

Council of Delegates Comments regarding Overture 45

MEMO

To: Synod 2024

From: CRCNA Council of Delegates

Re: Overture 45: Appoint a Task Force to Shape a Gentle Pathway for Those Departing the CRCNA (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 531-39)

Date: March 2024

Introduction

In its overture to Synod 2024, River Park Church of Calgary, Alberta, requests that synod “appoint a Gentle Pathway Task Force for the purpose of providing support for those departing the CRCNA, with a focus primarily on supporting both congregations and pastors who have discerned a need to leave the CRCNA” (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 531). The overture goes on to make a number of specific requests to support pastors, churches, and CRCNA employees who might desire to leave the denomination.

Comments

In its consideration of Overture 45, the Council of Delegates would like to provide the following insights to synod:

1. Disaffiliation of congregations: Unlike many other denominations, the CRCNA has a fairly simple and straightforward disaffiliation process for congregations outlined in Church Order Article 38-f and its Supplement. While disaffiliation carries emotional weight for a congregation, there are *no legal impediments within Church Order* that would require special effort or study. Furthermore, the individual bylaws of each CRCNA congregation (which can be amended by congregations themselves) regulate the disposition of property of the congregation “in the event of an irreconcilable division.”
2. Minister’s pension: The CRCNA pension plans allow for continued participation only if a CRC congregation holds a minister’s credentials and the congregation or organization the minister serves contributes to the pension (see Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, D, 11; Art. 38-g and its Supplement). In one category CRC ministers themselves may contribute (Art. 13-c and its Supplement). Allowing ministers outside this category to continue active participation (actively accruing service credits and paying premiums) would require significant changes to Church Order and a complete overhaul of the pension plans. Defining the set of entities that could participate would be a key component, one that is elusive at best in the circumstances outlined in this overture. Determining the feasibility of this type of overhaul to the plans would take a significant

- financial investment in actuarial expertise alone. It should be noted that upon leaving the CRC pension plan, participants do not forfeit their accrued benefit.
3. Support for congregations and ministers making difficult decisions about their affiliation with the CRCNA: Thrive, the CRCNA's agency to support congregations, has already developed proven resources to support congregations that are facing difficult decisions (see crcna.org/pcr/churches). These resources have been used successfully by churches in the midst of difficult decisions and are supported effectively by Thrive staff members.
 4. Supporting CRCNA staff: If CRCNA staff members face concerns in their employment, the human resource departments in both the U.S. and Canada offer programs of professional counseling and support. The human resource departments provide as much material support to departing staff as possible under CRCNA policies in view of equity and financial realities facing our agencies and institutions.

Conclusion

As CRCNA members and leaders, we pray and long for unity. Our denomination, like many others, has experienced painful fracturing. We are hurting. When congregations and leaders choose to disaffiliate, resources and pathways already exist to make such separations as healthy as possible. The energy and resources of the agencies and institutions of our denomination are best used to further the calling, ministry, and mission of CRCNA congregations that remain. We continue to trust the Holy Spirit's capacity to do amazing things in and through the CRCNA despite our brokenness.

Note: This communication is submitted to synod per the synodically approved "Right of Comment" policy in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, which states the following:

1. The COD itself (i.e., without staff initiation) may judge that synod would be well served by a formal communication in response to a matter on synod's agenda that affects a ministry that falls under the governance of the COD.
2. If time permits, the COD may ask staff for background information.
3. The communication that emerges may be adopted or endorsed and communicated to synod via the COD's Supplement Report.