

# OVERTURES

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## OVERTURE 37

### Reject the Defining Membership Task Force Report

#### I. Background

The Defining Membership Task Force report contains many valuable insights and reflections on the comparison between officebearers and other members in relationship to the confessions of the church. The report notes Synod 1975's pronouncement that "full agreement with the confessions is expected from all members of the church" (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 257) and recommends that churches "develop and use membership and profession of faith classes that foster a commitment to the Reformed confessions" (p. 268). The report ultimately concludes that the CRCNA "permit consistories a wider latitude for membership acceptance than some past synodical statements have suggested" (p. 258) and recognize "the validity of CRC professing membership rooted in alignment [only] with the ecumenical creeds" (p. 268) in contrast to a profession that also affirms "that the confessions of the church 'faithfully reflect' the truths of Scripture" (p. 258, quoting the *Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 353).

#### II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2026 to do the following:

1. Reject the Defining Membership Task Force report.

*Grounds:*

- a. The report recommends that consistories continue to reflect upon "the balance between confessing membership rooted in the ecumenical creeds and an approach rooted in the Reformed confessions" (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 268). This so-called "balance" introduces a two-tiered membership level inconsistent with Church Order, which stipulates that the Christian Reformed Church—both members and officebearers alike—confesses its "complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word" (Church Order, Art. 1). The report introduces a functional distinction in which some members are only subject to the ecumenical creeds while others are subject to both the creeds and the confessions.
- b. The Church Order indicates that the process for becoming a confessing member of the Christian Reformed Church is the public profession of faith, which includes "a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church" (Church Order, Art. 59-b). The Church Order provides neither a definition of, nor

provision for, a “confessing membership rooted . . . [only] in the ecumenical creeds.”

- c. The task force report exceeds its mandate. Synod 2024 recognized that “‘commitment’ to the creeds and confessions is understood to mean increasing submission to the spiritual guidance of the church in a spirit of Christian love during the sanctification process” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 866). Synod simply charged the task force with clarifying “the difference in the relative commitment to the confessions between a member and an officebearer” (p. 867), not the introduction of a novel membership category whose commitment “aligns more closely with the ecumenical creeds than with some elements of the Reformed confessions” (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 259).
  - d. A prospective member’s profession that the confessions of the church faithfully reflect Scripture should not be construed as a burdensome barrier to entry. It ought to be considered a privilege of ministry. Accordingly, denominational resources and reports ought to equip and encourage consistories to fulfill their calling to “promote and defend doctrine” (Covenant for Officebearers), rather than prioritizing increased “latitude” (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 258).
2. In lieu of this report, respond to Synod 2024’s request for clarification by adding a supplement to Church Order Article 59-b:

“A commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church” means the following:

Members shall affirm that the confessions of the church faithfully reflect Scripture and promise to be formed and governed by our creeds and confessions, which together summarize the teaching of Scripture and place the church within the historic Christian faith, including that which synod has declared to have confessional status.

A member does not need a full “doctrinal understanding and competence” (*Acts of Synod 1959*, p. 22) to initially make this commitment but must demonstrate a desire and willingness to increasingly grow in this knowledge under the consistory’s discipleship. Members promise to submit to the instruction and discipline of the church. Consistories must build up members (1 Thess. 5:11) throughout their lives by robustly promoting and defending confessional doctrines in a way that increasingly fosters “a commitment to the Reformed confessions” (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 268).

*Grounds:*

- a. This definition of “commitment” is consistent with the requirement that all members be in “complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word” (Church Order, Art. 1), while allowing for the reality “that when a person

makes profession of faith, they have not fully comprehended all the nuances of the creeds and confessions” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 866).

- b. This definition appropriately distinguishes the duties of members who, although under the authority of the creeds and confessions, simply commit to “increasingly grow” in their knowledge, whereas officebearers commit to “heartily believe and . . . promote and defend” confessional doctrines (Covenant for Officebearers).
- c. Including this distinction in a short supplement makes this important information easily accessible to consistories when they need it.

Classis Minnkota  
Ryan A.K. VanderWees, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 38

### **Preserve the Original Authority of the Council in Multisite Congregations**

#### **I. Background**

We are grateful for the work done in the report of the Task Force to Study Multisite Churches. The report reflects careful and commendable work, particularly its theological grounding in the Belgic Confession, its attentiveness to the marks of the true church, and its exploration of the history of ecclesiastical networks from the Reformation to today. We also recognize that this is an important report for our moment, as multisite churches become more common and experience great success. As radio ministry, televangelism, and megachurches transformed the ecclesiastical landscape, we recognize that multisite congregations represent another tectonic shift that we do well to consider carefully, thoughtfully, and biblically.

While the report recognizes that “certain multisite arrangements risk unintentionally reversing the proper ecclesiastical order” (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 277), we fear that the proposed supplement to Church Order Article 35 does not sufficiently protect the principle of the original authority of the local council. The proposed supplement permits site churches to retain organized status—and the full classical representation that accompanies it—even when those congregations have, in practice, surrendered their self-governing authority to the leadership of the multisite network. We believe this is a vital gap that synod must address before adopting any proposed supplements to the Church Order.

#### **II. The principle at stake: original authority of the council**

Reformed polity is distinguished by the conviction that ecclesiastical authority finds its original and primary expression in the local council—the body of ministers, elders, and deacons who together carry out the ministry

of the local congregation. This is not merely an administrative agreement but a theological commitment rooted in Christ's headship over each gathered congregation. Broader assemblies—classis and synod—possess authority that is derivative and delegated, arising from what the local churches refer upward, not descending from above onto congregations below.

This was a very particular choice on the part of the Reformation churches, pushing back against the magisterium of Rome, which taught that original authority was given by Christ not to local leaders but to the institution of the papacy. The pope was seen as the true human representative of Christ on earth, and all authority in the church derived from his office. In contrast, the Reformers emphasized the “priesthood of all believers,” rooted in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer's heart (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:6), the unique gifts of grace poured out on each member of the body (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4, 7; Eph. 4:7), and the authority of Christ expressed in various leadership positions (Eph. 4:11, etc.). It has been our conviction that the Reformed expression of this theological truth in our practical exercise of polity is the truest to this biblical principle.

### **III. A concern not fully addressed**

This principle has practical consequences. An organized congregation in the CRCNA is defined not simply by numerical or financial thresholds but by its ability to elect a self-governing council—officebearers elected by the congregation who exercise original spiritual authority over the spiritual life, discipline, worship, and membership of the body. Such self-governance distinguishes an organized congregation from an emerging one, and it entitles such congregations to full representation in classical assemblies.

Church Order Article 35-a presents the responsibilities of the council, including “those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as promoting its mission, calling a pastor, approving nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern.” In many multisite arrangements, significant portions of these responsibilities, if not all, are surrendered to network leadership.

The task force report helpfully distinguishes between organized and emerging congregations. We appreciate this, and we feel strongly that this distinction must be applied consistently to congregations that join a multisite network. The proposed supplement as written nevertheless allows congregations in which an elected council of officebearers have *surrendered authority* over part or all of the church's vision, mission, and ministry to retain the status and privileges of an organized church. We believe this to be inconsistent and ripe for exploitation.

It is not difficult to imagine a scenario in which a thriving congregation with a gifted and charismatic pastor establishes a multisite network by

adopting several declining churches as campus sites. Each adopted congregation may retain its formal designation as an “organized” congregation—and with it, full delegation rights to classis. Yet in practice, the council of each site may operate as an extension of the network’s central leadership rather than as a body exercising original authority over its own congregation. The officebearers of each site, however sincere and capable, may receive their direction from the senior pastor or network council, effectively relocating original authority from the local council to the network’s center.

Or imagine a scenario in which the leadership of a church plant that is part of a multisite network begins to ask questions about matters that our denomination has given local councils authority over. Suppose a site pastor adopts a different stance from the network’s stance on women in ecclesiastical office, children at the Lord’s table, consumption of alcohol, or some other matter. It is not difficult to imagine a network’s leadership, concerned primarily with the mission and unity and “brand” of the network, removing such an individual from leadership rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue about appropriate and faithful practices and leadership at the local level.

What results, in effect, is an ecclesiological model that more closely resembles an episcopacy (in which a bishop-like figure exercises authority over multiple congregations) or a presbyterian connectionalism (in which authority is concentrated at the regional level) in comparison to the Reformed polity the CRCNA confesses and practices. The Church Order has historically guarded against both of those tendencies. The proposed supplement, as written, does not provide sufficient protection against the emergence of those tendencies in multisite form.

The ecclesiological consequence is significant: a multisite network that absorbs multiple organized congregations may, over time, exercise a degree of influence and authority that no single congregation was ever envisioned to hold under Reformed polity. This is not necessarily the result of bad faith. Leaders who are deeply committed to their multisite model, and who have seen it bear genuine fruit in revitalization and growth, may not perceive the structural drift that has occurred. But the absence of malicious intent does not diminish the polity concern.

#### **IV. A proposed solution: emerging status for site churches**

We propose that the remedy lies within the framework that the task force has already established. The organized/emerging distinction already recognizes that a congregation that lacks a fully self-governing council ought to be classified as emerging. We simply propose that this classification be applied consistently, including to established congregations that enter into a multisite network and thereby place themselves under the governance of network leadership.

Specifically we recommend that synod require organized congregations entering into multisite arrangements to *revert to emerging status* and to retain

that status for the duration of the multisite arrangement. This proposal is not punitive. It does not question the legitimacy or the fruit of multisite ministry, which we affirm. It does not even strip congregations of their participation in or delegation to classis, as the Church Order allows for councils to delegate officebearers from the emerging churches under their care (see Supplement, Article 40-a, d.). It simply insists that ecclesiastical status reflect ecclesiastical reality in the present, rather than historical designation. A congregation that has entrusted its original authority to a neighboring council or regional network—however temporarily and however fruitfully—is, in that season, functioning as an emerging congregation under Reformed polity. Recognizing it as such is not a demotion but an honest and pastorally appropriate description of where it stands, and this situation provides both the congregation and the classis with a clear and accountable pathway forward.

This approach also aligns with the safeguards the task force itself recommends in section V, E of its report, where it recognizes that “emerging congregations should be understood as temporarily lacking local officebearers, not as permanently dependent communities” and that “multisite structures should include clear pathways for leadership development and, where feasible, movement toward greater local governance.” We ask only that these safeguards be applied with equal care to existing organized congregations that enter a state of network dependency.

## V. Recommended alternative supplement to Article 35

### Supplement, Article 35

#### Multisite congregations

1. **Classical oversight:** When one or more churches enter into a multisite arrangement—defined as any structure in which a congregation cedes or shares governing authority described in Article 35 to another council or centralized leadership body—the approval of classis is required, in keeping with the principles of Church Order Articles 38-a and -e.

Classis shall ensure that appropriate church visitors—and, where applicable, church counselors—are assigned to each campus or worshiping community within a multisite structure. Church visitors should regularly inquire into the formal arrangements governing multisite congregations and their campuses to ensure continued ecclesiastical clarity and accountability.

2. **Ecclesiastical status:** In keeping with the Church Order’s principle of the local council’s original authority, churches that enter into a multisite arrangement shall be considered emerging churches under the care and leadership of the council providing oversight, according to Church Order Article 38, until such a time as the congregation both meets the requirements for organization laid out in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-b and is ready to resume local self-

governance by electing a council of officebearers to oversee the tasks required by Church Order Article 35. Classis shall regularly review the progress that site churches are making toward organization, and shall continue to encourage the formation of a self-governing local council as the truest expression of the headship of Christ over his church. Site churches within a multisite network may continue to delegate officebearers to classis under the provisions for emerging congregations in Church Order Supplement, Article 40.

- 3. Membership records and pastoral accountability:** The council of a multisite congregation shall maintain clear and accurate membership records for each campus or worshiping community. This practice serves pastoral care, discipline, and ecclesiastical accountability and assists both council and classis in discerning the health, development, and status of each community within the multisite arrangement.

## **VI. Overture**

Classis Muskegon therefore requests that Synod 2026 do the following:

A. Commend the Task Force to Study Multisite Churches for its careful and theologically grounded work, and receive its report as a valuable resource for congregations and classes navigating multisite expressions of church life.

B. Amend the proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 35, prior to adoption, to include a provision requiring that any organized congregation entering a multisite arrangement be recognized by classis as an emerging congregation for purposes of ecclesiastical status, until such a time as the congregation has developed and elected a self-governing council of ministers, elders, and deacons capable of exercising original authority over all responsibilities articulated in Church Order Article 35-a.

C. Adopt the proposed changes to the Church Order Supplement presented in this overture to further specify that classes, in their regular review of multisite arrangements, reaffirm the Reformed principle of the original authority of the local council of officebearers as the truest expression of the headship of Christ over his church, and encourage congregations and networks to work toward local self-governance as part of their vision and strategic plan.

### *Grounds:*

1. The principle of the original authority of the local council is a foundational commitment of Reformed polity, rooted in the confessional conviction that the church “ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word” (Belgic Confession, Art. 30).
2. The Church Order’s existing organized/emerging distinction, which the task force affirms, is theologically well-grounded and practically useful. Consistent application of this distinction to reflect the reality

of a congregation's self-governance through locally elected officers closes a significant gap in the proposed supplement without requiring revision of the report's broader framework.

3. Without such a provision, the changes to the supplement proposed by the task force permit a configuration in which multisite networks may adopt models that conflict with or even subvert the proper role of the regional classis and/or local council.
4. The task force itself acknowledges the risk that multisite arrangements may concentrate authority in a central figure or network structure in ways that undermine local ecclesiastical accountability, even unintentionally. A clear requirement for churches submitting to the authority of a network's leadership to revert to emerging status provides a concrete safeguard against this risk.
5. Emerging status is not a permanent condition but a transitional one, with the goal being local self-governance. Furthermore, emerging status is not punitive but reflective of a congregation's ecclesiastical reality. The Church Order allows for the delegation of officebearers from emerging congregations under the authority of a neighboring council. The proposed supplement encourages movement toward self-governance without demanding it, retaining flexibility for congregations to exist indefinitely within multisite agreements under emerging status if that is appropriate to the ministry context.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 39

### **Response to the Defining Membership Task Force Report**

#### **I. Background**

The report of the Defining Membership Task Force offers reflection on the biblical, theological, and pastoral dimensions of church membership within the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The report rightly seeks to address real pastoral and missional challenges faced by local consistories as they receive individuals into confessing membership. At the same time, the report introduces language and categories that raise important questions regarding the nature of confessional commitment in the church.

In particular, the report suggests that confessing membership may, in some cases, be "rooted in alignment with the ecumenical creeds" while being distinguished from full alignment with the Reformed confessions. This introduces a conceptual distinction that does not clearly align with the historic understanding of membership in the CRC.

Historically the church has understood a distinction between confessing members and officebearers—not in the substance of their faith but in their role and responsibility. While officebearers are called to a greater measure of knowledge, discernment, and teaching responsibility, the core commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as articulated in the Reformed confessions, is shared by all confessing members of the church.

Furthermore, the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions serve different but complementary purposes. The ecumenical creeds articulate foundational doctrines such as those focusing on the Trinity and the person of Christ, while the Reformed confessions give fuller expression to the doctrine of salvation and the gospel of grace. Accordingly, the confessions have functioned not as optional or secondary standards but as essential expressions of the church’s shared faith.

In recent years, some approved liturgical forms for profession of faith have expressed confessional commitment in less explicit ways, emphasizing agreement with the teachings of the church without always clearly naming the Reformed confessions. While often motivated by pastoral and missional concerns, such developments have introduced a measure of ambiguity regarding what is affirmed in a profession of faith. The present report appears to build upon and extend this lack of clarity, making it especially important for synod to provide guidance regarding the nature of confessing membership.

The concern, therefore, is not limited to particular recommendations within the report but extends to the underlying framework by which confessional commitment is being described. The introduction of categories such as “alignment,” “rootedness,” and “balance” between creeds and confessions introduces ambiguity into the nature of confessing membership and its relationship to the confessions.

This lack of clarity risks creating inconsistency in practice across consistories, confusion for those making profession of faith, and a gradual weakening of the confessional identity of the church.

## **II. Overture**

The council of Hillcrest CRC, Hudsonville, Michigan, overtures Synod 2026 to do the following:

- A. Decline to adopt the Defining Membership Task Force report and dismiss the task force with appreciation for its work.
- B. Direct consistories and future synods to continue to include the confessional nature of professing membership in accordance with the Church Order.

### *Grounds:*

1. The report introduces ambiguity into the nature of confessional commitment for confessing members.

The report's use of categories such as "alignment," "balance," and "rootedness" in relation to the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions introduces a category shift in how confessional commitment is understood. This departs from the historic clarity that confessing members affirm the doctrine of Scripture as summarized in both the creeds and confessions.

2. The report creates tension with the established teaching of Church Order regarding confessional commitment.

Church Order Article 1 states that the Christian Reformed Church confesses "its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word."

Church Order Article 59-b states that a public profession of faith includes a "commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church."

This language describes not varying degrees of alignment but a shared confessional posture of the church. The framework presented in the report introduces categories that suggest differing kinds or levels of commitment not reflected in the Church Order.

3. The report risks redefining the distinction between confessing members and officebearers in a way that implies a difference in kind rather than role.

Historically the distinction between confessing members and officebearers has been one of responsibility, calling, and depth of understanding—not a difference in the substance of their shared faith.

While officebearers are expected to demonstrate greater knowledge, wisdom, and ability to teach and defend the faith, the core commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as articulated in the Reformed confessions, is shared by all confessing members.

The report's framework risks introducing a two-tiered understanding of doctrinal commitment within the church.

4. The report's treatment of the relationship between the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions obscures the centrality of the gospel.

The ecumenical creeds were formulated to address trinitarian and Christological controversies, while the Reformed confessions provide a fuller articulation of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

To suggest that confessing membership may be adequately grounded in the ecumenical creeds apart from a clear commitment to the Reformed confessions risks diminishing the clarity with which the gospel is confessed in the life of the church.

5. The report's framework introduces practical ambiguity for consistories and congregations.

By introducing flexible and undefined categories of confessional alignment, the report risks inconsistent standards for profession of faith across consistories, confusion among those seeking membership, weakened catechetical expectations, and diminished clarity in the church's teaching and discipleship.

6. The concerns raised are not limited to isolated recommendations but arise from the report's underlying framework.

While specific recommendations within the report reflect these concerns, the issues are more fundamental. The ambiguity present in the report's conceptual approach to membership and confessional commitment cannot be adequately addressed through partial revision or selective adoption.

For this reason, it is most appropriate for synod to decline adoption of the report in its entirety.

Council of Hillcrest CRC, Hudsonville, Michigan  
Randall Plaisier, clerk

*Note:* This overture was submitted to Classis Georgetown for consideration at its May 14, 2026, classis meeting but was not adopted.

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## OVERTURE 40

### **Reject Recommendations A, B, and D of the Defining Membership Task Force Report**

#### **I. Background**

Christian Reformed churches are for people who identify as Reformed Christians, just as Roman Catholic churches are for people who identify as Roman Catholics. Now, this does not mean that every confessing member in the CRC is able to understand every aspect of Reformed theology. But this does mean that every confessing member in the CRC has heard what Reformed theology is and has chosen to commit to it.

The chief thing that marks the CRC out as distinct from other denominations is our commitment to the Reformed confessions (the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort). This commitment to the Reformed Confessions is made by confessing members (see Church Order, Article 59-b) and officebearers who are elected to their office from among the confessing members (see Church Order, Article 3-a). Article 1-a of our Church Order says forcefully that the Christian Reformed Church confesses "its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds."

Our Reformed confessions are significant and precious to us for many reasons, but especially because they articulate the Reformed understanding of the gospel (salvation by grace alone), which is not shared by every ecclesiastical body. For example, the Roman Catholic Church rejects the Reformed

conviction that a person is saved by grace alone apart from works, and instead teaches that a person is saved by grace and cooperating with grace.

What concerns us about the Defining Membership Task Force report is that it separates the ecumenical creeds from the Reformed confessions and suggests that confessing membership in the CRC could be grounded in a commitment to the ecumenical creeds but not necessarily the Reformed confessions.

Notice what the task force report says: “It seems possible, then, that a consistory may admit an individual to confessing membership whose commitment aligns more closely with the ecumenical creeds than with some elements of the Reformed confessions” (*Agenda for Synod 2026*, p. 259). This notion appears again in Recommendations B and D on page 268.

We believe that Recommendations A, B, and D of this task force report depart from the historic and current understanding of confessing membership in the CRC.

Recommendation A asks Synod 2026 to note “the distinction in confessional commitment required of officebearers in comparison to that of confessing members” (p. 267). But our Church Order does not expect confessing members to be less committed to the confessions than officebearers, as is made clear both by Church Order Articles 1-a and 59-b. The actual distinction our Church Order makes between confessing members and officebearers in relation to the Reformed confessions is that officebearers are expected to “promote and defend” the Reformed confessions on top of committing to them (see *Covenant for Officebearers*, Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a), whereas it is sufficient for confessing members to commit to the Reformed confessions without necessarily having the capacity to promote and defend them. This distinction is clear when the *Covenant for Officebearers* is compared side by side with Church Order Article 59-b, which spells out the confessional expectations for confessing members.

Recommendation B asks Synod 2026 to urge consistories to think “about the balance between confessing membership rooted in the ecumenical creeds and an approach rooted in the Reformed confessions” (p. 268). This statement is not totally clear, but in light of the clearer remark found on page 259 (quoted above), this recommendation seems to be saying that there is an approach to membership “rooted in the ecumenical creeds” that stands apart from the Reformed confessions. This is out of step with Church Order Article 1-a and 59-b.

Recommendation D then asks Synod 2026 to recognize “the validity of CRC professing membership rooted in alignment with the ecumenical creeds” (p. 268). Notice that Recommendation D does not say “rooted in alignment with the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions.” Recommendation D goes on to mention the Reformed confessions, but not in the same breath as the ecumenical creeds, giving us the impression that the task force thinks a commitment to the Reformed confessions is certainly ideal for new

confessing members but not essential. This is also out of step with Church Order Article 1-a and 59-b.

In contrast to this task force report, Synod 1975 rightly and plainly said, “Full agreement with the confessions is expected from all members of the church” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 44, 601). This declaration from Synod 1975 simply echoes the spirit and design of the Reformed confessions themselves. The Belgic Confession begins all of its articles with expressions like “We all believe” (Art. 1) or “We confess” (Art. 3), and this “we” found throughout the Belgic Confession is the voice of the whole congregation, not merely the voice of the officebearers. The Heidelberg Catechism is similar in its deployment of personal pronouns, which are intended for the whole church to take upon its lips as the catechism is confessed together (see, for example, the personal pronouns in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 26, 60).

In summary, the defining membership task force report recommends making the Reformed confessions nonessential and secondary to the ecumenical creeds when it comes to confessing membership in our churches. This is clear from the statement found on page 259 of the report, which we quoted earlier, as well as from the report’s pushback against Synod 1975’s statement, which is found on page 257 of their report.

The Council of Zutphen CRC finds both of these things problematic—that is, no longer requiring a commitment to the Reformed confessions from confessing members and making the Reformed confessions secondary to the ecumenical creeds when it comes to confessing membership.

We do not believe that a mere commitment to the ecumenical creeds apart from the Reformed confessions is satisfactory for confessing membership in the Christian Reformed Church, because while the ecumenical creeds lay out the orthodox position concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ, they do not explicitly lay out the Reformed understanding of the gospel. The ecumenical creeds were written in large part to combat trinitarian and Christological heresies in the ancient church, but they were not written to combat counterfeit gospels. The debate regarding the gospel itself happened years later at the time of the Protestant Reformation. It was in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation that our Reformed confessions were written. And our Reformed confessions lay out with clarity and force the true gospel—that a person is saved by grace alone apart from works rather than by grace and cooperating with grace.

With this difference in mind (that the ecumenical creeds lay out the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ while the Reformed confessions lay out the proper understanding of the gospel) we believe that every confessing member in the CRC should continue committing to both the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions. Of course, this does not mean that every confessing member understands every aspect of the creeds and confessions, but it does mean that they have heard the doctrine

contained in the creeds and the confessions and desire to commit to it. The Reformed confessions are as significant for confessing membership as the ecumenical creeds because the Reformed confessions explicitly state how a person can be saved—and there is nothing more essential to know, commit to, and confess than that.

## **II. Overture**

In light of this background, the Council of Zutphen CRC of Hudsonville, Michigan, overtures Synod 2026 to do the following:

A. Reject Recommendations A, B, and D in the Defining Membership Task Force report.

*Grounds:*

1. These task force recommendations are out of step with Church Order Articles 1-a and 59-b.
2. The ecumenical creeds alone are insufficient for confessing membership in the Christian Reformed Church since they do not explicitly lay out the Reformed understanding of the gospel.
3. Making the Reformed confessions secondary to the ecumenical creeds puts the CRC at risk of losing sight of the gospel of salvation by grace alone apart from works.
4. Congregational unity is enhanced when we commit to the Reformed confessions together rather than having one doctrinal expectation for officebearers and another expectation for confessing members.
5. The Reformed confessions have always been at the heart of who we are as the Christian Reformed Church.

B. Reiterate that confessing membership in the CRC is for people committed to the ecumenical creeds (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed) and the Reformed confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort).

*Grounds:*

1. Since the CRC's current position has been challenged in the Defining Membership Task Force report, it should be reiterated by synod, in order to avoid confusion and guide the future practice of our churches.
2. Our Church Order says that confessing membership is for people committed to both "the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church" (see Church Order Art. 59-b).
3. Pastors and elders are a true blessing to people interested in confessing membership when they patiently work with these individuals to help them understand not only the doctrine of God and the person of Christ prior to their reception as confessing members, but also the gospel itself. A wise person once said, "What we win them with, is what we win them to." The Christian Reformed Church should continue winning people to the wonderful message that a person is

saved by grace alone through faith alone apart from works, as the apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 2:8-9.

Council of Zutphen CRC, Hudsonville, Michigan  
Joel VanNoord, clerk

*Note:* This overture was submitted to Classis Georgetown for consideration at its May 14, 2026, classis meeting but was not adopted.