority to make decisions.

CRC congregations and ministry leaders in Canada currently have no space or assembly to gather together and share ideas, hopes, and goals for working together from coast to coast to coast. The result is disparate efforts and hindered imaginations. The synod-mandated Canadian gatherings are not structured or equipped to do this important work.

Canadian CRC members have demonstrated again and again their capacity for strong and creative shared ministries that have a powerful and lasting impact in society. The Christian Labour Association of Canada, the *Christian Courier*, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Redeemer University, and the Institute for Christian Studies are but a few examples. They are a demonstration of the historic Reformed understanding of the call to engage with and transform our world for Christ.

It might be argued that these successful examples demonstrate that there is no need of a distinct Canadian CRC, considering what's been accomplished and our demonstrated ability to work together. The truth is that much of our best ministry came about when Canadian members did have a collaborative space, when the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (CCRCC) was active between 1966 and 1997. Given the many areas in which Canadians have had a shared and unique inter-

est in ministry together—reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours, campus ministry, institutional chaplaincy, prison ministry, refugee resettlement, diaconal ministry, and environmental stewardship, to name a few—one can only imagine what could be accomplished with the time and space to collaborate together. A Canadian synod would create stronger country-wide partnerships, increase formal and substantive ministry accountability, and bring together ministry knowledge, leadership skills, spiritual gifts, and other resources to better steward our shared calling within Canada.

5. A Canadian CRC will be better equipped to forge a uniquely Canadian theological culture and identity.

The theology and practice of the wider church in Canada has long been heavily influenced by Christianity in the U.S. In his foreword to *Blessed Are the Undone* by Angela Reitsma Bick and Peter Schuurman, Neal De Roo writes:

Angela and Peter point out that it is a particular kind of Christianity that is being deconstructed today: an American (and predominantly white) evangelicalism that has tied itself quite closely to certain cultural and political markers. . . . That American evangelicalism is American doesn't automatically make it suspect. But it does make it American in ways that may not fit well within our context here in Canada.³

Such deconstruction has made clearer than before that the church in Canada needs to wrestle with, debate, develop, and articulate a uniquely Canadian understanding of what it means to follow Christ. This is because the societal context for the church in each country is quite different: “Christians are—sorry to say—an embarrassed minority in Canada, while evangelicals in the U.S. are a powerful and controversial voting bloc that casts a shadow to the north.”⁴

The evidence of a need (and giftedness) for differing approaches to being the church on either side of the border are already present in the CRCNA. It has long been observed that Canadian CRC congregations and members have a unique heart for certain areas of ministry and theological focus, such as diaconal work, justice advocacy, campus ministry, and Indigenous reconciliation. Another example is the role of women in ecclesiastical offices. In Canada, women are seated at all classes, whereas four U.S. classes do not permit women to be delegates; 87 percent of Canadian churches have women deacons, compared to 68 percent in the U.S.; 72 percent of Canadian churches have women elders, compared to 44 percent in the U.S.

³ Angela Reitsma Bick and Peter Schuurman, *Blessed Are the Undone: Testimonies of Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada* (Saskatoon, Sask.: New Leaf Network Press, 2024), p. xv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The development of a Canadian expression of Reformed Christianity is difficult as a small minority within a binational denomination. In fact, it could be argued that the identification of the CRCNA as a “binational” denomination itself reflects a U.S. understanding of nationality. In Canada, Quebec is recognized as a distinct nation within our federation. Our Indigenous neighbours are recognized as the First Nations within our country’s borders.

6. Restructuring the CRCNA into a CRC Canada and a CRC U.S. is consistent with the recently adopted global CRC initiative.

Synod 2024 adopted the report of a COD study committee tasked with exploring “the integration of international churches into the composition of the CRC.”⁵ The adoption of this report reflects a desire to bless and be blessed in turn by our sister denominations around the world through a shared Reformed identity and unique cultural and contextual differences. It is an expression of a “vision for a deeper global engagement” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 708).

While the CRCNA has decided to pursue this initiative, synod also acknowledged a number of challenges identified by the Global Vision report, including “physical distance; cultural and language differences.” They also stated that “an ever-present concern is paternalism,” along with the “concern about maintaining local autonomy” expressed by some leaders of Reformed denominations outside North America (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 691, 704). The Canadian experience suggests these global leaders are wise to be cautious, and these concerns have been repeatedly experienced and identified by CRC ministry leaders in Canada.

In pursuing this Global Vision, Synod 2024 made a firm statement that free and equal partnership with churches in different countries is a high value. It was also made clear that the goal is not incorporating or absorbing those other denominations into the CRCNA and blunting their distinctiveness or unique contribution, but instead “developing an ecclesiastical body that would be the global CRC church. This body would not be a single global denomination but, rather, an opportunity for the CRCNA and its global partners to go deeper in partnership with each other.”⁶ The creation of a distinct Canadian CRC in an equal partner relationship to a distinct U.S. CRC would be a consistent application of these expressed values.

Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church,
Ancaster, Ontario,
Ed Witvoet, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to Classis Hamilton at its February 22, 2025, meeting but was not adopted.

⁵ See crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ, “The CRCNA’s Global Vision,” question 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

Prioritize Church Planting within the Denominational Budget

We take note of the anticipated decrease in funding for church planting within Resonate Global Mission's budget and the decision to reduce/eliminate all grants for church planting.

In light of this, we overture synod to direct the general secretary, the Resonate Global Mission director, and the Church Planting Core Initiative to re-prioritize church planting within the denominational budget. Church planting is vital to our present existence and our future.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA has been experiencing a tremendous decline.
2. The elimination of grant funding for church planting is incompatible with our stated goal of reversing this trend of decline.

Classis Southeast U.S.
Vivy Cassis, stated clerk

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNICATION 1**Classis Red Mesa**

As our delegates to synod agree to sign the Covenant for Officebearers, Classis Red Mesa continues to remain a classis in protest. We do not protest anything in the creeds and confessions, rather we protest the changes to the gravamen process ratified by Synod 2024, as communicated in Article 5 of the Church Order. In particular, the requirement for officebearers to recuse themselves from classis and synod when they file a confessional-difficulty gravamen.

We treasure our denomination's colorful history of discussion, discernment, and disagreement about nonsalvific issues. For we know that even as we disagree, we can stand in alignment and agreement in worship before our Creator.

We lament the loss of our ability to dialogue and hold opposing opinions, and we grieve the loss of the ability to live together in unity as many feel excluded, living under suspicion with their consciences constrained. We pray that God will continue to provide opportunities for all of us to grow in our faith journey as followers of Jesus Christ.

Since our protest is about changes to the Church Order and has nothing to do with any reservations to the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA, we do not see any barriers to our full participation in classis or synod meetings.

Classis Red Mesa
John Greydanus, stated clerk

COMMUNICATION 2**Classis Grand Rapids East**

Classis Grand Rapids East sends the following communication to Synod 2025 in service of your process of discernment.

This is a progress report on conversations that have happened at various levels: within the Classis Grand Rapids East executive committee, among pastors and leaders of churches in our classis, and with input from other Grand Rapids-area CRC pastors and leaders. Church Order Article 39 notes the nature and purpose of a classis in the CRC, and the role especially of synod in any redistricting of classes. The proposal below is intended as a conversation starter within our classis, for other CRC congregations in the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and with synod.

I. Background

As Synods 2022-2024 unfolded, a majority of congregations in Classis Grand Rapids East began to move toward disaffiliation from the CRCNA. Most of these anticipate finalizing their disaffiliations prior to or soon after

Synod 2025. Those congregations that have chosen to remain with the CRCNA face two difficult possibilities: either continue as a much-diminished Classis Grand Rapids East, or disband and disperse the classis to join neighboring classes.

II. Imagining an alternative

We have begun a discussion of what may be a compelling alternative: invite Grand Rapids congregations from neighboring classes to join with the remaining Classis Grand Rapids congregations to form a new “Grand Rapids City Classis.” As a place to begin, we have shared initial communications with congregations in the Grand Rapids urban and metro area, using as initial boundaries Leonard Street (North), 44th Street (South), Burlingame Avenue (West), and East Beltline (East).

Church Order Article 39 says, “A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God’s will; offer one another mutual support and accountability; find ways to live out a collective calling within their region; and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination.”

To that end, we are encouraging conversation regarding the constitution of a new classis that encompasses the heart of the city of Grand Rapids and exists to serve our diverse city. This “Grand Rapids City Classis” could seek to fulfill the nature and purpose of a classis with congregations

- who are within, or border upon, the city of Grand Rapids proper.
- who represent the cultural and ethnic diversity of our city.
- who are passionate about ministry needs that are prevalent in urban environments (e.g., housing and food insecurity, racial reconciliation, cross-cultural fellowship, evangelism).
- whose leaders are committed to keeping covenant with the CRCNA, upholding a historic Christian view of marriage, and wish to grow in caring and effective ministry in areas of gender and sexuality.

III. Early response

A sketch of these ideas was sent to area churches and an initial Zoom meeting was held on December 20, 2024. Twelve people attended the meeting, representing eight congregations. Several others gave feedback via email. Responses (at the meeting and via email) were quite positive. Participants spoke of the idea as attractive, intriguing, “a hopeful vision,” and a “positive and beautiful option.”

They also raised a number of issues and questions, including the following:

- Would this create an enclave that would continue or exacerbate some of the rural/urban divide in the CRC?
- What would be the impact on the various classes (Grand Rapids South, Grand Rapids North, Grandville, Thornapple Valley), and how would they receive this idea?

- What might be done in policy or culture relative to women in ministry?
- What might be done in policy or culture relative to ethnic-minority leadership?
- How broadly/narrowly might the bullet point regarding marriage and sexuality be interpreted and applied?
- What would be the impact on CRC-connected agencies and institutions (Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, etc.)
- Who would finally decide such things (councils, congregations, classes, synod)?

IV. Conclusion

We do not have answers to all of these questions, but we think they are important. And we thought it both valuable and important to give a summary of this conversation to Synod 2025. There are too many considerations and stakeholders for us to bring an overture at this time. But we want to inform synod of these conversations, and we encourage prayerful and wise discernment on how classis arrangements might best serve the cause of Christ's kingdom in our city and denomination.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Robert Arbogast, stated clerk

COMMUNICATION 3

Classis B.C. North-West

As Classis B.C. North-West delegates, at our meeting of classis on February 25-26, 2025, we wish to share with Synod 2025 the impact of the discipline-related and gravamen-related decisions from Synod 2024. We wonder if there is another way of guiding individual officebearers and congregations. For some congregations, there is not only concern with some of synod's recent decisions but also a sincere struggle with implementing those decisions. In some cases, officebearers have resigned their positions and members have left their congregations, causing hardship and pain. We lament this reality. At the same time, we acknowledge that in the midst of this hardship our denomination is sincerely trying to find a way to call one another to faithfulness to our denominational covenants and to our shared witness to the ways we live out the gospel. This is a significant challenge.

Classis B.C. North-West heard these concerns from delegates and congregations in its October 2024 meeting. In response to this, during our February 25, 2025 meeting, and with the support of Rev. Sean Baker (Thrive), and Rev. Martin Vellekoop (B.C. Restorative Practices Task Force), we as delegates spent the afternoon being led through two trust-building activities:

1. Working through a polarity exercise on holding “denomination as shared beliefs” alongside “denomination as shared community and history.” Both are necessary, and we were able to see the strengths and the weaknesses if one of these poles were overlooked.
2. Working through listening circles with agreement-making, empowering us to listen well to each other, and giving us actionable decisions that will continue to shape our life together as classis moving forward. We recommend a similar process to synod so that our broader community life can be strengthened in a similar way.

This communication is an outcome of this process.

We believe Synod 2024’s pursuit of setting clear guidelines related to confessional adherence led to more far-reaching consequences—namely, the erosion of trust for individual officebearers and B.C. North-West congregations. For example, we note the following:

- Communication between delegates has been more difficult. Many fear that we have lost the ability to hold relationships with each other and our family members.
- The current language at synod regarding the confessional-difficulty process has precluded some members.
- We grieve that some officebearers in our congregations are now unable to serve.
- Synod 2024’s focus on “without reservation” (Supplement, Art. 5-a, A, 1) has brought a focus on one’s individual conscience, at the expense of an equally important emphasis on the *manner* in which the officebearers will serve in their roles.
- Synod 2024’s initiating a process of “limited suspension” brought about a climate of fear that resulted in some congregations focusing on disaffiliation, discipline, and bylaws in their congregations, instead of discernment and directing that energy toward learning how better to apply the confessions in our contexts.

May the Lord continue to lead this church that he loves: congregants, officebearers, church councils, and classical and synodical delegates.

Classis B.C. North-West
Kathy N. Smith, stated clerk

Council of Washington D.C. CRC

Over the past four years, multiple synods have encouraged ongoing discussion about faith and sexuality across our denomination. In that spirit, we wish to add this essay by member Ryan Struyk to our denominational conversation. We are not all in agreement with every point or conclusion, but we find it a substantive and thoughtful contribution to the church's continued work.

Reformed Christians view God's work in the world through a creation, fall, redemption, and consummation framework—what N.T. Wright describes as a grand drama. Act 1 starts with Creation. It's followed with the Fall in Act 2, the story of Israel in Act 3, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Act 4, and the early church in Act 5, Scene 1. We know the play will end with the new creation in Act 6. Our job now is to fill in Act 5, Scene 2.¹

How we live out our moment in God's story hinges not only on how we understand the previous acts, but also how we understand the coming act. Neo-Calvinist giant Herman Bavinck emphasizes both the continuity *and* the transformation in *new* creation: "The point of arrival returns to the point of departure, and is *simultaneously* a high point elevated high above the point of departure. The works of God describe a circle which strives upward like a spiral."² Here's one of my favorite paragraphs:

Just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, as carbon is converted into diamond, as the grain of wheat upon the dying ground produces other grains of wheat, as all of nature revives in the spring and dresses up in celebrative clothing, as the believing community is formed out of Adam's fallen race, as the resurrection body is raised from the body that is dead and buried in the earth, so, too, by the re-creating power of Christ, the new heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world, radiant in enduring glory and forever set free from the bondage of decay.³

When we think about a caterpillar or a chrysalis, we can hardly imagine the creative potential of the butterfly that will one day emerge. New creation is more. In Bavinck's own words: "Christ gives more than sin stole; grace was made much more to abound."⁴

Perhaps the most obvious biblical data we have to confirm this view is the nature of Christ's resurrected body. It is not a brand-new body. The nail marks are still in his hands. Jesus ate food. Thomas suggested touching his

¹ Wright, N.T. "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative? The Laing Lecture 1989." *Vox Evangelica*, vol. 21, 1991, p. 25.

² Bavinck, Herman. *Our Reasonable Faith*, 1909, p. 144. Quoted in Veenhof, Jan, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," *Pro Rege*, Vol. 34: No. 4, 2006, p. 22.

³ Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 1899, p. 719.

⁴ Bavinck, Herman. *De algemeene genade*, 1894, p. 43. Quoted in Veenhof, Jan, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," *Pro Rege*, Vol. 34: No. 4, 2006, p. 22.

side. Yet, it is not the same as his previous body. Jesus suddenly appeared in a locked room. He disappeared after the Road to Emmaus. His resurrected body ascended into heaven.

Traditionalist scholar Darrin W. Snyder Belousek suggests that embracing same-sex marriage requires “replac[ing],” “rescind[ing],” or even “forsak[ing]” God’s intention at creation.⁵ He adds: “Seeing the ‘new’ in Christ as overcoming the ‘old’ in creation sets Christ the Savior against Christ the creator.”⁶

But leaning into Bavinck’s view of eschatology, I respectfully disagree. Revelation 21 paints a picture of the new creation that, frankly, repeatedly violates creation order. There will be no sun or moon. There will be no more sea. There will be no more night. Our bodies will be transformed. And there will be no more marriage. But more on that later.

My friend Jess Joustra, one of the world’s leading Bavinckian theology experts, writes that Jesus doesn’t produce a new *law*, but he brings “a new *understanding* of the law.” She continues: “Nothing is lost in the law; the original meaning and intent is gained.”⁷ What is the “original meaning and intent” for us to gain in marriage?

Here is the bottom line: Our eschatological direction does not point us toward creation, but toward *new* creation. We are not staying in the chrysalis, but we are joining creation in turning into butterflies. Could creation—and therefore, marriage—be right now today on its way to unfurling its wings?

Augustine outlined three core tenets of marriage in a widely accepted Western Christian marriage ethic: permanence, fidelity, and procreation. We can apply a Reformed, creation-fall-redemption framework to each of these three dimensions to understand its evolution from Genesis to Revelation.

	Creation	Fall	Redemption → Consummation
Perma- nence	God creates Adam and Eve to live forever in full communion with God and each other	Death divides and law of Moses allows for divorce due to hardness of hearts	Christ says marriage does not exist in heaven after the resurrection

⁵ Snyder Belousek, Darrin W. *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union*. Baker Academic, 2021, pp. 60, 81, 154.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷ Joustra, Jessica. “Jesus the Law Restorer: Law and the Imitation of Christ in Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Ethics,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*, Vol. 6, Iss. 2, p. 328.

Fidelity	God creates marriage as an exclusive bond between Adam and Eve in Genesis	Men marry multiple wives through polygamy and pursue sex out of marriage	Christ says that lust itself constitutes adultery in one's heart already
Procreation	God calls humankind to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth in creation mandate	God curses Eve with pain in childbirth, and infertility derails entire family lines	God's family grows today through the Great Commission and includes Gentiles

In Creation, God ordained marriage to be permanent—that is, that the marriage bond could not be broken by death or divorce. It was exclusive—neither partner could violate it by leaving it for someone else, and no one else could enter the marriage bond. God also ordained marriage as the rightful place for Adam and Eve to fulfill God's mandate to grow God's family on earth.

After the Fall, marriage is no longer always the permanent institution it was intended to be because of death and divorce. The Fall also shatters the ideal of fidelity—commitments are broken, polygamy emerges, and prophets use the metaphor of an unfaithful spouse. The Fall also breaks God's good gift of procreation: pain is increased in childbirth. Some couples experience infertility, including biblical figures like Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth. Still, God keeps the procreative lineage of the covenant going for God's people—ultimately culminating in a baby in a manger.

Now Jesus redeems each dimension of marriage by both embracing God's intent at creation and also making it new in the redemptive age. Jesus reiterates the creational permanence norm by rejecting nearly all reasons for divorce (Matt. 5:31-32). But notably, Jesus says that marriage does not exist in the resurrection, a stunning new revelation about the ultimate *impermanence* of marriage (Matt. 22:30). Christ's redemptive work also embraces a new vision for the fidelity dimension of marriage by proclaiming that anyone who lusts has already committed adultery in their heart—both honoring what came before and making it new by revealing its core meaning and intent (Matt. 5:27-28).

Finally, Christ both fundamentally makes new the procreation mandate while embracing its original intent. When Jesus expands God's family to include Gentiles more fully, the move also replaces the necessity of a biological family with the new reality of a spiritual family. A Synod 2003 panel says, "In the New Testament, adoption into the family of God through Christ is the theological concept that supersedes procreation as the point of entry into the covenant" (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 283).

Progressive scholar Robert Song writes: “Unlike the old covenant, in which membership of the chosen community was determined by shared ancestral blood, membership in the new covenant community is determined by sharing in the blood of Christ.”⁸ “If we accept that sex even in a non-procreative context can be good, and that there is no final reason why all committed relationships should be intrinsically or deliberately open to procreation, we are opening the way to same-sex relationships.”⁹

Even Snyder Belousek points to this moment as one in which “traditionalists must accept the burden of argument,” particularly when it comes to contraception. “Christians cannot, consistently, affirm intentionally non-procreative marriage and then oppose same-sex union on account that God intended procreation as a good integral to marriage.”¹⁰ Yet that is exactly what the CRCNA has done: Synod 2003 determined that nonprocreation in marriage is a “disputable matter” — allowing “a husband and wife the freedom to prayerfully before God choose not to have children” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 648).

So, does Christ’s work abolish the creational good of children? Of course not. Without a doubt, children are a blessing from God. But, in short, the creational *intent* of procreation has been made new. Our new covenant family is God’s family!

In Genesis, God creates Eve as an ‘ezer kenegdo for Adam — or a “like-opposite” partner.¹¹ Why? Men and women are “like” because they are both human — “bone of my bone” and “flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). But how are they “opposite?” Why does it matter? And what are those differences now in the already-but-not-yet of Christ’s redemptive work? If procreation is no longer the binding force undergirding the like-opposite ethic in marriage, another option is gender complementarity — specifically, male headship.

The traditionalist case for male headship originates in Genesis 2 — in which Eve is created as a “helper suitable” for Adam. Adam names her and receives her; Eve is silent. Traditionalists say multiple New Testament passages appear to confirm the headship principle — 1 Corinthians 11:2 (“the head of the woman is man”); 1 Corinthians 14:34 (“women should remain silent in the churches”); and 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.”).¹²

⁸ Song, Robert. *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships*. SCM Press, 2014, p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰ Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture and the Church*, p. 160.

¹¹ Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Marriage with the Wisdom of God*. Hodder & Stoughton, 2011, p. 195.

¹² For much, much more detail, see also Report 33, *Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 282-376; Report 26, *Agenda for Synod 1990*, pp. 309-30; Report 31, *Agenda for Synod 1992*, pp. 359-83; Committee to Review the Decision re Women in Office for Synod 2000, *Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 351-407.

In 1984, synod narrowed male headship by rejecting it on a societal level and “quietly laid aside what had been for nearly two millennia the unquestioned status of man’s priority and dominance in society on the basis of creation order.”¹³ Further, Synod 1990 determined that the headship principle did not necessarily extend to church leadership (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p. 657).

In marriage, the CRCNA describes headship as a husband’s “direction-setting role” and a wife’s role of “voluntarily accepting his leadership” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 330). Theologian John Piper writes that men have “a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for, and protect women,” and women have “a freeing disposition to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men.”¹⁴

But the 1984 headship majority report also finds that “it does not appear that spiritual gifts as such are sex-specific—some feminine, some masculine” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 322). Theologian Karl Barth says attempts to articulate tangible, normative headship definitions “have tended to lapse into apparent arbitrariness and been vague about their premises.”¹⁵ He suggests that these descriptions “obviously cannot be said or heard in all seriousness. . . . On what authority are we told that these traits are masculine and these feminine?”¹⁶ Indeed, I would think that most traditionalists would be hard-pressed to articulate normative social roles of husbands and wives that absolutely must be present in every single marriage.

In his argument against extending the headship principle to the church, Calvin Theological Seminary professor (emeritus) John Cooper writes that, in Genesis 1, “there is no hint of hierarchy or differentiation of roles.”¹⁷ A 1990 synodical study committee report in the Christian Reformed Church in North America paints a picture of what it means to pursue an eschatological direction of the headship principle (*Agenda for Synod 1990*, pp. 327-28):

Isn't the future kingdom already present now? Isn't God's kingdom already in our midst now? What does the here and now of God's kingdom mean for husband-wife relations? What does it mean for males to be married to persons who will someday stand before God as their total equals in Christ?

¹³ Boomsma, Clarence. *Male and Female, One in Christ: New Testament Teaching on Women in Office*. Baker Book House, 1993, p. 86.

¹⁴ Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem, editors. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Crossway, 1991, p. 36. Quoted in Rivera, Bridget Eileen. *Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church*. Brazos Press, 2021, p. 128.

¹⁵ Roberts, Christopher C. *Creation & Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*. T&T Clark, 2007, p. 181.

¹⁶ Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, III.4, p. 153. Quoted in Roberts, *Creation & Covenant*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Cooper, John W. *A Cause for Division? Women in Office and the Unity of the Church*. Calvin Theological Seminary, 1991, p. 42.

The overall thrust of the Bible—its eschatological orientation and direction—is toward women’s attaining a place alongside men, rather than under them or separated from them.

One might also argue next that anatomical complementarity still exists separate from procreation and separate from any social dimension. But what is the significance of this anatomical complementarity without the purpose of procreation? Does our entire biblical sexual ethic rise and fall on only our literal, physical genitalia? To stake our sexual ethic here is to reduce the gift of marriage to a biological jigsaw puzzle.

So Barth offers one final suggestion: orderedness.¹⁸ He argues the simple fact that men came first and women came second is sufficient to maintain normative sexual difference in marriage:

Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like the two halves of an hourglass, which are obviously two, but absolutely equal and therefore interchangeable. Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore, be equated. . . . A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage. . . . Every word is dangerous and liable to be misunderstood when we try to characterize this order. But it exists.¹⁹

Barth says any explanation of this difference is “better left unresolved.”²⁰ How convenient for Barth not to enumerate any specific normative difference—given that we have not been able to find any normative, real-world reason to undergird our “opposite” ethic to this point! Reformer John Calvin ultimately agrees that this basis “does not seem to be very strong” because “John the Baptist went before Christ in time and yet was far inferior to him.”²¹ I’m with Calvin: The existence of an ordered pair at creation, with some hidden meaning that we are unable to articulate, is far too narrow upon which to mandate lifelong celibacy for all LGBTQ individuals.

And when the denomination’s 1973 report attempts its own reasoning for male-female difference beyond procreation, it actually backs into a more compelling reason to actually endorse same-sex marriage (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 615):

Turning to Genesis 2 we learn that the male-female polarity is by no means only for the purpose of biological reproduction. The account stresses the role of sex differentiation for the purpose of fulfilling the individual man’s fundamental need for companionship and personal

¹⁸ This section relies heavily on a synopsis of Barth’s views in *Creation & Covenant* by Christopher Roberts. His book is extremely helpful for understanding the traditional views on sexual difference in the last two millennia.

¹⁹ Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, III.4, p. 169. Quoted in Roberts, *Creation & Covenant*, pp. 160-61.

²⁰ Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, p. 287. Quoted in Roberts, *Creation & Covenant*, p. 145.

²¹ Calvin, John. *New Testament Commentaries: Commentary on I Timothy*, 1561, p. 217. Quoted in Boomsma, *Male and Female, One in Christ*, p. 56.

wholeness. Woman is created as a complement to help man so that the two cleave to each other in love and form a unity in marriage.

This is the created order into which male and female polarity form an integral part of being human.

Fulfilling a fundamental need for companionship and personal wholeness. Holding fast to each other in love. Coming together in unity in marriage.

“This is the created order.” Could it really be that simple?

Scripture links marriage to three important images: the one-flesh union, the image of God, and Christ and the church. All three mysteries, to borrow from Paul’s vocabulary, find their meanings “already” revealed to us in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

First, the one-flesh motif in Scripture points us toward not only a unitive coming together of two individuals in marriage but also the new unity of Jews and Gentiles, Christ and the church, and, ultimately, heaven and earth. The one-flesh motif does not, as some traditionalists claim, allude to some sort of reunification of the sexes into some original, unisex human being in Genesis.²² Nor can the “one-flesh” motif be reduced to only a familial bond, as some progressives suggest. That is certainly a piece of the puzzle, but Scripture certainly suggests a unitive component (see 1 Cor. 6:16-17). Snyder Belousek writes that marriage “would not fully reflect God’s unitive plan of salvation” if male and female are not united.²³ But why? This unitive salvation plan has *already* been revealed to us in Christ. No doubt, the *meaning* or *intent* of the figure lives on in Christ. This work is done!

The denomination’s Human Sexuality Report makes a fair point here that Jesus’ mention of “male and female” alongside “one flesh” in Matthew 19 was not strictly necessary to answer the Pharisees’ question. But we can understand Jesus’ teaching within a creation-fall-redemption framework: he describes the creation account, acknowledges the Fall by moving to Moses’ law, and then ushers in the new era with his own authority. That’s why I must split with the report’s conclusion that this means Christ “understands sexuality in creational terms” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 327). While Christ *grounds* marriage in creation, he understands it now in terms of *his own self*. Christ issues new rulings on all three Augustinian dimensions of marriage out of his own Messianic authority. (Regardless, this is far from the main thrust of the passage, in the same way traditionalists reference 1 Timothy 3:2 as a proof text against women in office because it requires elders to be “the husband of one wife.”)

Second, Genesis 1 explains that Adam and Eve are created “in the image of God.” The traditional argument suggests that this male-female binary is essential to humanity’s reflection of God’s image. However, the grammar of

²² Ganson, Robert A.J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Abingdon, 2001, p. 60. Quoted in *Classis Grand Rapids East Study Report on Biblical and Theological Support Currently Offered by Christian Proponents of Same-Sex Marriage*, Jan. 2016, pp. 60-61.

²³ Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church*, p. 152.

the sentence does not directly tie the two: the first two clauses of the verse are separated by a comma, and then the male and female dichotomy is separated with a semicolon. Regardless, Colossians 1 tells us that Christ is the truest and fullest image of God. When we ask ourselves what it means to be imagebearers of God, we find the best understanding by looking at the incarnation of Jesus Christ—the one through whom all things at creation were made.

Third, the traditionalist argument suggests that husband and wife ought to model the relationship between Christ and the church. We find here yet another image revealed to us in Christ. Traditionalist Christopher Roberts writes: “The sexes were created for the purpose of responding to their prototype, Christ and the church.”²⁴ But does the Christ-church relationship point us toward normative husband-wife relations? Or did Paul’s understanding of husband-wife relations point his readers toward a better understanding of the brand-new Christ-church relationship? Now that Christ has been revealed to the church, and is still present with the church in the Holy Spirit, sexual distinction in marriage is no longer necessary to point us to the reality *in which we are already living*. Indeed, Paul himself communicates that reality to us when he writes: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21).

In conclusion, the Belgic Confession states, “We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled” (Art. 25). The foreshadowings have come to an end. The truth and substance remain.

Romans 1 is the lone apparent *theological* condemnation of same-sex relationships. Synodical reports lead us to three main components of biblical interpretation: the grammatical-literary dimension, the historical dimension, and the theological dimension.²⁵ As Cooper writes, “The issue is not *whether* the Bible is normative or *which parts* are normative, but *how* it is normative for us today.”²⁶ Much of my analysis will be in conversation with New Testament ethicist Richard Hays, who wrote a 1996 landmark exegesis of Romans 1 that is widely accepted and cited by traditionalists today.

First, the grammatical-literary component of Reformed interpretation points us toward an observation of what Romans 1 is *not*: Romans 1 is not a rule against same-sex relationships. It is not, in the view of Hays, primarily

²⁴ Roberts, *Creation & Covenant*, p. 154.

²⁵ See also “Report 24: Infallibility and Inspiration in the Light of Scripture and the Creeds,” *Acts of Synod 1961*, pp. 253-328; “Report 44: The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority,” *Acts of Synod 1972*, pp. 493-546; “Report 31: Hermeneutical Principles Concerning Women in Ecclesiastical Office,” *Acts of Synod 1978*, pp. 484-533 (referenced in Cooper, *A Cause for Division?* pp. 17ff).

²⁶ Cooper, *A Cause for Division?* p. 26.

even about providing moral instruction for Christians.²⁷ Instead, the verses regarding same-sex relationships are “of a secondary and illustrative character.”²⁸ Hays calls it an “image” of “humanity’s primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the creator”²⁹ and a “sign” of “humanity’s confusion and rebellion against God.” Further, same-sex relationships are not listed here as a *reason* for God’s wrath but, rather, as an *image* or *manifestation*. Hays writes: “When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator’s design.”³⁰

(As a side note, Romans 1 also creates problems for the moderate traditional position. Is attraction to the same sex “shameful”? Are they “lusts”? Are they “sinful desires of their hearts”? If so, how do we hold the position that sexual orientation is not sin? The Presbyterian Church in America recently determined that same-sex attraction “is not morally neutral” and “must be repented of and put to death.”³¹ John Calvin goes so far as to call “unnatural lust” a “dreadful crime.”³² Superimposing our modern ethic here—ultimately a compassionate approach meant to absolve individuals of guilt over sexual orientations that they cannot control—prompts its own exegetical problems in Romans 1.)

The second core Reformed hermeneutic is an exploration of the historical culture.³³ Classics scholar Sarah Ruden writes this riveting description:

Perhaps, in the matter of homosexuality, what he saw as a boy influenced him more than his tradition did. . . . Flagrant pedophiles might have pestered him and his friends on the way to and from school. . . . As he preached what Jesus meant for human society, he wasn't going to let anyone believe that it included any of this.³⁴

I picture Paul, flushed and sweating in his rage as he writes that everyone is responsible for what pederasty has made of society. . . . All this leads to a feeling of mountainous irony. Paul takes a bold and effective swipe at the power structure. He challenges centuries of execrable practice in seeking a more just, more loving society. And he gets called a bigot.³⁵

²⁷ Hays, Richard B. “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 14, no. 1, Apr. 1986, p. 195.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. HarperCollins, 1996, p. 386.

³¹ Presbyterian Church in America. “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality to the Forty-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (2019-2020),” p. 8. pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf.

³² Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. 1540, p. 79.

³³ Cooper, *A Cause for Division?* p. 20.

³⁴ Ruden, Sarah. *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time*. Image Books, 2010, p. 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Traditionalists dispute whether ancient authors were familiar with any consensual, committed same-sex relationships approximating marriage. Comprehensive work by progressive scholar Matthew Vines ticks through a lengthy list of proposed counterexamples to demonstrate that nearly all ultimately stem from pederasty, come from fiction, or just plain don't fit.^{36 37} Even traditionalist Preston Sprinkle ultimately admits: "It is unlikely that Paul has monogamous same-sex marriages in view when he pens Romans 1. Consensual same-sex relations existed in Paul's time, but they were rare."³⁸

Likewise, Paul likely believed that same-sex relationships stem from excessive lust or a lack of self-control. Sprinkle says this point is "one of the strongest arguments" for an affirming view — admitting that "no one can deny with any historical credibility that homosexual behavior was often believed to result from excessive lust and uncontrollable sexual desire."³⁹ Hays writes that "there is no trace either in the New Testament or in any other Jewish or Christian writings in the ancient world" of the idea of sexual orientation.⁴⁰ (A line from Sprinkle in the Human Sexuality Report about ancient writers who "explored" an idea that "could be" considered a "version" of same-sex orientation ultimately references an approach that rooted sexual preference in astrology, age, and wealth [*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 421].)

John Chrysostom, a key fourth-century theologian, can help us shed some light on how Paul might have been thinking about Romans 1:

No one, he means, can say that it was by being hindered of legitimate intercourse that they came to this pass, or that it was from having no means to fulfill their desire that they were driven into this monstrous insaneness. For the changing implies possession. . . . That which is contrary to nature has in it an irksomeness and displeasingness, so that they could not fairly allege even pleasure.⁴¹

What a stunningly different understanding of same-sex intimacy than we have today! Plus, he's indeed correct that "the changing implies possession" — why would Paul symbolize the universal fall of all humankind with an "exchange" that literally no LGBTQ individual actually demonstrates? Let me be clear: These two very different understandings of homosexual orientation and practice do not render the passage nonauthoritative. But it

³⁶ Vines, Matthew. "Did Same-Sex Marriage Exist in the Biblical World? A Response to N.T. Wright and Preston Sprinkle," The Reformation Project; reformationproject.org.

³⁷ Sprinkle, Preston. "Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive-Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27." *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2015, p. 501.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

⁴⁰ Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," p. 200.

⁴¹ Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Homily 4.

should prompt us to ask how we ought to interpret the passage for real LGBTQ individuals today.

(Further, I have little original thought to add about the meanings of the words “arsenokoitai” and “malakoi” in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. I find it noteworthy that Martin Luther’s first 1534 translation translates it to “boy molester.”⁴² And in the end Hays suggests he chooses to focus so heavily on Romans 1, as I do, because he has found that “there is room for reasonable doubt” about their meanings.⁴³)

Third, the theological dimension of Reformed hermeneutics asks how Romans 1 fits into the overall message of Scripture. My hope is that my analysis on the one-flesh motif, the image of God, Christ and the church, procreation, and headship largely contribute to this section’s purpose. Still, traditionalist scholars rightly make the distinction that, contrary to other contemporary issues like women in leadership, no biblical texts explicitly endorse same-sex intimacy,⁴⁴ or give examples of Christians who are in same-sex partnerships.^{45 46}

Still, just as the Human Sexuality Report rejects the argument that Jesus’ silence on same-sex relationships ought to be taken as a sign of approval (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 413) (agreed!), the Bible’s lack of examples of Christian same-sex relationships ought not be taken as a sign of disapproval, either. We should also note, along with Hays, that “the New Testament contains no passages that clearly articulate a rule against homosexual practices.”⁴⁷

Finally, we also must recognize that this short passage on same-sex intimacy lands in the “fall” section in Paul’s creation-fall-redemption analysis. We have not gotten to the gospel yet! As Hays later writes: “The wrath of God—manifested in God’s ‘giving up’ of rebellious humanity to follow their own devices and desires—is not the last word.”⁴⁸ “Neither the word of judgment against homosexuality nor the hope of transformation to a new life should be read apart from the eschatological framework of Romans.”⁴⁹

I do ultimately agree with traditionalists who say that Paul is talking about *all* same-sex relationships in Romans 1. The Human Sexuality Report says: “The problem that the apostle identifies involves not one of wrong *degree* (excessive behavior) but of wrong *object*” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 419). Indeed, the thrust of Paul’s entire argument hangs on the sameness of the

⁴² Oxford, Eric. “Has ‘Homosexual’ Always Been in the Bible?” *Forge Online*, Mar. 21, 2019.

⁴³ Hays, Richard B. “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” p. 184.

⁴⁴ Cooper, John W. “Not Like Women in Office: Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Same-Sex Relations.” *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, vol. 22, no. 3, Fall 2015, p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. HarperCollins, 1996, p. 395.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

sexes. This presents the progressive case with a dilemma. Hays arrives at this exact same point and writes: “Does that settle the contemporary issue? By no means. This is precisely the point at which genuinely fruitful reflection must begin.”⁵⁰ We will attempt that here:

The hermeneutical study committee report to Synod 1978 implores us to consider the possibility that “that which looks like a moral principle and has long been considered such by the church is in fact no more than an application of a moral principle” (*Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 500). Some examples might be greeting each other with a holy kiss, raising hands in prayer, or abstaining from meat with blood.⁵¹ This interpretive hermeneutic applies even when Paul explicitly roots his command in creation order (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 622). In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul requires that women must pray with their heads covered. Just two verses later, Paul explicitly references Genesis 2. Later, Paul references “nature” — the same word he uses in Romans 1 — to insist that men have short hair and women have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14).

The Synod 1978 panel points to John Calvin’s approach to this passage — that nature here simply means “the custom that prevailed in Paul’s day” and it is “a far cry from taking it to be a reference to something that is embedded in the fabric of nature itself” (*Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 516). This is also how Cooper approaches the 1 Timothy injunction for women not to speak in worship: “His appeal to the creation and fall of Adam and Eve does not automatically make Paul’s prohibitions in [1 Timothy 2:12] universally binding creational norms.”⁵²

In short, our hermeneutic does not require direct, literal compliance with these creation-rooted directives even when the New Testament explicitly lays them out as rules to follow. This brings us back to our note that, in Romans 1, we do not even find an explicit *rule* against same-sex relationships but, rather, a symbolic *image* of idolatry. Hays calls this idea the “symbolic world” or “mythico-historical” representation of a Creation-to-Fall dynamic.⁵³ But the intellectual leap from this representative world — Paul’s “image,” “sign,” and “symbol” — to normative mandatory lifelong celibacy for all same-sex-oriented people — is not clear.

In fact, Hays himself admits that “Romans 1:26-27 cannot be read as an account of how individuals become homosexuals.”⁵⁴ So if Romans 1 does not articulate *why* individuals are gay — though that is a main thrust of the entire passage — then how can it tell us anything about how LGBTQ individuals ought to behave?

⁵⁰ Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” p. 205.

⁵¹ Cooper, *A Cause for Division?* p. 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵³ Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” p. 189.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Hays suggests that individuals who search for a principle behind an application of a principle here are left with only vague platitudes about love or analogies about the Gentiles. I agree that is not enough. But then he asserts that a “principle that human actions ought to acknowledge and honor God as creator” is also “too general.”⁵⁵ Why? That what Hays himself says is the entire point of Romans 1!

Dare I venture to say, in today’s culture, the image or sign of same-sex relationships in Romans 1 actually *confuses* rather than *clarifies* our understanding of idolatry? Perhaps we can take the words of our 1978 synodical report—“the symbol was abrogated, the principle was not” (*Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 498)—and declare them for our modern question about Paul’s representation of humankind’s idolatry in Romans 1.

For decades, Christian Reformed scholars have been wary of using Galatians 3:28 as any kind of determinative proof text for women in office. However, this passage cannot be ignored—and it must, in my view, weigh heavily on our discussion. Importantly, Paul does not write “neither male nor female,” as one might expect from the parallelism of the verse. Paul changes his sentence structure to write—*nor is there male and female*—clearly referencing Genesis 1:27. (In fact, the sentence is so grammatically clunky that there is no other logical understanding.)

Hays goes so far as to say: “The formula alludes to the creation story and says ‘no more.’”⁵⁶ He continues: “The question we have to ask ourselves is this: How shall we order the life of our community in such a way that we retell the story of God’s new creation in Christ, in whom there is no male and female?”⁵⁷

Traditionalist John Cooper, in his argument for women in office, writes this:

Unity within the body of Christ is the most basic thing about our lives. It is more fundamental than the husband-wife relation, the parent-child relation, the master-slave relation (Eph. 5:21), or any other human relationship. . . . Equality in Christ is the operative relationship between Christian men and women unless it is modified by some other legitimate role or relationship of authority.⁵⁸

In its celibacy section, the traditionalist Human Sexuality Report agrees: “Our identity in Christ transcends all other identities, whether those that are consequences of the fall (such as slave and free, gay and straight) or those that are gifts of creation and redemption (such as male and female, married and celibate)” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 339). The implications of that statement ought to apply to marriage, as well.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵⁶ Hays, Richard B. “New Testament Ethics: The Story Retold.” (The 1997 J.J. Thiessen lectures) CMBC Publications, 1998, p. 72.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁸ Cooper, *A Cause for Division?* p. 43.

What is the alternative? We cannot view this as simply a choice between endorsing same-sex marriage or maintaining the status quo. Instead, it is a choice between endorsing same-sex marriage or endorsing the new idea of mandatory lifelong celibacy.

Calvin Theological Seminary professor Jeffrey Weima says: “Those today who find themselves beset by same-sex attraction are ultimately in the same position as heterosexuals who face inclinations to act outside of God’s revealed intention for humanity.”⁵⁹ As someone who has personally seriously grappled with the idea of lifelong celibacy at just 20 years old, I find this is stunningly wrong.

Put yourself in a gay child’s shoes: two-thirds of LGBTQ individuals first felt they might not be straight when they were fourteen years old or younger.⁶⁰ That child, under the traditional ethic, might come out and fully know, at that moment, that he or she must be single for the rest of the next seven decades. On the contrary, straight individuals may enter multiple dating relationships and, at any time in the future, from their twenties to their eighties, choose to marry.⁶¹ In short, the difference is the hope of a future relationship. While the end result might be the same—a single life—these are wildly different *practical* realities over the course of a lifetime.⁶²

So what should we make of the biblical ethic of celibacy, and why we might or might not adopt it as mandatory for all LGBTQ individuals?

In Matthew 19, Jesus suggests that celibacy is voluntary in two ways: he suggests that celibacy is “given” and “not everyone can accept” it (Matt. 19:11). Indeed, “accepting” lifelong celibacy requires an action by the individual; it’s not simply something forced upon them with no discernment of call. Jesus also outlines three types of eunuchs—including those who “choose” so for the sake of the kingdom. These individuals, in Martin Luther’s words, “are rare, not one in a thousand, for they are a special miracle of God.”⁶³

Paul says unmarried individuals should try to stay single—but “if they cannot control themselves, they should marry” (1 Cor. 7:9). As Lewis Smedes writes: “If Paul thought that most heterosexual people lacked the gift of celibacy, would he not have thought that at least some homosexuals lack it?”⁶⁴ Traditionalists assert this is only the gift of self-control (*Agenda for Synod*

⁵⁹ Weima, Jeffrey A. “Same-Sex Activity: What Does the New Testament Say?” Calvin Theological Seminary *Forum*, vol. 22, no. 3, Oct. 2015, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Pew Research Center, “A Survey of LGBT Americans,” June 13, 2013. n=1,197. MOE +/- 4.1% pts.

⁶¹ See “The Significance of Singleness” by Christina Hitchcock for an example of this.

⁶² To be clear, none of this should be misconstrued to suggest that I think marriage ought to be elevated over singleness. In fact, I agree with the observation of virtually every theological traditionalist that our evangelical culture has elevated marriage to an unacceptable and idolatrous expectation.

⁶³ Luther, Martin. Sermon: “The Estate of Marriage.” 1522.

⁶⁴ Smedes, Lewis B. “Like the Wideness of the Sea?” *Perspectives*, May 1999.

2022, p. 339). But as we've noted, mandatory lifelong celibacy is a *far* different reality.

In the Reformation, Martin Luther mocks the idea that it's possible to "possess virginity as we do shoes and clothing." He also suggests that mandatory celibacy is "simply impossible" — and "they will not remain pure but inevitably besmirch themselves with secret sins or fornication."⁶⁵ Calvin's assessment of forced-celibacy vows for priests: "It is of no consequence to mention with what impunity whoredom prevails among them, and how, trusting to their vile celibacy, they have become callous to all kinds of iniquity."⁶⁶

Importantly, Snyder Belousek goes so far as to call such a celibacy mandate an "innovation"⁶⁷ — using the exact same word he uses throughout the book for supporters of same-sex marriage! He ultimately proposes an alternative: mixed-orientation couples. But this would be a fraught, irresponsible path forward for pastoral care. Elsewhere Snyder Belousek rejects an accommodation argument for same-sex couples to marry. But if anything is an accommodation, it is an LGBTQ individual marrying a straight individual and insisting it meets God's creational vision for marriage.

(Finally, I hope it goes without saying that advocating for orientation change is repugnant. Every major ex-gay organization has shuttered and apologized. Our 2016 synodical study committee unanimously recommended rejecting it [*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 404]. The Human Sexuality Report's suggestion that LGBTQ people should "pray that God will allow them to be drawn to a partner of the opposite sex" is an absolute disgrace [*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 437].)

In other words, there is no "safe" option. The choice is between endorsing marriage without sexual difference or endorsing mandatory lifelong celibacy imposed on millions of LGBTQ individuals. Whether you support or oppose same-sex marriage, you must endorse overturning two thousand years of church history regardless of where you fall.

Former Calvin Theological Seminary president James De Jong used what he called an "inverse test of systematic correlation" to tease out the implications of women in office: "When one asks what of confessional Reformed orthodoxy unravels when one approves the ordination of women as pastors, elders, and evangelists, the answer is, 'Nothing.' None of this redefines by implication the entire fabric of Reformed faith."⁶⁸

Nothing I've written here redefines our faith either. The Augustinian marriage ethic remains intact. The meanings of the biblical images of the one-flesh motif, the image of God, and Christ and the church are revealed to us

⁶⁵ Luther, "The Estate of Marriage."

⁶⁶ Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (4.12). 1536.

⁶⁷ Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church*, pp. 179-80.

⁶⁸ De Jong, James A. *Freeing the Conscience: Approaching the Women's Ordination Issue by Means of Theological Correlation*. Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995, p. 23.

in Christ in the same way. This argument doesn't dismiss Paul as out-of-touch. It doesn't overgeneralize about love. It doesn't rewrite the creation account or push a potpourri of negative arguments and hope one lands. This is a cohesive, *positive*, theological argument, rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and exegeted with a Reformed hermeneutic.

It can be scary to open ourselves up to an understanding of Scripture that steps away from church tradition—especially a position that has been perceived for so long as such a flagrant departure from sound doctrine. But it's not. It's time to consider it. And it's time to realize that our Reformed theology and hermeneutic are not *barriers* to supporting same-sex marriage, but our greatest *strength* in discovering how God calls us to live in our chapter of Christ's redemptive work.

Council of Washington D.C. Christian Reformed Church
Ryan Struyk, clerk

Note: This communication was submitted to the March 4, 2025, meeting of Classis Hackensack but was not adopted.

COMMUNICATION 5

Classis Minnkota

Classis Minnkota sends delegates to synod each year that protest the ordination and seating of women at synod. In the interests of transparency and clarity, classis wishes to explain the rationale for our protests by sending this communication.

The churches of Classis Minnkota affirm that men and women are created by God with equality in essence and dignity but with distinction in some roles. We praise God for the beautiful diversity he created when he made us male and female. These distinct roles are taught in Scripture, derive from God's creative will, and are to be manifest in complementary roles in the family and church. This belief is reflected in an accurate translation of the Belgic Confession, Article 30, which reads, ". . . when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." (See the original French wording, which refers to persons using the masculine gender.) This belief is therefore not rooted in chauvinism or patriarchy but in Scripture and in our historic confession of faith. It is our hope and prayer that this communication will provide a clear and respectful understanding of our convictions in this matter.

We believe that men and women are created equal as imagebearers of God and as heirs of salvation. We also believe that men and women complement each other in mutually enriching ways and that God has given each gender

specific callings in the church and home. We seek to honor and glorify God by celebrating and using the gifts and abilities he has given to us within the roles he has established for us.

As a classis we affirm the following convictions:

1. That men and women equally bear the image of God and are called to serve him throughout their lives (Gen. 1:27-28).
2. That we are to follow Christ's example when he honored and respected women during his earthly ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42) and as he continues to equip them for service in his church today (1 Cor. 12:4-7).
3. That the roles for men and women in the church must be defined solely by the Word of God and not by human ideologies such as feminism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, or sexist oppression (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
4. That from the beginning of creation God assigned headship to males in the family and in the church (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).
5. That the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" and then grounded this argument in the good created order (1 Tim. 2:12-13). The church, therefore, should not ordain women to its authoritative offices.
6. That the purpose of spiritual gifts is not self-fulfillment but service to God and others, to the end that God receives all the glory (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26).
7. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women is contrary to Scripture.

We also offer the following observations:

1. That even though Synod 1995 declared that both complementarian and egalitarian views are faithful interpretations of the Word of God, synodical practice since that time has become markedly egalitarian, making it difficult for complementarians to participate in good conscience.
2. That the complementarian position is held by many male and female members and by other officebearers, churches, and classes in the CRCNA.
3. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women has resulted in offense, division, strife, loss of members, and our expulsion from NAPARC in 1997.
4. That celebration of the egalitarian position and practice through video and song (as done at Synod 2018) causes offense and pricks the consciences of those who hold to the historic complementarian position regarding women in church office.

As members of the body of Christ in the CRCNA, Classis Minnkota does not present this communication in order to offend our brothers and sisters

who hold to the egalitarian view; rather we wish to explain that our convictions are rooted in the Word of God. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

COMMUNICATION 6

Council of Church of the Savior CRC, South Bend, Indiana

We write in regard to the confessional-revision gravamen we submitted to Classis Holland in February of 2023. We will give a brief history of the gravamen, request that Classis Holland acknowledge the factuality of this history, and pass this communication on to Synod 2025 for its information and records.

For weighty biblical and theological reasons, Church of the Savior (CotS) disagreed with Synod 2022's declaration that "unchastity" included "homosexual sex." Heeding the admonition of those who said it was a misuse of confessional-*difficulty* gravamina to use these kinds of gravamina as a means of privately communicating ongoing disagreement with the confessions, CotS chose to submit a confessional-*revision* gravamen. This made the matter public, and open for discussion by the whole church (see Church Order Article 5).

According to the rules of Church Order, CotS's gravamen went to Classis Holland as an overture at its February 2023 meeting. Classis Holland opted not to discuss the overture, which they later admitted was a mishandling of the matter. They sought to rectify the mistake but were told by the Office of General Secretary (OGS) that it was too late to do so. Meanwhile, CotS appealed the overture/gravamen to Synod 2023, and for reasons unknown Synod 2023 did not engage with it in any way at all, inaccurately claiming that the matter had already been addressed.

Certain that this nonengagement with its gravamen/overture was in violation of Church Order, CotS submitted an overture to Classis Holland in February of 2024 that asked that Synod 2024 deal appropriately—that is, according to Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers—with confessional-revision gravamina previously submitted, including CotS's. Classis Holland saw the reasonableness of this request and joined CotS in making the overture to Synod 2024. The OGS refused to receive this overture, however, claiming that it lacked new and sufficient grounds, and changed it into a communication to Synod 2024 that did not require a response. Synod 2024 then instructed Classis Holland to resolve the matter with CotS—effectively contradicting the original advice of the OGS that it was too late for

resolution. Classis Holland reached out to CotS to see how the matter might be resolved.

Meanwhile, Synod 2024 also ordered that churches who are not in alignment with Synod 2022's definition of "unchastity," including CotS, disaffiliate from the CRC. Classis Holland has expressed its agreement with Synod 2024 in this regard, and CotS is acquiescing to this decision. In light of this reality, CotS believes that it is not possible at this time to have a good-faith dialogue with Classis Holland about its gravamen, nor to move toward genuine resolution. The matter has been decided before the dialogue even begins.

CotS's gravamen was not handled at either the classical or synodical level according to the spirit of the Covenant for Officebearers, which states that officebearers will "receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel." As such, the CRCNA has a debt outstanding to CotS. However, CotS recognizes that this is a debt that cannot be repaid at this time; nor can genuine resolution be achieved in the current climate. Thus CotS proposes that the matter be set aside without resolution, so that CotS and Classis Holland may go their separate ways in peace.

Council of Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church,
South Bend, Indiana
Christine Hedlin, clerk

Note: This communication was submitted to the March 6, 2025, meeting of Classis Holland but was not adopted.

COMMUNICATION 7

Classis Iakota

Dear Dr. Roels and EIRC members,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Last year our classis submitted Overture 15 to Synod 2024 regarding the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In response to that overture, synod directed your committee to dialogue with the RCA and bring forth a recommendation to Synod 2025 concerning its status as a "church in communion." We are grateful for your committee's work toward that end and write to you now concerning it.

We took note of several concerns mentioned in your evaluation of our overture to Synod 2024 but wanted to continue this important conversation by addressing the first. Your claim was that a change in our relationship with the RCA would cause the EIRC to violate Church Order Article 49-a, since the Ecumenical Charter states that requiring ecumenical partners to "think biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC" is "no longer a meaningful option."

We wanted to raise several concerns in response. First, the point raised cites not the Ecumenical Charter itself, but its Preface. But, more importantly, we wonder about applying such a broad principle on “ecumenical relationships,” generally speaking, to what you have called our “closest ecumenical” partner (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 317). Does such an interpretation and application of our Ecumenical Charter mean that there are no longer any faith and practice expectations defining our closest partners? If that is the case, where is our unity grounded?

To observe that we are no longer in alignment on significant confessional matters of faith and practice, and to then change the status of a partnership to accurately reflect that reality, is not a matter of policing or holding accountable, but of honesty. The interpretation and application of our Ecumenical Charter offered by your committee’s memo to Synod 2024 would lead us to wonder what another church could do, if anything, that would lead to a change in their status. Such an application of the Charter (or to be specific, its Preface) seems untenable.

We deeply lament the hurdles and consequences that would come out of a growing separation from the RCA. Consequences, however, arise out of actions. Where there is no longer a deep alignment on matters of faith, unity—especially to the extent of “church in communion” status—no longer truly exists. We in Iowa and South Dakota no longer recognize the RCA of 2025. Most of the brothers and sisters who we work together with in our local communities have left the RCA, and they have done so specifically because of commitments on human sexuality and biblical interpretation that we share.

As you consider your recommendations to Synod 2025, we hope that you will bear these concerns in mind. The RCA of 2025 is not the RCA with whom we formed the so-called “Pella Accord” in 2014. We urge you to let this reality, lamentable as it may be, be reflected in your decisions.

Classis Iakota
Bernie Haan, stated clerk

APPENDIX

Relevant Portion of EIRC “Right of Comment” Memo to Synod 2024 Regarding Classis Iakota Overture 15

1. If the overture were adopted, the CRC would be going against its Ecumenical Charter.

The preface to the CRC’s 2019 Ecumenical Charter reads, in part, as follows:

Historically, ecumenical contacts of the CRC were exclusively with denominations in the Reformed tradition who shared the viewpoint that ecumenical partners assume responsibility for keeping each other confessionally Reformed. Not only did synods

consult each other on important theological issues, but the one partner could hold the other partner accountable for deviations or practices that were considered to be objectionable.

The CRC has learned that requiring such uniformity for ecumenical relationships is no longer a meaningful option. The requirement that ecumenical partners think biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC can soon make the circle of ecumenical relationships very small. Furthermore, such a demand for similar perspectives exposes the risk of being perceived as being theologically arrogant. . . .

These changes in ecumenical relationships prompted Synod 2006 to revise its Ecumenical Charter. The Charter was revised again in 2010. The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as those issues are understood in the CRC. The CRC does not endorse every position taken by ecumenical partners; nor do we need to (cf. Church Order Art. 50-c). Rather, the present understanding in ecumenical circles is that churches learn from each other and discuss differing perspectives. Ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which the gospel calls the whole Christian church. . . .

Were Overture 15 to be adopted, the EIRC would have to operate contrary to this stance in the Ecumenical Charter, which would itself be a violation of Church Order Article 49-a: “Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, *as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church* so that that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

COMMUNICATION 8

Members of Third CRC, Kalamazoo, Michigan

I. Background

In Overture 15 to Synod 2024, Classis Iakota asked synod to “review the ecumenical status of the Reformed Church in America as a church in communion” (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 453).

Synod 2024 decided to (1) “instruct the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) to communicate with the Reformed Church in America general secretary and Commission on Christian Unity . . . and to report to Synod 2025 regarding the responses received” and (2) “propose that the

EIRC provide a recommendation to Synod 2025 regarding the ecumenical relationship of the RCA as a *church in communion* with the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 883-84).

II. Recommendation

We, the undersigned members of Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, wish to communicate a desire to remain in ecumenical relationship as a church in communion with the Reformed Church in America. We recommend that synod make no changes to the ecumenical relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America—in particular, our current practice of the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers.

Grounds:

1. The shared heritage of the RCA and the CRC cannot be easily brushed aside. For many years, our two denominations have worked to collaborate where our goals align and to remain separate where they do not. This partnership was affirmed in our Ecumenical Charter and in the "Pella Accord" of 2014. As the RCA is our parent denomination, the CRCNA could not exist in its current form without this shared history.
2. In their response to Overture 15 in the *Agenda for Synod 2024*, the EIRC provided the assurance that "rules governing the orderly exchange of ministers already require that an RCA minister respect and submit to the polity, theology, and traditions of the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 744).
3. In their response, the EIRC also shared that, at the time of writing, that there were 46 RCA ministers currently serving CRC churches. In particular, two of them are currently serving at Third CRC (we have four in our classis altogether), and they have been doing excellent work for our congregation for the past several years. If synod were to make a decision that would cause a disruption to the ability of these ministers to serve their congregations, all of them, including Third CRC, would be put in a very difficult position.
4. Many churches in both denominations are currently experiencing great difficulties in calling new pastors, and the decreasing supply of ministers has been noted at past meetings of synod. With this fact in mind, any decision made by synod to suspend or cease the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers between our denominations would only exacerbate the struggle in many churches to maintain pastoral leadership for their congregations.

In conclusion, Third CRC's relevant experience, and our deep appreciation for the RCA ministers currently serving our church, led the undersigned members to petition for the stability of this ecumenical relationship. We respectfully urge Synod 2025 to continue to affirm the value of the CRCNA's

continued relationship with the RCA, particularly the wisdom, experience, and excellent work we are blessed with in our RCA ordained ministers.

Members of Third Christian Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Andrew Bolles	Ed Maring
Nicole Bolles	Cindy Nanninga
Dave Bierenga	Tom Nanninga
Amy Brimmer	Carolyn Osterhouse
John Buttery	Aaron Potter
Jane Buttery	Andrea Potter
Barb Dyk	Lucas Potter
Christee Dyk	Leslie Rafferty
Ken Dyk	Kay Severson
Randy Dyk	Sandy Siegfried
Bill Dykhuis	Saara Spitzer
Nell Dykhuis	Erica VanderKooy
Eric Edewaard	Tim VanderKooy
Marlene Hikok	Jennifer VanderMolen-Potter
Peggy Link	Mary Lagerwey Voorman
Jane Lockwood	Rich Voorman
Linda Maring	

Note: The above communication was presented to the Council of Third CRC on January 27, 2025, but was not adopted. It was also presented to Classis Kalamazoo on March 11, 2025, but was not adopted.