

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNICATION 2

Classis Columbia—Response to Appeals 1-2

In October 2024, Christ Community Church wrote a letter to our classis and shared that two of their officebearers could no longer sign the Covenant for Officebearers after Synod 2024's revision to the Church Order Supplement regarding gravamina (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 867-71, 875-80). They asked us to consider ways we could permit nonessential differences. Christ Community included the traditional understanding of what is permitted by the second commandment, and the proper number of biblical offices, as examples of these differences. We established a committee and invited John Shaw to participate because he was one of these officebearers. This committee wrote Classis Columbia's confessional-submission gravamen overture that was sent to synod in 2025 (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 376-78).

Since Synod 2025 did not accede to our overture, John Shaw, an elder at Christ Community Church (Tualatin, Ore.) communicated two gravamina to his council in June 2025. These confessional-revision gravamina concerned the traditional understanding of what is permitted by the second commandment, and the proper number of biblical offices. Furthermore, an overture was submitted, requesting that synod establish a list of acceptable alternative viewpoints on confessional matters.

On July 10, 2025, Christ Community Church voted not to accede to the overture, and they did not sustain the gravamen on the second commandment. On the gravamen concerning the number of offices, they decided that they were unable to judge the gravamen and submitted the matter to classis for examination and judgment.

Our classical interim committee (CIC) consulted Church Order, synodical decisions, and denominational leadership and determined that John's views were considered acceptable interpretations of our confessions. CIC members met with John on August 20 and communicated this to him. John indicated that if his views were affirmed as acceptable by the CRC by a broader assembly, he would withdraw his overture and gravamina.

On August 29, the CIC communicated in writing to John that his views were indeed considered within the acceptable interpretations of the confessions. On September 6, our CIC sent a letter to Christ Community's council that stated, "It is our determination that John's views are within the breadth of the CRC's interpretation and that these revision gravamina are unnecessary. John should be able to sign the Covenant for Officebearers with a clear

conscience. Thus we recommend that you withdraw both gravamina. We believe that the overture is unnecessary.”

In spite of the assurances by John that he would withdraw his overture and gravamina if his views were deemed acceptable, John communicated on September 15 that he had “decided to continue with both the overture and gravamina.” These three documents were forwarded on to classis for consideration.

On September 18, 2025, the Council of Christ Community Church passed a motion that it concurred “with the recommendation of the Classical Interim Committee as outlined in the ‘CIC Response to John Shaw’ document sent on September 6, 2025, in regard to the ‘Two Office Gravamen’ and that it rejected John’s “office confessional-revision gravamen on the ground that it is unnecessary.”

At the classis meeting on October 4, Classis Columbia considered the two confessional-revision gravamen and the overture sent by John. John was given the opportunity to speak, and delegates were given the opportunity to ask questions. A committee of preadvise also addressed the classis, summarizing reasons why classis should not adopt the overture and the gravamina.

The reasons given were as follows:

- A. Since classis received the letter from Christ Community Church in fall 2024, the CIC, church visitors, and other leaders worked with John and Christ Community’s council to understand the issues that kept John from being able to sign the Covenant for Officebearers. Upon consultation of synodical decisions and denominational staff, it was clearly communicated that these views were deemed to be in line with the confessions. John presented his second commandment gravamen to the classis as a confessional-revision gravamen, which is a request to change the confessions. However, since his viewpoints were already in alignment with the CRC understanding, the gravamen was deemed moot. Additionally, the grounds given in the gravamen were based on what we judged to be an inaccurate understanding of the biblical texts.
- B. Concerning the gravamen on the number of officebearers, we pointed out that synod has allowed a considerable amount of flexibility in determining the appropriate number of offices within the church. We also pointed out that acceding to his request would have the effect of removing the distinction between the work of ministers of the Word and elders. The Synods of 1973 and 2001 both affirmed that ministers play a unique ecclesiastical role. Additionally, John acknowledged later that he was unaware of previous synodical decisions and reports concerning the offices of elder and minister. We judged that his gravamen lacked engagement and understanding of the CRC’s historical reasons for the distinctions of office and that therefore it would be unwise to sustain the gravamen.

C. Finally, concerning the overture, we pointed out to the classis that, while there may be some wisdom in allowing for some flexibility in accepting different viewpoints on certain confessional matters, Synod 2025 had already rejected a similar request from Classis Columbia, and thus his overture would likely not be accepted by synod. We also pointed out that the overture lacked strong argumentation necessary for making a change to the Church Order.

Upon deliberation, Classis Columbia overwhelmingly defeated each of the three requests. We wish to make synod aware that our classis worked diligently with John to answer his questions and to resolve his concerns. Members of our classis met with him on a number of occasions, and we did our best to offer helpful guidance to him. We note as well that the spirit of these interactions was good, and that the tenor of the classis meeting was good. John expressed that he did feel as though he had been heard, even though the outcome was not what he had desired. Classis Columbia recommends that synod not sustain John's appeals.

Classis Columbia
Brad Vos, stated clerk