

Calvin University Supplement

I. Introduction

The Calvin University Board of Trustees met April 29-30, 2026, and presents this supplemental report to synod. The board had a successful meeting and completed its scheduled work for committee and plenary sessions. During its April meeting, the board thanked three members whose terms are ending—Edward Wayne Coleman, Lambert Kamp, and Carl Triemstra—for their diligent work on the board and for their service to Calvin University.

II. Finance

The Calvin University Board of Trustees approved the 2026-2027 budget proposal.

III. Academic

The Calvin University Board of Trustees approved tenure and six-year faculty appointments, and an academic strategic finance proposal. They ratified or endorsed curricular program revisions, new faculty appointments, faculty retirements, and recognition of faculty who are completing their service. They also ratified mandate and policy decisions approved by the following university committees: the committee on governance, the undergraduate studies committee, the graduate and continuing studies committee, the professional status committee, the faculty senate, and the faculty assembly.

IV. Board matters

A. Board membership

The Calvin University Board of Trustees recommends that synod appoint new trustees, reappoint existing trustees for subsequent terms, ratify the results of elections held in classes, and ratify the appointment of a 2025 trustee for membership on the Calvin University Board of Trustees. These recommendations are presented in detail in the Nominations section of this Agenda Supplement.

B. Board officers

The Calvin University Board of Trustees appointed the following officers of the board for 2026-2027: Perrin Rynders, chair; Carolyn Van Allen, vice chair; Gene Miyamoto, secretary; and Dirk Pruis, treasurer (vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer at Calvin University).

V. Other

The Calvin University Board of Trustees approved the recommendation for board chair Perrin Rynders to grant degrees, honors, and certificates upon those recommended by the faculty at the 2026 commencement ceremonies.

The Calvin University Board of Trustees ratified the February 2 decision of the executive committee of the board to submit to Synod 2026 the report requested by Synod 2025.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod appoint new members, reappoint existing members for subsequent terms, and ratify the result of the Region 3 classes election for membership on the Calvin University Board of Trustees.

B. That synod approve the report from the Calvin University Board of Trustees submitted in response to the request from Synod 2025.

Calvin University
Greg Elzinga, president

Appendix: Comments on Overtures 16-17

I. Introduction

Calvin University values its covenantal partnership with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and is grateful for our mutual interest in sustained and serious dialogue about the university's mission.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to select overtures received by Synod 2026. This communication is submitted to synod per the "Right of Comment" protocols that guide the processes by which staff and boards respond to an overture or report on synod's agenda in keeping with the principles established by the Rules for Synodical Procedure and other governance documents.

Overtures 16 and 17 (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, pp. 368-71) concern expectations of confessional subscription for university trustees and for employees who sign the Covenant for Faculty Members. We trust this response will assist with synod's discernment in the matters addressed by these overtures.

II. Update on implementation of commitments to Synod 2025

Given the aims of these two overtures, we ask that the comments below be taken alongside a close reading of both our report to Synod 2026 (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, pp. 146-47) and last year's special report to Synod 2025 (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 155-73). In addition to clarifying conduct expectations for all trustees and employees, the 2025 report described and made a case for our new developmental approach to confessional commitment and differences, including a three-year onboarding period for new faculty. We also introduced two new practices meant to align more closely with the Church Order: active annual reaffirmation of the Covenant for Faculty Members and a multiyear period of mentoring and discernment for faculty who submit a confessional difficulty.

This year we have invested in operationalizing and implementing these commitments throughout the university. In response to a commission by Calvin's Professional Status Committee, our Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom Committee, Senior Academic Leadership Team, and

others have developed fresh guidance for hiring, a revised approach to confessional education and formation for first- and second-year faculty, an active annual reaffirmation process, a multiyear mentoring and discernment framework for faculty with confessional difficulties, and faculty handbook revisions reflecting the details of our report. At the same time, our trusteeship committee has developed and clarified its review process for trustee nominees in ways that are consistent with our commitments to Synod 2025.

III. Comments on Overtures 16 and 17

In the midst of this work, we have received Overtures 16 and 17, both of which would require confessional subscription—without exception on any confessional teaching—of all Calvin trustees and employees who sign the Covenant for Faculty Members, from the start of trusteeship or employment. We have multiple significant concerns with both overtures.

A. Short-circuited process

We have procedural concerns with both overtures. Synod 2025 received Calvin's report positively and asked the university to respond to two specific prompts in a report back to Synod 2026 (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613):

- “Consider a higher level than a simple majority of confessional alignment, and report back to Synod 2026.”
- “Further define ‘indefinite exceptions’ to confessional subscription (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 156) and the reasons that these may be granted, and report back to Synod 2026.”

Overtures 16 and 17, which touch on these matters, were submitted, adopted, and added to the *Agenda for Synod 2026* before Calvin's responses were submitted to and considered by Synod 2026. This seems premature. Specifically, the process seems to short-circuit one in which the university would first be given the opportunity to offer its responses to Synod 2026.

We aim to engage in good faith, and it seems right that our responses should be fully considered before churches and classes reengage on the same topics. If, however, our responses to synod may not even be received before we are challenged again on the same questions, that creates uncertainty about the purpose and value of our engagement with synodical questions. Mutual trust benefits from orderly discernment in which one party's rebuttals do not get ahead of the other's responses.

B. Synodical consistency and institutional integrity

We also have concerns with the overtures' consistency with what we understand to have been the response of Synod 2025. Synod commended our report as “both thorough and robust . . . [going] a long way in affirming trust in the board and institution” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613). It also “[affirmed] the Calvin University Board of Trustees' ongoing efforts to live into a robustly Reformed set of standards for the board, faculty, and administration as servant-leaders in the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613). In this context of otherwise positive reception, Synod 2025 asked only for the two

clarifications specified above, and it did not question or challenge any other aspect of the report.

Overtures 16 and 17 take a fundamentally different approach, challenging what Synod 2025 received positively, seeking to overturn corresponding board commitments, and proposing changes to subsequent operational changes that are already under way. Examples include the following:

1. Overture 16 would eliminate the three-year period in which an employee with faculty status would need to affirm only the ecumenical creeds. This component of our report to Synod 2025—designed to strengthen Reformed commitment and onboard with integrity new faculty with minimal past exposure to the Reformed tradition—was not challenged or questioned, and we have taken steps to implement this practice over the past year.
2. Overture 16 would permit zero confessional exceptions among Calvin faculty. Not only does the university couple more than a century of precedent for confessional exceptions with the rationale offered in its 2025 report, but the university's 2025 report commits to honoring past gravamina as a matter of institutional integrity. The intentions and purpose behind this approach were shared transparently with Synod 2025 and its relevant advisory committees. Our framing of this commitment as a matter of institutional integrity was not questioned or challenged, and our 2025 delegation recalls only sympathetic, understanding, and accepting responses on this point.

Notably, Overture 17 not only challenges what went unchallenged by Synod 2025, but it explicitly rejects what Synod 2025 specifically commended and encouraged. By insisting upon the full alignment of every trustee, it contradicts Synod 2025, which “commend[ed] Calvin University for their high-level majority of confessional alignment in the Board of Trustees and encourage[d] them to continue the good work of *two-tier application*” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613, emphasis added). This encouragement of the university's two-tier application of trusteeship, in which a majority of trustees may not hold a confessional difference while a minority may, cannot be squared with an overture that seeks to eliminate that same practice. On this point, the university is making a good-faith effort to meet the expectations of Synod 2025, while the overture is simply at odds with Synod 2025.

Calvin's Board of Trustees values its covenantal partnership with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, but both partners would benefit from predictable and consistent expectations. When synod commends the university's path and the university responds in good faith to further inquiry, it should not, at the same time, be expected to meet the expectations of new overtures that are inconsistent with synod itself.

C. Inaccurate grounds

The background and grounds specified for both overtures rest upon material inaccuracies that undermine their own arguments.

Citing the *Acts of Synod 1967*, both overtures claim synod has asserted that the church “does indeed adequately and directly supervise and operate the College” (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 97). While this may have been an accurate description of governance realities in 1967, it is currently both legally inaccurate and inconsistent with more recent synodical decisions. Moreover, if it were true, it would raise substantial accreditation concerns.

Legally, Calvin University is incorporated as a nonstock, directorship non-profit corporation under Michigan’s Nonprofit Corporation Act. In this form of organization, the Board of Trustees—and not the CRCNA—supervises and operates the university. Thus, some grounds offered in Overtures 16 and 17 are legally inaccurate. While synod has the responsibility to appoint university trustees nominated by means specified in the university’s bylaws, the trustees are fiduciaries of the university, responsible for governing the institution according to its Articles of Incorporation. The covenantal partnership between the CRCNA and the university provides a relational framework of mutual accountability in which synod is only responsible for setting the university’s purpose and appointing trustees, and only those trustees are responsible for supervising the university.

The grounds are also inconsistent with the governance arrangements and board structure adopted and endorsed by synod itself. The current arrangements and structure were adopted by Synod 1991 after several years of careful review, and an extensive study of proposed governance models for Calvin College and Seminary resulted in the adoption of separate boards for the college and the seminary, each empowered to govern the institution and populated in ways appropriate to their institutional needs. An excerpt from the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Governance (*Agenda for Synod 1991*, p. 31; *Acts of Synod 1991*, p. 734) explained how a new structure supported the board in its essential work of supervising the institution:

For the college, the increasing complexity of operations and relationships in the college require more diversity in governance. The proposal:

1. Enables the college (and the church) to attract diverse leadership to its governing board while still retaining ultimate control over the character and direction of the college.
2. Enables leaders with varied experience and influence to be attracted to the college by opportunity to serve on the governing board.
3. Benefits the college by making available needed expert advice from outside professionals and leaders, and assists the college in projecting a national and international presence.

4. Assists the college in generating new contacts and networks for fund-raising and, thus, enhances fund-raising capabilities of the college.
5. Affords an increasing role in college governance for parents, alumni, and other constituents of the college (those whose role in funding of the college has been increasing).
6. Conforms to more cost-effective and more efficient denominational models of governance already in existence.

In 2015, the denominational Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture recognized that the benefits of the Calvin board structure described by Synod 1991 still existed. The task force recommended that Calvin's board structure would remain the same, explaining: "The boards of World Renew, Calvin College, and Calvin Theological Seminary would remain the same, *due to requirements for recognition and accreditation in their respective fields of endeavor, ability to receive grant funding, and ability to do ministry in contexts where churches are not welcome*" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 375, emphasis added).

The reasons for adopting the current governance arrangements and board structure are as strong today as they were in 1991 and 2015. Diverse board leadership has allowed Calvin to navigate the challenges of the shifting higher-education environment and to attract more diverse students and additional funding. Such a structure, developed after extensive study, has allowed Calvin to attract the board talent it needs in order to thrive while still ensuring CRCNA representation (more than 80% of current trustees are members of CRCNA churches). These arrangements do not warrant a change.

Finally, direct supervision and operation of the university by synod is not only an inaccurate description of present arrangements but could generate substantial accreditation concerns. Calvin University's accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), like other accreditors, requires the university's board to have adequate autonomy. Direct supervision of the university by the church would risk significant concern on the part of the HLC.

D. Inapt analogies

The grounds also include inapt analogies. For example, Overture 16 rests in part upon the assumption that faculty either are or are like officebearers in a congregation. However, Church Order does not include university faculty among officebearers. Moreover, there are not only differences in calling between congregational officebearers and university faculty, but there are other key distinctions between the two upon which our developmental approach to confessional commitment is built.

- The typical nominee to the office of elder or deacon will almost always have had experience in that congregation and—by virtue of

that experience, at least—in the Reformed tradition. They are therefore likely to understand already the creedal and confessional documents the Covenant for Officebearers requires them to affirm.

- In contrast to nominees to the office of elder or deacon, some faculty candidates come without meaningful experience in the Reformed tradition. In fact, while they are always sincere Christians, they sometimes come from traditions and institutional contexts that have no role for the confessions. They are therefore far less likely to understand what the Covenant for Faculty Members requires them to affirm. Our three-year onboarding period—including our two-year faculty development sequence—is meant to address this challenge. While such a period may be unnecessary or inappropriate for a church officebearer, we believe it is quite appropriate and helpful for a university faculty member.

Importantly, this aspect of our developmental approach is meant to strengthen our Reformed identity and commitments. Ensuring that all faculty signatories are familiar with the Reformed tradition and its confessional commitments before they sign the Covenant for Faculty Members is in the interests of both the university and the CRCNA. It is a developmentally appropriate investment in formation that reflects the church’s historic practice of catechesis before profession, and it may be more enriching and demanding than the formation experienced by many officebearers. As such, it is an excellent example of the ways in which alignment in purpose is often stronger—and more meaningful—than alignment in process. It is a strength to be celebrated, not a weakness to correct.

IV. Conclusion

Again, we are grateful for the invitation to respond to these overtures, and we welcome further opportunities to inform relevant discussions about the work of the university. We understand that this matter may require further conversation with an advisory committee during synod’s upcoming meetings. In the interest of deepening trust in our covenantal partnership and further strengthening Calvin’s Reformed identity and commitments, we stand ready to supply further information or perspective. In the meantime, we will keep the Synod 2026 deliberations in prayer.

Calvin University Board of Trustees
Perrin Rynders, chair