

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES SUPPLEMENT

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I. Membership

A. Appointment of classical delegates

The COD recommends that Synod 2025 appoint the following nominees for the classis and at-large positions indicated below to a first term of three years, beginning July 1, 2025 (see Recommendation A).

Classis Albert North

Wendy Werkman (M.Div.) serves as pastor of congregational care and discipleship at Bethel Community CRC, Edmonton, Alberta. Wendy has served as a coach with Church Renewal Labs, on the Westana Condo Board executive team, as a member of the Strathcona Chamber of Commerce, as chair of Women Alive Canada, as president of the parent council at Northeast Christian School, as chair of the building committee at Gateway Alliance Church, and on the finance, facilities and human resources committees at Bethel Church. She presently serves on the shepherding elder board of Bethel Church. Wendy has been involved in all areas of church ministry, from teaching Bible studies and children's church to serving as prayer coordinator and church administrator.

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan

Lee Himbeault is an engineer with professional experience in business development, marketing, and product management. With over 40 years of experience in the telecommunications and technology industries, he has held senior roles focused on growth, change, and innovation. Lee is a member of Covenant CRC, Calgary, Alberta, where he has served as an elder, as chair of both council and consistory, as a men's Bible study leader, and as a guitarist on the worship team. He has also served on the board of Neighbourlink Calgary and has many years of experience on other nonprofit and industry association boards. Prior to joining Covenant CRC, he was a member of various Lutheran churches, serving on council, on social ministry committees, and as a delegate to the synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Classis Atlantic Northeast

Henry Lane is a member of Fairlawn CRC, Whitinsville, Massachusetts. He is an attorney who holds a bachelor's degree from Calvin College, a juris doctor degree from Suffolk University Law School, and a master of laws degree from Boston University Law School. He has served on the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees as well as on a number of municipal, community, and political boards and committees. He has also served on a synodical study committee and as a deacon and elder on his church council. Henry currently serves as the elected moderator of the Town of Northbridge, Massachusetts (presiding officer of the town's legislative assembly) and on the Fairlawn Church council.

Canada - at large

Gregg Lawson is a retired minister of the Word, with credentials held at Community CRC, Dixons Corners, Ontario. Before completing his master of divinity degree, he worked in business development and project management for various regional and international logistics companies over a twenty-five year period. Greg has served as chair of the classis executive committee for Classis Quinte and Classis Eastern Canada, as a synodical deputy, and as chair of the local ministerial association.

Canada - at large

Linda VanSligtenhorst is a member of First CRC, Owen Sound, Ontario, where she currently serves on the worship committee. She has also served on the boards of the Kiwanis Festival of Music, Timothy Christian School (as treasurer and chair), and the Bruce Grey Child and Family Services (as member and chair). She is self-employed as a legal office administrator. Linda loves the CRCNA denomination and volunteers extensively in her community and church. She has a heart for board governance and holds institutional trust in high regard.

Classis Hamilton

Mike Bekendam is a member of Hope CRC, Brantford, Ontario. He holds a diploma in business marketing and is working on a masters of Christian leadership degree at Calvin Theological Seminary while working in the commercial real estate investment and development industry. He also serves as the youth ministry coordinator at Hope Church. Before pursuing vocational ministry, Mike started and operated a portable storage company. He has also served as chair of the Brantford Christian School board and as chair the school's capital campaign committee and building committee during an expansion project. He has also chaired fundraising campaigns for nonprofits. After leading a mission trip to the Dominican Republic serving the Sinergia Christian Reformed School system (which operates 15 Christian schools), he continues to consult with Sinergia and other local Christian schools, primarily in fundraising and capital campaigns. Mike has also served on numerous other committees, primarily in finance and youth ministry, and he has served two terms as an elder. He currently serves at the Hope Pregnancy and Family Support Centre in Brantford as a male client advocate, mentoring young men involved in unplanned pregnancies.

Classis North Cascades

Bryan Dick serves as the pastor of Bethel CRC, Lynden, Washington. He has served in classis leadership on the student fund, deacons, home missions, and classical interim committees. He currently serves as chair of the elders at Bethel CRC.

B. Corporation officers and executive committee of the Council of Delegates

At its May meeting the COD members from their respective corporations and the full Council of Delegates elected the following to serve as officers in 2025-2026:

1 CRCNA Canada Corporation/CRCNA Canada Ministry Board

President: Andre Van Ryk

Vice president: Roberta Vriesema

Treasurer: Peter Meerveld

Secretary: Henry Eygenraam

2. CRCNA U.S. Corporation/CRCNA U.S. Ministry Board

President: Michael Ten Haken

Vice president: Jill Feikema

Treasurer: Christian Sebastia

Secretary: Drew Sweetman

3. ReFrame Ministries Canada Corporation

President: Andre Van Ryk

Vice president: Roberta Vriesema

Treasurer: Peter Meerveld

Secretary: Henry Eygenraam

4. ReFrame Ministries U.S. Corporation

President: Michael Ten Haken

Vice president: Jill Feikema

Treasurer: Christian Sebastia

Secretary: Drew Sweetman

5. Council of Delegates executive committee and officers

Chair: Michael Ten Haken

Vice chair: Andre Van Ryk

Secretary: Peter Meerveld

Treasurer: Drew Sweetman

II. Program matters

A. Diversity report

Synod 2016 tasked the CRC's executive director (now general secretary) with requesting "an annual diversity report from each agency and ministry" and including "a summary of these reports . . . to the [COD] each February" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 829). A delay in receiving data from various boards this year led to the summary of reports being delayed for presentation to the COD until its May 2025 meeting. The COD presents here the summary of the diversity reports.

Data for the 2024-25 year with regard to gender and ethnic diversity has been received from the denominational boards (Council of Delegates, Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University, and World Renew). In addition, data from the World Renew Joint Ministry Council (JMC) is included

along with data from the World Renew Board of Delegates. *Note:* The JMC is elected from the membership of the World Renew Board of Delegates.

Out of 149 denominationally appointed board members, 40 (27%) are women, and 34 (22%) are people of color. As compared to the data from 2023-24, this reflects a decrease of 5 percent in women delegates, and an increase of 4 percent in delegates who are persons of color.

The diversity on individual denominational boards is also reported in light of synod's goal of having at least 25 percent ethnic-minority membership (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 631-32).

Denominational board ethnic diversity

<i>Board</i>	<i>2022-2023</i>	<i>2023-2024</i>	<i>2024-2025</i>
Calvin Theological Seminary	24%	25%	14%
Calvin University	16%	19%	19%
World Renew (JMC)	n/a	20%	25%
COD	18%	14%	17%

Denominational board gender diversity

<i>Board</i>	<i>2022-2023</i>	<i>2023-2024</i>	<i>2024-2025</i>
Calvin Theological Seminary	28%	25%	19%
Calvin University	39%	35%	23%
World Renew (JMC)	n/a	47%	38%
COD	30%	31%	26%

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.

B. Gather Initiative

The COD received a report from Elaine May, project manager for the Gather Initiative, reviewing the ten Gather events that took place from April 2024 through April 2025. A full report is included as a supplemental agency report from Thrive, and further reflection on the findings will be presented to Synod 2026 as part of the response to synod's instruction "to develop a comprehensive unified strategy" to work toward membership growth in the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976). The COD recommends that synod allow a period of 30 minutes for a presentation and discussion on this initiative (see Recommendation B) and that synod receive the report on the Gather initiative for information as part of the response to synod's directive to address membership decline (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976) (see Recommendation C).

C. Ministry plan review

Following a directive from Synod 2024 to review and evaluate the ministry plan, with a specific instruction to "review the wording and intent of [the milestone] . . . Grow in Diversity" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12), the COD

received a report from a team tasked with reviewing the ministry plan. The report is presented in Appendix A (see Recommendation D).

D. Ethnic-minority committee

At its February meeting the COD voted to develop a proposal for adding a committee to the Council of Delegates to function as a connection point for identified ethnic-minority leaders of the CRC to share their feedback and engagement regarding the CRCNA's ecclesiastical structures. This proposal aims to create an intentional process of connecting ethnic-minority churches and leaders to both the ministries and the ecclesiastical processes of the CRCNA in light of feedback received by denominational leadership in recent years. At its May meeting the COD received and approved a committee charter for the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee to be added to the COD Governance Handbook, with a proposal to evaluate whether to continue or discontinue the committee after an initial trial period. The committee charter is presented in Appendix B (see Recommendation E).

E. Assessment resources for bivocational and covocational pastors

Synod 2023 directed the Office of General Secretary to provide resources for bivocational pastors for ministry wellness and for end-of-ministry situations (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 966). The Thrive Committee of the COD has prepared resources for an Annual Pastoral Wellness Check and an End of Ministry Wellness Check, available by email request to thrive@crcna.org (see Recommendation F).

F. Ministry evaluation and schedule

In 2018, when synod adopted the COD's Prioritization and Evaluation Report (assigned by Synod 2016), the COD and the executive director (now general secretary) were instructed to "continue the important work of [ministry] evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455). Synod 2015 had adopted five ministry priorities to strategically focus the work of the CRCNA, and the ministries were evaluated accordingly through the year 2022. The executive committee of the COD approved a pause to the reporting practices while the COD reorganization (resulting from the work of the Structure and Leadership Task Force) was in progress (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 45). At its May 2025 meeting the COD received an updated schedule for the ongoing evaluation of all agencies and ministries. The COD also now recommends that the focus of denominational reporting be in alignment with the *Our Journey* ministry plan instead of the five ministry priorities (see Recommendation G).

Presentations by CRC ministries play an important role in the function of synod. Reports provide the means for accountability, celebration, prayer

support, encouragement, and increased understanding. Synod 2025 will receive presentations from ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission. The updated schedule and recommendations are provided in Appendix C.

III. Polity matters

A. COD responses to Overtures 5, 6, 7, 29

The Council of Delegates exercises its right of comment by endorsing the responses presented in Appendices D, E, and F regarding the following overtures:

- Overture 5: Rewrite *The Banner* Mandate (see Appendix D)
- Overture 6: Amend the Synodical Mandate and Guidelines of *The Banner* (see Appendix D)
- Overture 7: Synodical Advisory Committee regarding Denominational Boards (see Appendix E)
- Overture 29: Prioritize Church Planting within the Denominational Budget (Appendix F)

B. Synodical deputies and alternates

On behalf of synod, the COD has ratified the following classical appointments of synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies*:

<i>Classis</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Term</i>
Eastern Canada	C. Gregg Lawson	B. Gresik	2028 (1)
Grand Rapids South	G. Bekker	J. Vander Hooft	2028 (1)

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

C. Judicial Code Committee

The COD Synodical Services Committee, on behalf of the COD, has solicited nominees for the anticipated vacancy of a person trained in law. The Council of Delegates recommends that synod elect one new member for the Judicial Code Committee, for a first term of three years, from the following slate of nominees (see Recommendation H).

Jason Van Doesburg is a self-employed lawyer and serves as an elder at First CRC, Edmonton, Alberta. He has served multiple terms on council and its committees and as a delegate to synod in 2000 and in 2017. He professes and has demonstrated a strong commitment to good process and justice, within and outside the church. He is interested in the subject matter and work of the Judicial Code Committee, and he is committed to serving and learning on this committee.

Leah Nieuwstraten is a law student and a member of Hope CRC, Brantford, Ontario. She holds a bachelor of laws degrees and is in her final year of study for a bachelor's degree in criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University. As a law student and as a Christian, her faith and career aspirations are intrinsically linked. Additionally, as someone who has grown up in the CRC and who is passionate about living out the words

in Micah 6:8, she anticipates that serving on the Judicial Code Committee will deepen her understanding of Church Order and administration while contributing to justice in the church.

D. COD Governance Handbook

In addition to the updates reported earlier (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 29-30, and Appendix A), the COD at its May meeting received additional updates to the Governance Handbook, including a revised Dignity Team Charter. These additional updates are presented in Appendix G of this report (see Recommendation I.) The COD requests that synod consider these updates together with those presented in Recommendation H of its report in the *Agenda for Synod 2025* (pp. 39-40).

E. Review of COD exceptions policy

Synod 2024 instructed denominational boards, including the COD, “to review and revise” their policies for assessing exceptions to the Reformed confessions in light of updates to the gravamen process (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 880).

At its February 2025 meeting the COD adopted changes to its delegate nomination process to confirm potential nominees’ agreement with the COD membership policies (including the COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA) before being recommended by classis or being presented for a vote on membership within the COD (see *Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 44). This change ensures that COD members affirm, as they begin their terms, that they hold to the creeds and confessions without reservation and do not hold settled convictions contrary to the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions (see Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 1).

Subsequently, at its May 2025 meeting the COD also adopted changes to replace its exceptions process (summarized in *Agenda for Synod 2019*, p. 33) with a new Personal Reservations Procedure designed to work in conjunction with the changes to the nominations process. Because COD members may no longer begin their term with an exception to the confessions, this new procedure addresses only reservations that might develop while the member is serving on the COD (see Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, 1). The Personal Reservations Procedure is presented in Appendix H. In summary, the revised COD nomination policies and updated reservation procedures mean that COD members may not begin their service with a reservation to a confessional matter or persist with a reservation (if they develop it subsequently) for longer than one three-year term. These changes demonstrate alignment with the ecclesiastical gravamen process (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5).

The COD requests that synod take note of the work done to bring the COD Governance Handbook into alignment with the directives of Synod 2024 (see Recommendation J).

F. Abuse of power

In response to the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee, Synod 2019 instructed the COD to report each year on progress made toward the goal of creating a culture in which all members are respected and called to mutual service (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 799). The COD receives regular reports from Thrive on its work with safe church advocacy and other related projects. In addition, synod authorized the creation of a Dignity Team for the specific role of complementing existing management and governance systems to develop a pastoral response to abuse of power concerns throughout the CRCNA (*Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, pp. 634-37). The Dignity Team began its work in summer 2022 and, after working through 2023 with the COD to clarify its mandate, presented reports to the COD in October 2024 and in spring 2025. The COD also approved a plan to review the Dignity Team's role and place beginning in October 2026, as intended when the team was first instituted (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, p. 67), and the team's charter is presented as part of Appendix G (see section III, D of this report). The COD also approved renewing the terms of Sherry Fakkema, Carel Geleynse, and Sheila Holmes to serve in this role. The report of the Dignity Team is presented for information in Appendix I.

IV. Financial matters

A. Salary disclosure

At the directive of synod, the Council of Delegates reports the following salaries for senior CRCNA staff in the Office of General Secretary, ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global, and *The Banner*:

Job level	# of positions	# below target	# at target
E1	1	1	0
E2	5	5	0
E3	6	6	0

Synod 2014 adopted a salary administration system that uses a salary range target and a minimum of 85 percent of that target (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 552). In addition, the COD adopted a revised salary structure in 2020 with fewer levels than the previous structure. Salary ranges for the current fiscal year are as follows (unchanged from 2024):

2024-2025 Salary Grade and Range Structure

<i>Level</i>	<i>U.S. Range</i>		<i>Canadian Range</i>	
	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Target</i>
E1	\$163,294	\$204,117		
E2	\$147,361	\$184,201	\$141,762	\$177,202
E3	\$124,881	\$156,103	\$124,220	\$155,275
H	\$105,833	\$132,290	\$106,471	\$133,089
I	\$89,688	\$112,110	\$91,258	\$114,073
J	\$76,007	\$95,008	\$78,219	\$97,774
K	\$64,413	\$80,516	\$67,043	\$83,804
L	\$54,587	\$68,233	\$57,464	\$71,830

M	\$46,260	\$57,825	\$49,253	\$61,567
N	\$39,204	\$49,004	\$42,216	\$52,770
O	\$33,224	\$41,530	\$36,184	\$45,230

B. Nonretirement employee benefit programs

Oversight of the denomination's nonretirement employee benefit programs is provided by the Council of Delegates.

Consolidated Group Insurance is a denominational plan that offers health, dental, and life coverage in Canada to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 311 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 214 pastors and employees of local churches, 97 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and no retirees. The plan in Canada is a fully insured plan with coverage purchased through a major health-insurance provider and is supplemental to health benefits available through government health programs.

In the United States, the denomination offers health, dental, and life coverage to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 321 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 121 pastors and employees of local churches, 111 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 89 retirees. The plans are provided by the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) through a trust established to fund benefits and expenses of the plan. RBA was established by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the Board of Benefit Services of the Reformed Church in America to provide nonretirement benefit programs for both denominations, and is governed by a six-member board appointed by the two denominations' organizing bodies (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 446).

Premiums charged by the plan in Canada are set by the insurance carrier. The premiums for the U.S. plan are set by RBA based on overall expectations of claims and administrative expenses for the coming year.

C. COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs

At its February meeting the COD established a task force to consider ways to reduce governance costs, fund synod, and use time wisely. The task force is made up of members from the COD Finance and Synodical Services committees, along with relevant staff. The COD requested completion of a full report by October 2025 and an interim report by the time of its May 2025 meeting. During its May meeting the COD explored some of the possible ways forward, considering reduced costs and additional funding options. The interim report is presented in Appendix J.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod by way of the ballot elect new members to the COD from the nominations presented to a first term of three years (COD Supplement, section I).

- B. That synod allow a period of 30 minutes for a presentation and discussion on the Gather initiative (COD Supplement, section II, B).
- C. That synod receive the report on the Gather initiative (presented in the Thrive Supplement) for information as part of the response to synod's directive to address membership decline (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976) by helping classes and churches discern how God is at work to bring about renewal in the CRCNA (COD Supplement, section II, B).
- D. That synod receive the ministry plan review report in Appendix A in response to the Synod 2024 request to review and evaluate the *Our Journey* ministry plan, in particular the Grow in Diversity milestone (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12) (COD Supplement, section II, C).
- E. That synod note the creation of the COD's Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee, recognizing that the COD will evaluate the effectiveness of this committee after its first year of work. The committee charter is presented in Appendix B (COD Supplement, section II, D).

Ground:

This committee provides another potential avenue for deepening relationships and shared ministry efforts within the CRCNA across ethnic and cultural backgrounds, consistent with the principles articulated in previous synodical documents such as *God's Diverse and Unified Family* (see *Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 510-15).

- F. That synod note the completion of the task assigned by Synod 2023 regarding bivocational minister wellness (COD Supplement, section II, E).
- G. That synod receive for information the report on the ministry evaluation schedule as provided in Appendix C, and adopt its recommendations, including a shift to evaluate ministries in alignment with the *Our Journey* ministry plan instead of the five ministry priorities (COD Supplement, section II, F).
- H. That synod by way of the ballot elect one new member (person trained in law) to a first term of three years on the Judicial Code Committee (COD Supplement section III, C).
- I. That synod approve additional updates to the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook as presented in Appendix G (COD Supplement, section III, D). The COD requests that synod consider these updates together with those presented in Recommendation H of its report in the *Agenda for Synod 2025* (pp. 39-40).
- J. That synod affirm the work done by the COD to bring its exceptions policies into alignment with the instruction of Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 880). The Personal Reservations Procedure is presented in Appendix H (COD Supplement, section III, E).

Grounds:

- 1) Though not all COD members are officebearers, the changes to the COD's policies make clear that robust confessional alignment is desired for those who serve as part of synod's interim committee (Church Order Art. 33-b).
- 2) Similar to the gravamen regulations (Supplement, Church Order Art. 5: 1; A, 1; B, 2), the changes to COD procedures clarify the expectation that COD members will not begin their terms of service with settled convictions contrary to the Reformed confessions, that the Personal Reservations Procedure is intended to address only those difficulties that arise subsequent to their appointment to the COD, and that personal reservations are intended to be addressed and resolved within a three-year term.
- 3) These changes enable COD members who develop a personal reservation subsequent to the beginning of their term to maintain their active role in service while honoring the church's understanding of its confessions (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 879).

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

APPENDIX A

Ministry Plan Review

I. Introduction

The *Our Journey* ministry plan first launched in 2015 after a series of strategic listening sessions with Christian Reformed churches and members across the United States and Canada. The first iteration of the ministry plan included five “desired futures” for the CRCNA to work on by 2020: community engagement, discipleship, leadership, Reformed identity, and collaboration (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 484-85, 655).

In 2020, *Our Journey* was updated for the next five years with four new goals (*Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2020*, pp. 421-23). These were selected on the basis of feedback gleaned from classis meetings, denominational conferences, synod, and other listening sessions, as well as from information that had been gathered before the previous ministry plan was created. The new goals that CRC members and leaders sensed that God was calling us to set were redefined as “milestones” and included the following: cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual disciplines, listening to the voices of every generation, growing in unity and diversity, and sharing the gospel.

Unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as polarization in both our political cultures and synodical discussions, limited progress on these milestones. Synod 2024 agreed to extend the *Our Journey* ministry plan with those same milestones until 2030, but also asked that the plan and wording be reviewed and possibly updated. Synod specifically asked that the third milestone about “growing in diversity and unity” be reviewed to ensure that we are emphasizing hospitality and welcome and not merely ethnicity quotas (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12).

The Office of General Secretary assigned the tasks here to two groups—one to look at how the ministry plan is expressed and communicated to CRC members, and the other to look at metrics and how the plan is being administered, measured, and evaluated. The following report provides an update on the first group’s assignment, focusing on these points:

- reviewing the milestone terminology and framing
- reviewing the resources connected to the milestones
- reviewing the placement of milestones on crcna.org and other identified pieces
- soliciting feedback from key stakeholders (COD, ministry boards, ethnic-minority groups, staff, key CRC leaders, etc.)
- reviewing promotion, engagement, and communication strategies, including the *Our Journey* survey

The second assignment involves internal procedures and operational policies for staff, so the group looking at those matters will report to the COD as needed.

II. Methodology

To address the first assignment, a small group of staff met between September and December and completed the following:

- reviewed the current *Our Journey* website and support materials
- reviewed data from the annual denominational survey
- gathered written materials on hospitality, diversity, and unity that have been produced by synod and/or CRCNA ministries
- sent a brief survey to COD members
- conducted one-on-one conversations with a broad range of CRC members representing a variety of geographic regions, ethnicities, ages, genders, and perspectives
- presented initial findings to the COD in February 2025
- implemented steps based on the COD’s feedback

III. Recommendations

Based on its research, this group makes the following recommendations, exploring them further throughout this section.

1. Build awareness—CRC members should recognize themselves in the ministry plan and see how denominational ministries are supporting them in the things they care about. It’s important to communicate that

congregations across the denomination are already working in these areas and that the agencies of the CRCNA are oriented toward supporting congregations in these efforts.

2. Allow for flexibility—There is great variety in how congregations are responding to and growing in each of the milestone areas. There are also multiple ways in which CRCNA ministries can support congregations. The ministry plan materials need to be presented in a way that is flexible to a variety of contexts and points people to where they can find support that fits their unique needs.
3. Connect to Scripture—There is a need to provide the biblical background and theological framework behind each milestone area to help people understand why these four areas are important for CRC congregations at this time.
4. Ensure that our culture encourages diversity—The third milestone about growing in unity and diversity remains something that all CRC people are committed to. While the wording of this milestone is not, in itself, problematic, there continues to be work needed in our systems to ensure that the CRC is serving well in this area.

Let's explore these recommendations a bit further.

A. Recommendation 1: Build awareness

When the first *Our Journey* ministry plan launched in 2015, a packet of materials was sent to every CRC congregation. In most cases, this packet simply sat on a shelf in church offices. In conversations with individuals, and in reviewing the COD survey results, it became clear that most people in the CRC are not aware of the *Our Journey* ministry plan and don't see it as related to the work happening in their congregation.

This is also true of the second *Our Journey* plan. However, *Our Journey 2025* did successfully build ownership within the agencies and ministries of the CRCNA. Each milestone became part of at least one Ministries Leadership Council meeting each year, at which progress was discussed. The milestones were also frequent topics on the agendas for CRCNA staff town hall meetings. This repeated communication helped to foster ownership and awareness of the plan among ministry staff.

What this has revealed is that there is a need for regular and consistent communication about *Our Journey* to church leaders and people in the pews. They need to see themselves reflected in whatever is communicated and to know that denominational ministries are supporting them in the things they care about. There is a need to communicate that congregations across the denomination are working in these areas and that the agencies of the CRCNA are oriented toward supporting them in their efforts.

Changes that have been implemented:

- Small tweaks to the crcna.org/OurJourney page to ensure that the language of "you and your church" is used throughout.

- The creation of sticker images for each milestone. These images will be used on resources, workshop materials, and so on as they are used by congregations in the coming years.
- Gathering and sharing stories from congregations that are working in these areas, including ones in which denominational agencies provided assistance. Some sample stories have already been added to the website, and additional ones will be included over time.

B. Recommendation 2: Allow for flexibility

The *Our Journey* materials presented each milestone, encouraged people to reach out to a “milestone champion” with their questions, and provided a static list of resources in each area for those who wanted to do more.

In conversations with people as part of the ministry plan review, it was discovered that almost no one had reached out to the milestone champion with their questions. People also reported that the long list of resources on each milestone page online was daunting. What’s more, in some cases people would find a resource on the page that they didn’t think would fit their context, or was problematic to them in some way, and they’d discount all the rest.

Changes that have been implemented:

- Instead of linking to one milestone champion online, we now provide the One Click, One Call, One Chat information so that people have an easy way to connect to a CRCNA staff member. Customer service representatives are already trained to listen to callers and direct them to the CRCNA agency or resource that best fits the context of the inquiry. This change makes use of existing infrastructure and ties in to how Thrive is structured.
- Instead of featuring a list of resources, each *Our Journey* milestone webpage now mentions which agencies can be helpful in each milestone area. (*Note: While we have many agencies providing resources for milestones 2, 3, and 4, we don’t have as many working on milestone 1.*)
- Each milestone page now includes video stories that focus on what real congregations have been doing. This can inspire other churches to think creatively about what might work in their context. Additional stories will be added over time.
- Congregations are encouraged to send in their stories so that they can be shared with others. These can be sent to communications@crcna.org.

C. Recommendation 3: Connect to Scripture

The materials for *Our Journey 2020* and *Our Journey 2025* were based on conversations that were part of strategic listening sessions across the denomination. They revealed the real needs and expressed desires of ministry leaders. They are also deeply scriptural and connect well with our Reformed

theology. However, the way the materials are presented online and in support materials does not explain this connection. In conversations with people as part of the ministry plan review, CRC constituents clearly expressed a desire for the scriptural basis to be spelled out.

This has been found to be especially true for the third milestone about growing in diversity and unity. The people who were interviewed shared deep respect for the CRCNA report “God’s Diverse and Unified Family” (crcna.org/sites/default/files/diversefamily.pdf). They encouraged staff to share more from this document as background to this milestone area.

Changes that have been implemented:

- Provided a brief biblical rationale for each milestone area on the website.
- Provided links to official CRCNA position statements that apply to the issue.

D. Recommendation 4: Ensure that our culture encourages diversity

The third milestone states, “Grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers.” Synod 2024 asked for a review of the wording and intent of this statement as well as the underlying materials “in light of concerns that the emphasis of this pillar should be on the virtue of hospitality rather than on the fulfillment of ethnicity quotas” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12).

This is the area in which the committee spent most of its time during one-on-one conversations with CRC members. In these conversations a few things became clear. First, there is overwhelming consensus across groups of Christian Reformed people that we desire to be a reflection of the Revelation 7 vision – welcoming and including believers “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9). No one who was interviewed was against the idea of growing in diversity.

Further, the language of the milestone itself does not necessarily need to be changed. People appreciate the desired future depicted in this statement. They also recognize that this is a current and relevant need in our churches, as many (if not all) of the places where CRC congregations are found are becoming more diverse.

The conversations that were part of the ministry plan review included people who reflect a broad span of ethnicities, political opinions, ages, and genders. These revealed a few areas of growth.

Suggested changes

1. We do not need to add the word *hospitality* to the existing milestone.

As one person pointed out, adding the word “hospitality” into the current milestone would only make the phrasing longer. If we desire to “grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, hospitality, and welcome,” hospitality becomes just one more thing in a laundry

list of values. People are concerned about how we would measure programs using this list. If something seemed hospitable but was done in a way that was not just, would it qualify?

The ideas behind *hospitality* are also already addressed in the idea and intent of being a welcoming congregation. Adding one more word does not improve upon what is already there.

In addition, the word *hospitality* has some potential pitfalls. It implies that there are some people who are “hosts” and others who are “guests.” Will it truly help our growth in diversity if we approach people by inviting them to our tables but not embracing what they bring to ours?

It is recommended that the CRCNA continue to use the existing wording of this milestone, which includes the word “welcome,” and that the denomination take steps to provide additional support to demonstrate what this welcome should look like in congregations that are truly intercultural and respectful of diversity.

2. **We need to be careful to avoid tokenizing people of color.** While none of our goal language mentions quotas, conversations with people of color revealed that sometimes the CRCNA acts as if it operates by quotas. One person shared how they felt when they saw their name on a list of committee members and it was marked with an asterisk as a “person of color.” They don’t want to be on a committee as a token representative. They want to be there as equal participants.

At the same time, the committee heard from folks who said that if you don’t set a goal and don’t track your progress toward that goal, you might never change. While we don’t want quotas for people of color in leadership, and we don’t want people to feel tokenized, we do want to move toward a place where our meetings, committees, boards, and leadership reflect the diversity we experience in our congregations.

The solution may be to not have specific numeric goals but to instead regularly pause and ask ourselves who is and isn’t at the table. Committees and boards can also do surveys to find out why they aren’t as diverse as they would like. It is also okay to continue encouraging people to nominate and delegate “people who represent the diversity of the congregation/classis” without saying that it is mandatory or that there has to be a certain percentage of ethnic minority.

3. **We need to be careful of the language used in the resources we recommend.** While the wording of our milestone was endorsed by all the people we talked with, interviewers did hear some concerns about how this ministry plan area is communicated and promoted to the churches. There was a strong desire to make greater use of synodical resources such as “God’s Diverse and Unified Family” (crcna.org/sites/default/files/diversefamily.pdf) and to provide strong, biblical reasons for why this is important to the church.

Several people also expressed caution about using secular terminology or resources that don't have a strong faith background. While some of the ideas in these materials may be helpful, they can turn people off before they have truly engaged.

4. We heard a desire to remain committed to justice and reconciliation.

While people want to grow in diversity and unity as a denomination, they want to make sure that the emphasis on justice and reconciliation that is expressed in this milestone area does not get lost along the way. To truly grow in diversity requires us to consider also the needs of diverse people.

For example, congregations should consider the systems that are affecting newcomers and refugees, and we should advocate for change where appropriate. Similarly, as we consider our Indigenous neighbors, we must also recognize our histories and work toward reconciliation. Seeking justice goes hand-in-hand with growing in diversity. This value cannot be lost.

IV. Conclusion

An earlier version of this report was presented to the Council of Delegates in February for information and feedback. Following that meeting, the group worked on writing and gathering the biblical and theological background for each milestone, updating the website, gathering sample stories from congregations, and writing this report for Synod 2025 as a response to this synodical assignment. A communications plan is also being developed to help foster greater awareness of *Our Journey* among congregational leaders and CRC members.

APPENDIX B

Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee Charter

Note: The following document has been adopted by the Council of Delegates on a provisional basis, to guide the work of the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee as it begins its work in the 2025-2026 ministry year. The COD will conduct an evaluation at the end of the ministry year that will include a proposal to continue or discontinue the ministry.

I. Purpose

The purpose of the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee is to listen to the perspectives of CRCNA members and leaders of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds regarding their engagement within our denomination's ecclesiastical system and to advise the COD and its committees on policies and activities that will increase participation in that system in alignment with our denominational statement *God's Diverse and Unified Family* (1996—see crcna.org/sites/default/files/diversefamily.pdf).

II. Membership

The COD Governance Committee shall prepare a slate of nominees to serve on the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee. The COD shall act on this slate as recommended by the Governance Committee. The Governance Committee will solicit potential nominees from the general secretary and the COD at large.

The membership of the committee shall be as follows:

- Six members of the COD for the duration of their term on the COD, including the vice chair of the COD.
- Effort shall be made to ensure ethnic, gender, and binational diversity among these members.
- If possible, these members shall include those who are already serving on the Resonate, Reframe, Thrive, Synodical Services, and Governance committees.
- Ex-officio members without a vote include the general secretary and the director of ecclesiastical governance.

III. Guests

The general secretary shall invite annually to the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee a slate of up to six guests from among the preceding year's synodical delegates who represent the diversity of the CRCNA from the United States and Canada. Attention will also be given to diversity of gender, generation (i.e., first, second, 1.5 gen immigrants), and geographic origin. In special circumstances when the appropriate diversity cannot be obtained through selections of former synodical delegates, the general secretary may approach classis delegates to serve as guests. These guests are not voting members of the committee but will instead provide feedback needed by the advisory committee.

IV. Chairperson

The chairperson is elected by the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee annually from its membership.

V. Authority and Responsibilities

- a. Advise: Advise the Council of Delegates and its committees about the effectiveness of the CRCNA's efforts to enfold ethnic-minority members and leaders into our denomination's ecclesiastical governance (synod, classis, council, and Council of Delegates). When necessary, advise COD committees on concrete steps that might be necessary to enhance those efforts.
- b. Report: Report to the COD and its committees about the results of efforts to live out our denomination's vision as expressed in *God's Diverse and Unified Family*.
- c. Review: As assigned by other COD committees, review COD policies, procedures, and activities designed to enhance our denomination's faithfulness to its biblical vision of diversity in its governance processes.

Make appropriate recommendations to COD general or ministry committees.

VI. Meetings

The Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Committee will meet twice per year by video in advance of the fall and spring COD meetings.

VII. Minutes and Reports

The minutes of the meetings of the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee, including advice given (which shall be recorded in official minutes), shall be distributed to the COD and the general secretary.

VIII. Oversight and Review

The Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee Charter is intended to be a dynamic document. As such, the charter should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis by the committee. In consultation with the Governance Committee, recommended changes can be made to the COD and, as appropriate, to the respective Canada and U.S. Ministry Boards, for review and approval.

APPENDIX C

Ministry Evaluation Schedule Review

I. Background

Synod 2015 adopted five ministry priorities to strategically focus the work of the CRCNA. In 2018, when synod adopted the COD's Prioritization and Evaluation Report (assigned by Synod 2016), the COD and executive director (now general secretary) were instructed to "continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455).

In response to this directive, the COD adopted a policy to ensure the continual evaluation of all agencies and ministries over a four-year cycle according to the five ministry priorities. The agencies and ministries are required to have comprehensive and strategic program goals and objectives and, by means of fitting evaluation and assessment approaches, to provide annual outcomes in their reporting year.

(*Agenda for Synod 2020*, p. 47; see *Agenda for Synod 2019*, p. 42)

Synod 2022 adopted the report of the Structure and Leadership Task Force, which required significant changes to the governance structures of the CRC. In 2023 "the executive committee of the Council of Delegates agreed to a request by the general secretary to pause these reporting practices temporarily" until the COD reorganization was complete (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 45).

II. Methodology

- Review the information presented to synod and what form it takes.
- Review the intentions of Synod 2015 and beyond in the use the five ministry priorities (areas of Our Calling).
- Review our current practices with joint ministry agreements.
- Review how the ministry plan is used by the agencies and institutions.

III. Recommendations

A. The agency and ministry reports/presentations to synod should continue on a rotating schedule (see proposed schedule below), and the content of the reports/presentations should remain informative and inspirational.

B. Instead of pursuing an evaluation of ministry in alignment with the five ministry priorities, create a four-year schedule for reviewing the implementation of the *Our Journey* ministry plan milestones in each ministry, agency, and institution.

C. The review of the work of the agency, institution, or ministry will be based on two things: the synodical mandate of the agency, institution, or ministry and its work on the four milestones of the synodically approved *Our Journey* ministry plan. The review will not address organizational aspects such as budget and finance, staffing, structure, or other issues related to the organization. Instead, the review will be focused on the synodical mandate and the challenges, opportunities, and progress made as the agency, institution, or ministry works within its mandate toward the goals of the ministry plan.

D. The review will be conducted by a panel consisting of the following: two COD members (one U.S., one Canadian) from the ministry committee (and/or Connections committee), appropriate board members of the institution or agency (if is not governed by the COD and CRCNA ministry boards), and the directors (or their designees) of the agencies or institutions most involved in the focus area of the specific milestone. The chief administrative officer or successor position will initiate this process.

E. The scope and purpose of the review:

- Review the synodical mandate of the agency, institution, or ministry, making any suggestions or recommendations for necessary updates.
- Review the range of activity in milestone areas to ensure collaboration where possible, that any areas of potential overlap are being addressed, and that significant gaps are identified.
- Review the metrics related to the activities to ensure that metrics are being used and that they are helpful indicators of progress.

F. The panel writes and submits a report to the Ministries Leadership Council (for information), their ministry (and/or Connections) committee for the COD's review, and synod (as part of the COD's report).

Grounds:

1. Each agency, institution, or ministry report to synod provides delegates with an opportunity to learn and engage with the agency, institution, or ministry in ways that inspire both the delegates and the agency, institution, or ministry staff. This practice is valuable.
2. Synod 2018's directive intended to prioritize the work done across the CRC's spectrum of agencies, ministries, and educational institutions to reduce redundancy, reduce the denomination's footprint, and help prioritize the work being done at the churches' request (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455). This work continues to be done through the implementation of the ministry plan (*Our Journey*) with emphasis on its four milestones (rather than on the five ministry priorities).
3. Based on the recommendations and the implementation of the Structure and Leadership Task Force report, a robust joint ministry agreement process has been put into place for agencies governed by the COD and the CRCNA ministry boards (see *Minutes of the Council of Delegates 2021*, pp. 531-33; *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 930). These joint ministry agreements are written annually. They contain goals and key activities for each agency (tagged with relevant milestones). Progress reports are written and evaluated multiple times each year by a committee of cross-functional staff. Twice a year, the convener of these committees (the chief administrative officer in the Office of General Secretary) writes a report and submits the report to the ministry boards. This process provides monitoring that is even broader than the scope of the original request by Synod 2018.
4. Although Synod 2018 used the term *evaluation*, the review process proposed is more robust today than what was implemented before Synod 2023. Together with the joint ministry agreement processes, it creates the evaluation that synod intended in a way that amounts to a stewardly use of resources.

IV. Proposed reporting/review schedule

Year in Ministry Plan Cycle	Year	Synod Report/Presentation	Panel Reviews
Year 1 (first year after synod approves the new/refreshed ministry plan)	2026	World Renew	World Renew
Year 2	2027	Thrive	Thrive
Year 3	2028	Resonate Global Mission and ReFrame Ministries	Resonate Global Mission and ReFrame Ministries

Year 4	2029	Calvin Theological Seminary, Candidacy Committee, Calvin University	Calvin Theological Seminary, Candidacy Committee, Calvin University
Year 5	2030	Presentation of the new or refreshed ministry plan	

APPENDIX D

Council of Delegates Response to Overtures 5 and 6

The Council of Delegates has endorsed the following response by staff members of *The Banner*.

I. Overview: Overtures 5 and 6

There are two overtures to Synod 2025 regarding *The Banner's* mandate: Overture 5 from the council of First Christian Reformed Church, Artesia, California; and Overture 6 from Classis Heartland.

Overture 5 asks for the creation of a committee to rewrite *The Banner's* mandate. The new mandate should “foster strict adherence to our confessional documents, rather than debate about them,” among other things (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 346).

Overture 6 suggests specific amendments to various sections of *The Banner's* mandate, with the goal of ensuring that the mandate “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” (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 349).

We want to emphasize at the outset that *The Banner* is, and has been, committed to “be faithful to Scripture and the confessions” while honoring all parts of its mandate and its synodical editorial guidelines. *The Banner* has always strived to serve the denomination as faithfully as we can.

II. Core issue: Two different visions of *The Banner's* role and purpose

The core issue is that there are two different visions of what *The Banner* is supposed to be and do for the denomination. One vision, reflected in Overture 5 especially, is that *The Banner* should be a voice of the institution; its primary role is to promote the CRCNA’s confessional and synodical positions, to disciple and unite members under these positions. We can discern this vision in the following excerpt from Overture 5: “Therefore, *The Banner* should be retooled as a mechanism for discipleship and unity” (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 345-46).

The second vision is the historic, traditional vision of *The Banner* as a journalistic ministry, a medium for the voices of the people rather than the voice of the institution. A journalistic ministry includes opinion journalism and not merely news reporting, with a discipleship dimension but in a dialogical forum sort of way. We have tried to stay true to the spirit of this vision. We believe this vision is synod's original hope and goal for the magazine in the way it has written its mandate and guidelines.

It is this vision that animates those sections of *The Banner's* mandate that seek to "stimulate critical thinking" and present issues "in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the church" rather than simply the confessional or synodical positions.

It is why *The Banner* is tasked to be "a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues" and to 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."

It is why the editor has editorial freedom to "provide a biblically prophetic and responsible criticism . . . of actions, decisions, policies, programs, etc., being considered by or already approved by ecclesiastical assemblies and agencies." Ecclesiastical assemblies include synod. Hence, past synods have seen the wisdom of granting *The Banner's* editor editorial freedom to criticize synodical decisions, albeit in a responsible and biblically prophetic way.

Overture 5's recommendation would, intentionally or not, essentially undermine the journalistic purpose of the ministry by undermining its editorial freedom.

To accede to Overture 5 would be to say "no" to the historic vision of *The Banner* as a journalistic ministry representing the voices of the people and to say "yes" to *The Banner* as a voice of the institution.

Our denominational institution already has a medium for its voice: CRC Communications. CRC Communications publishes via the denomination's website, social media channels, weekly emails, and in eight pages of "Our Shared Ministry" in every issue of *The Banner*.

We recognize that synod has the right to change course, so to speak, in its vision for *The Banner*. But it should be made clear that this is the choice set before us. This is not simply a minor tweaking of *The Banner's* role but a fundamental change. Is this what synod wants? Is this what is, in the long term, best for the CRCNA? Is there collective and historic wisdom in synod's over 150 years in keeping *The Banner* as a journalistic ministry? These are the questions before us.

As for Classis Heartland's Overture 6, it is not entirely clear to us as to what it means when it wants *The Banner* to "represent the denomination." If it means to be the voice of the institution, then we are looking at the same core issue as with Overture 5. But if it means to fairly represent the diverse

voices of the people in the denomination, then it could align within the historic journalistic vision.

Hence, it would be helpful for the Banner Advisory Committee and the Council of Delegates to study and research deeper into the concerns and hopes of Overture 6, to explore where there might be gaps in the current mandate that might need addressing. But that would need to be done in a way that does not create unintended conflicts with other parts of the mandate. We believe that the Council of Delegates needs to be involved in the discussion regarding *The Banner* mandate, given that the Banner Advisory Committee is responsible for reviewing the mandate—and this would be in line with established procedures. The chair and vice chair of the Council of Delegates will be present at synod and able to speak to the committee, along with the editor in chief of *The Banner*.

III. History of *The Banner*

The following two articles briefly survey *The Banner*'s history and thus might be helpful in gleaning the journalistic nature of the magazine:

- “*The Banner: In the Church but Not Just of It*” (November 1996) by James Bratt (thebanner.org/features/1996/11/the-banner-in-the-church-but-not-just-of-it)
- “From the Voice to the Voices: *The Banner* at 150” (May 2016) by Leonard VanderZee (thebanner.org/departments/2016/05/from-the-voice-to-the-voices-the-banner-at-150).

IV. Confessionally aligned articles on homosexuality

Although the overtures are not explicit about this topic, the contentious issue before us is obviously the debate concerning the denomination's position on homosexuality and synod's decision on confessional status. The two overtures, especially Overture 5, have highlighted various articles they find to be problematic and out of alignment with the denomination's confessions and/or positions.

To show that we have tried to present a balanced approach, here follows a list of some articles (perhaps not exhaustive) that align with the denomination's confessional position on homosexuality since 2016 when Shiao Chong assumed the role of editor in chief. Please note that these articles relate mainly to the topic of sexuality and do not reflect the other numerous confessionally aligned articles on various other topics. All of these articles are available online at thebanner.org (with publication dates indicating their dates of online publication).

- “Can You Clarify the Christian Reformed Church's Position on Homosexuality?” (Big Question article) by Shiao Chong (Feb. 2024)
- “Conservative Compassion” (Feature article) by Ben DeRegt (March 2024)
- “Synod 2024: An Appraisal and a Vision” (As I Was Saying blog) by Aaron Vriesman (Oct. 2024)

- “The Difficult Synod of 2023 and What it Says about the CRC” (As I Was Saying blog) by Aaron Vriesman (July 2023)
- “Synod 2022 Did the Loving Thing” (As I Was Saying blog) by Aaron Vriesman (Sept. 2022)
- “How to Walk Well Alongside LGBTQ+ People” (Feature article) by Laurie Krieg (May 2020)
- “LGBTQ-Incompatible Means Gracious Separation Is the Church’s Best Option” (As I Was Saying blog) by Aaron Vriesman (Feb. 2020)
- “Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ” (Feature article) by Matthew Tuininga (Nov. 2017)
- “Reflections on Sexuality and the Gospel” (As I Was Saying blog) by Matthew Tuininga (Dec. 2016)

V. “Not all opinions are of the CRCNA” disclaimer

To clarify concerns about public representation of the CRCNA’s views to outsiders, we want to note we have, for about the past two years, placed disclaimers on our social media home profiles and on our table of contents page in print. Underneath our logo, “*Banner*,” and the sentence, “*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church,” we include the disclaimer: “Opinions expressed in *The Banner* are not necessarily those of the editor or of the CRCNA.”

Similar disclaimers are on the home profiles of our Facebook (facebook.com/crcbanner) page and our X (x.com/crcbanner) page.

We hope that these disclaimers will educate our readers, both insiders and outsiders, that not all views published are official views of the CRCNA.

Note: This communication is submitted to synod per the “Right of Comment” policy in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, which states that the COD may endorse, or adopt with grounds, a communication from staff of a ministry or agency under the purview of the COD if there is a matter on the agenda for synod that affects their ministry’s mandate.

APPENDIX E

Council of Delegates Response to Overture 7

The Council of Delegates submits the following in response to Overture 7: Synodical Advisory Committee regarding Denominational Boards (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 352-54).

I. Introduction

In the history of the Christian Reformed Church, its synod has invested its boards and standing committees with the authority to supervise the work of denominational entities (agencies, institutions, boards, and standing committees) according to the directions of synod and the bylaws of those

organizations. In many cases, the boards of those entities solicit CRCNA classes or groups of classes (regions) for prospective nominees. In some cases, those boards solicit “at-large” members as well. In most cases, slates of nominees are presented to synod through its agenda for ratification as part of the denominational ballot.

This is a complicated process that interacts at various points with the by-laws of the entities that are legally recognized organizations. Overture 7 from Classis Zeeland proposes adding an additional layer of vetting (i.e., a new synodical standing committee or advisory committee) to provide recommendations to synod regarding nominees. The primary stated concern articulated by the overture is to ensure the nominees’ “biblical, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices” are aligned with those of the CRCNA.

II. Issues for synod’s reflection

- **COD Delegate Nomination Policy and Confessional Reservation Policy:** Over the course of 2024-25 the COD has altered these two policies so that they are effectively the same with regard to their expectations on theological alignment with the Church Order Article 5 process for officebearers. Further, potential COD nominees are asked if they can sign the COD Statement of Agreement. This ensures that slates of COD members presented to synod will be in alignment with “biblical, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices” of the denomination.
- **Interaction with organizational bylaws:** The bylaws of CRCNA boards, agencies, and institutions already recognize the role of synod to ratify nominees. The Classis Zeeland overture creates complexities and possible conflicts with the bylaws that serve as the legal framework of CRCNA boards, agencies, and institutions. Introducing a new standing committee to make recommendations to synod about nominees could bypass or sideline the assemblies (classes), committees, boards, and their governance and/or nominating committees.
- **Logistical challenges:** While the Office of General Secretary (i.e., the synodical office) tries to keep the nominations process on a particular timeline, due to the timing of classis meetings and the struggle of many classes to find nominations, this process happens throughout the whole year. Since there are a number of steps that need to happen within a certain time frame (notify classes/committees of vacancies; find nominees; nominees and stated clerk/pastor fill out form; names go to classis for approval; names go to COD or synod for approval), it would be difficult to also add another synodical standing committee to vet nominees. It already takes multiple staff to work with various committees to track down nominations; it would be even more difficult to manage a vetting committee (made up of volunteers) to work to track down nominations.
- **Duplicated review processes:** Many denominational boards and committees already have review processes, including the solicitation

of recommendations by classis stated clerks and local church pastors to ensure that nominees are members in good standing. Further, nominees are vetted by the various committees of the boards they will serve (e.g., governance committees, nomination committees, etc.).

- **Internal logic:** According to the overture, this new synodical standing committee would affect the Council of Delegates, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Historical Committee, the Ecumenical and Interchurch Relations Committee, and the Loan Fund (U.S.). Why were these particular boards and committees chosen while others were not? What “biblical, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices” requirements would be expected of potential board or committee members? Would we expect the same level of theological acumen of a nominee to the Loan Fund (U.S.) or the Historical Committee as we would of a Calvin Theological Seminary board member or a Council of Delegates member?
- **Selection of members:** Who would be members of this potential synodical standing committee, how would they be chosen, and who would approve them? The overture is entirely silent on these critical issues.

If more information or reflection is needed to assist synod in its ratification process, the COD stands ready to provide those measures as directed by synod and within its limitations and scope of authority.

Note: This communication is submitted to synod per the “Right of Comment” policy in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, which states that the COD may judge (with or without staff initiation) 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.

APPENDIX F

Council of Delegates Response to Overture 29

The Council of Delegates has endorsed the following response by staff of Resonate Global Mission.

I. Introduction

Resonate Global Mission commends Classis Southeast U.S. for their ongoing passion for church planting and mission work. Church planting remains vital to our present existence and our denomination’s future. In response to Overture 29 from Classis Southeast U.S., titled “Prioritize Church Planting within the Denominational Budget,” this report is submitted both

as a reply to the concerns raised and as a guide regarding changes within Resonate to which the overture refers.

II. Background information

A. Synod's previous engagement on this issue

In 2017 synod received an overture from Classis Southeast U.S. titled “Discover Cause for CRC Membership Decline; Develop Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Decline through Church Renewal and Planting; Require Annual Reporting of Progress” (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 429-34). In response to this overture, Synod 2017 adopted several recommendations, including the instruction to “make available a list of denominational resources related to church renewal, including church planting with emphasis on training for evangelism” (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706). In its report to Synod 2018, the COD presented a “List of Resources re Church Renewal, Church Planting, and Evangelism Training” compiled by Resonate Global Mission and Calvin Theological Seminary staff in consultation with ReFrame Ministries staff (*Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 64-75). We encourage delegates to revisit this important report.

In 2023 synod received an overture from Classis Southeast U.S. titled “Develop a Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Membership Decline and Require Annual Reporting of Progress” (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 389-96). Resonate Global Mission’s response reaffirmed the 2018 “List of Resources” report with added nuance (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 758-769). We encourage delegates to note the vision for church planting laid out in this response.

In 2025 synod received the current overture from Classis Southeast U.S. titled “Prioritize Church Planting within the Denominational Budget” (Overture 29). This overture names the elimination of grant funding for church planting as a key issue.

B. Resonate Global Mission budget reduction referred to by Overture 29

CRCNA congregations need to be aware of the financial realities facing Resonate Global Mission. Long-term sustainability and viability requires that our Leadership Team make decisions to bring our budget into balance. To do so, significant budget cuts have been made in every department for Resonate’s 2025-26 budget year.

To achieve this goal, we have intentionally underspent this year’s budget and will cut \$4 million (USD) from next year’s budget for a reduction of about 20 percent of total ministry costs. We are thankful for God’s provisions and for our churches who continue to give generously. Financial giving directly to Resonate clearly shows that the denomination still places a high priority on mission.

During this fiscal year we are seeing a slight decrease in general giving and missionary support. This has been offset by generous estate gifts that bring year-to-date revenues slightly above our year-to-date budget as of April

2025. Now that Resonate's generous reserves have been spent down, it is vital that we operate on a balanced budget each year going forward. This means that our supporters' consistent giving is more important than ever.

All of Resonate's synodically mandated core initiatives and supporting functions will be affected by planned budget reductions:

1. **Global mission:** One of the challenges unique to the Global Mission department of Resonate is that our biggest expense is compensation. At this point, we are not anticipating making significant involuntary reductions-in-force, however, we expect attrition of several workers who will leave through retirement and for other personal reasons. Our international teams are reducing their budgets by approximately \$2 million (USD) through such measures as reduction in staffing, program reduction, and reduced regional grant funding.

Through these challenges we continue to see the Lord's blessing in our work around the world. We are anticipating an organization-wide fundraising project for missionary ministry in the coming fiscal year. Together we seek to increase designated revenue for global ministries so that undesignated funds (ministry shares and general giving) received as an organization can support other programming for which there is not the same capacity for fundraising.

2. **Local mission:** In the coming year we will trim regional team staffing in our six North American regions, and regional grants will be cut by almost 70 percent. Resonate's presence in our regions is critical for the future health of the CRCNA, and we will continue to work with local churches and classes to help the CRC live more fully into all three of our core initiatives.
3. **Church planting:** Overall funding will be reduced by approximately \$1.3 million (USD), and the program funding that remains will be repositioned to contextualized ministry support for church planters such as personalized assessments, coaching, and training. Our vision is for church plants to continue to receive ongoing funding support locally, while church planter assessments, coaching, training, and other leadership support are provided denominationally through Resonate.

Strong financial partnership, which includes the parent church, classis, and Resonate, is a major component to ensure the success of a church plant. Over the past several years Resonate's grant funding has played a decreasing role in the church plant's operational funding model. However, we still lament the fact that ending the operational grants will have a profound impact on local church plants. We also emphasize that our focus has always been on the professional development and ministry support of church planters. Going forward, our budget will be allocated to provide even more direct support and resources for church planters.

C. Current plan for Resonate's church planting core initiative

Church planting is a foundational priority in Resonate's mission and overall work. For years we have been deeply committed to partnering with church planters by offering various forms of support. This commitment remains strong today.

Planting churches is a missionary endeavor to form new Christian communities of faith—churches—from persons currently outside of existing established Christian communities for the purpose of discipling the new community in the ways of Jesus to be witnesses to the world in both word and deed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Resonate will continue to support church plants across a variety of models such as microchurch plants, classic and multisite church plants, and multiplication hubs.

It is not only a decline in denominational funding that makes these changes necessary. In light of our long-term vision for growth in church planting, we must transition to a model that focuses on long-term sustainability. We are convinced that a holistic support model, one that equips church planters with the tools, resources, and relationships they need to thrive, is the direction we must pursue.

This shift will build deeper, more sustainable partnerships with church planters and emphasize holistic planter assessments, coaching, training, leadership development, and community engagement. By focusing on deeper relational support and local partnerships, church planters will be better positioned for long-term success. This new direction will ensure that church planting will continue to be a thriving, sustainable pillar of our mission work.

1. **Coaching:** We are working to match each church planter with specialized, skilled, and certified church-planting coaches. This will ensure that each planter receives guidance that is directly relevant to their unique context and needs. In addition to one-on-one coaching, we are creating Peer Group Gatherings to connect church planters in similar contexts.
2. **Training:** We are committed to expanding our training opportunities by offering more practical learning that church planters can immediately apply to their ministries. These opportunities will be offered through various formats, such as webinars, learning group cohorts, and in-person gatherings. We are also working to offer training in multiple languages.
3. **Assessments:** We will continue offering church planter assessments to help planters and their partners (churches and classes) explore their calling, discern readiness, and develop competencies. We are working to offer these assessments in multiple languages, and we are actively searching for partnerships and resources that will support us in this initiative.
4. **Reviews:** As part of our commitment to ongoing support, we are doubling down on more frequent reviews to evaluate the health of each church plant and determine the specific needs for ongoing support.

These reviews will focus on assessing the church plant's growth, challenges, and areas where additional resources or coaching may be required.

5. We will work closely with church planters, parent churches, and classis representatives to **strengthen local financial support** for church plants. We will explore the possibility of providing fundraising training for church planters to assist them in the critical role of raising local funds for their new plant.

III. Conclusion

A. Summary of plan for Resonate's responsibility vs. local responsibility regarding church planting

Overall, the shift in Resonate's budget for church planting reflects the following priorities: Resonate helps to identify, develop, train, and coach church planters; provides a holistic assessment for every church planter; matches every church planter with a skilled and certified church-planting coach; develops a cohort of such coaches to position them to coach future planters; offers myriad church-planting resources including gatherings, webinars, and conferences; invests in annual reviews; and advocates for local/regional support. This means Resonate will not provide financial support for church planter salaries and ministry costs; rather, we will provide ministry support including assisting church planters in setting up strong local networks of financial support through their parent churches and classes.

B. Recommendations regarding Overture 29

We commend Classis Southeast U.S. for their ongoing passion for church planting and mission work. Indeed, church planting remains vital to our present existence and our denomination's future. Currently we believe Resonate's budget adjustments make for the best possible distribution of resources to allow us to work alongside our local partners and to ensure that church plants will flourish and increase in number within the CRCNA.

Note: This communication is submitted to synod per the "Right of Comment" policy in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, which states that the COD may endorse, or adopt with grounds, a communication from staff of a ministry or agency under the purview of the COD if there is a matter on the agenda for synod that affects their ministry's mandate.

APPENDIX G

COD Governance Handbook Updates

The following updates to the COD Governance Handbook (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~) are presented here for approval by Synod 2025. These updates are in addition to those presented in Appendix A in the *Agenda for Synod 2025* (pp. 42-51).

Pages 33, 35, and 37—Changes to the Thrive, ReFrame Ministries, and Resonate Global Mission committee charters, respectively

2. Membership:

[Subpoint a unchanged.]

~~b. The chairs of the [Thrive/ReFrame/Resonate] Committee from the Canada ministry board and the U.S. ministry board shall be on this committee.~~

eb. Up to two non-COD members are eligible to serve on this committee. (See pp. 20-21.)

c. The Director of U.S. Ministries and the Executive Director-Canada will serve as nonvoting ex officio members.

Page 44—Bible Translations Committee Charter

The COD Governance Committee shall prepare a slate of nominees to serve on the Bible Translations Committee. 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~~ratify the slate of nominees and recommend to synod for approval.~~ Synodical terms of three years are not applicable to the committee. The membership shall include the following representatives:

- Three members of the theological faculty (Old Testament and/or New Testament) of a seminary with strong ties to the CRCNA.
- English-language stylist who may also be an English-language professor, communications expert, or other such professional who understands the current use of language in contemporary life. If translations are required in other languages, the committee may arrange for a member or consultant(s) proficient in such languages.
- Church leader or pastor who understands the needs of the pulpit.
- One current COD member who will serve as a nonvoting liaison between the Bible Translations Committee and the COD.
- Denominational representative appointed by the Office of General Secretary who will serve as convener (nonvoting).

Pages 45-46—Dignity Team Charter

1. Purpose

The Dignity Team is to offer direction that ultimately encourages, builds up, and transforms the life of those persons who approach the Dignity Team because they feel they have been victimized by abuse of power in the CRCNA. The manner in which the Dignity Team carries out its work is by listening empathetically, praying with and for those who reach out to them, providing clarity and direction, and identifying resources and processes available toward the goal of healing and reconciliation. The Dignity Team desires to maintain a capacity of nimbleness in relating to people instead of being highly structured.

2. Membership

- a. The COD Synodical Services Committee, after seeking nominations from the Dignity Team, Thrive, the Office of General Secretary, and the full COD, shall prepare a slate of nominees to serve on the Dignity Team. The COD shall act on this slate as recommended by the Governance Committee.
- b. The membership of the Dignity Team shall be as follows:
 - One (1) member of the COD for the duration of their term on the COD
 - Up to five (5) members at-large appointed for a three-year term, renewable for a second term. At-large members will represent, individually or collectively, some understanding including, but not limited to, awareness of how the CRCNA works, knowledge of the Church Order, grasp of community dynamics, and pastoral sensitivity.
 - There will be no ex-officio members; however, the team may seek support as needed from the General Secretary, the Director of Ecclesiastical Governance, or Thrive's ministry consultants.

3. Chairperson

The Chairperson will be selected from among the members of the Dignity Team.

4. Reporting

The team reports to the COD (through the Executive Committee) and to synod on the CRCNA's progress in affirming the dignity of every human being in and through our covenantal relationship.

Note: Confidential details of cases will not be disclosed to either the COD or synod, nor will there be an expectation for the COD or synod to interject themselves into a case. Cases needing council, classis, or synodical involvement will be expected to proceed through the processes laid out in the Church Order.

5. Team records

The Dignity Team shall keep records of its minutes, reports, and correspondence.

6. Team Procedures

- a. Meetings: The Dignity Team meetings are set by the chairperson. The committee *ordinarily* meets monthly. In special circumstances additional meetings will be called.
- b. Meeting locations: Meetings will ordinarily be held virtually. Once a year, in conjunction with the fall COD meeting, an in-person meeting of the Dignity Team may be held to welcome new members, build relationships, and meet with parties whose case(s) would especially benefit from meeting in person. In special circumstances, at the approval of the

General Secretary or the Director of Ecclesiastical Governance where cost is involved, other in-person meetings may be held.

7. Training and Support

The Dignity Team in the normal discharge of its mandate and in response to emergent issues, may implement enabling and training sessions that it deems critical to its work. These will be underwritten from the Dignity Team budgetary allocation. Further, the Dignity Team assumes that any newly appointed members deserve and will require some orientation.

8. Oversight and Review of Charter

The Dignity Team charter is intended to be a dynamic document. As such, the charter should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis by the Dignity Team. In consultation with the Governance Committee, recommended changes can be made to the COD and, as appropriate, the respective Canada and U.S. Ministry Boards, for review and approval.

APPENDIX H

Personal Reservations Procedure re COD Statement of Agreement with Beliefs of the CRCNA

Process for Submitting and Addressing Personal Reservations related to the COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA

A. Introduction and background

The COD in May 2025 adopted the following updated procedure to help guide COD members and the COD executive committee in providing fellow members with an appropriate time for discernment related to personal reservations about the COD Statement of Agreement as a result of synodical decisions or other changes while the member is serving.

Like other denominational boards, the COD has established its own procedure (Chapter 5: Governance Policies in the COD Governance Handbook) to indicate and process the personal reservations of its members regarding confessional statements and their interpretations. Because not all COD members are officebearers (ministers of the Word, commissioned pastors, elders, and/or deacons), the process for COD members to report their personal reservations to the COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA is independent from the Church Order gravamen process (filed with the local council by officebearers—cf. Church Order Supplement, Art. 5). In fact, the Statement of Agreement is similar but not identical to the Covenant for Officebearers.

B. Definitions

- Personal reservation: *A personal reservation* is a weighty concern about a confessional or creedal doctrine that creates a conscientious

difficulty for a COD member in affirming the COD Statement of Agreement.

- COD Statement of Agreement: A statement about the shared creedal and confessional convictions of the CRCNA affirmed by Council of Delegates members annually (see Chapter 5: Governance Policies in the COD Governance Handbook)

C. Process

1. If COD members develop a personal reservation with regard to the COD Statement of Agreement while serving, they will send a written notice of such to the general secretary.
2. The general secretary will seek any clarification that might be needed and place the correspondence on the agenda of the next COD executive committee meeting. Such submissions are considered to be confidential documents and are not open to discussion beyond the COD executive committee, the deciding body.
3. Two COD executive committee members will have a private conversation with the petitioner to listen to their personal reservation(s), evaluate the weight and extent of such reservation(s), and affirm the approved process. One of the two executive committee members (or another member chosen by the COD executive committee) will assist the petitioner in resolving their personal reservation during the applicable time period (see below). This discussion is reported back to the COD executive committee.
4. If still a valid submission, the COD executive committee makes a decision regarding the submitted personal reservation (to accept or not accept) and communicates its decision to the COD member. Criteria to guide the review and decision include the following:
 - The centrality of the belief for which the personal reservation is expressed to the core teachings of the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions.
 - The petitioner's willingness to "present" their personal reservation "in a spirit of love, fellowship, and submission" (Church Order Art. 5 and its Supplement).
 - The petitioner's recognition of the binding nature of the matter for which they are expressing a personal reservation and their willingness not to publicly contradict, teach, or act against the matter for which they hold a reservation, while they continue to study the matter.
5. Any decision by the executive committee regarding a submitted personal reservation is to be minuted in *executive session* minutes with grounds. Public minutes will record the number of personal reservations presented, how many of them were accepted and/or denied, and the specific confessional reference each personal reservation addressed (e.g., Canons of Dort, First Main Point of Doctrine, Art. 3).

6. If the submitted personal reservation is accepted by the executive committee, an asterisk will be added beside the name of the petitioner in the Statement of Agreement signature book. The written details are kept in a confidential file in the Office of General Secretary until the COD member concludes service on the COD.
7. If the COD executive committee does not accept the submitted personal reservation, the decision is communicated with the COD member, who may withdraw their submission, may resign from the COD, or may be removed from membership on the COD.
8. COD members are exhorted that sharing the presence of an asterisk next to a signature with anyone outside of the membership of the COD contravenes the Code of Conduct.
9. Members who have developed personal reservations while serving as a delegate must resolve them during their current term. If they are unable to agree with the COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA, they are not eligible for a second term.

Note: COD members who have had personal reservations accepted by the COD executive committee may choose to share that fact with the classis that nominated them, but are not obligated to do so. The decision of the COD executive committee is final and follows adopted procedures in the COD Governance Handbook for delegates who are appointed by synod, and is not open to review by classes.

Note: These guidelines are adopted by the COD for the COD executive committee and are not intended to be an official COD policy.

APPENDIX I

Dignity Team Report

I. Dignity Team reason for being

The CRCNA Dignity Team cites its reason for being as described on the crcna.org/dignityteam webpage:

Respect for the dignity of each person, as equally created and called by God to contribute to the life of the church, is one of the core stated values of the CRCNA. When incidents happen that erode, infringe upon, or violate this dignity, there needs to be a place to go for help to address the wrong done and to restore respectful relationships.

This is the function of the CRCNA Dignity Team. . . .

Established in 2022, the Dignity Team responds to less tangible and less clearly defined abuses of power that occur within CRC circles, but may fall between or outside the scopes of the systems addressed elsewhere in the CRCNA's system to prevent the abuse of power.

II. Annual report on activities (as per mandate: prevent and respond)

We are called upon to report annually to the denomination on the work of the team (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, p. 67). After working with the COD to clarify our mandate in 2023-24, we submitted our initial report to the COD in October 2024.

1. Since its inception in 2022, the Dignity Team (DT) has met on a monthly basis. Each meeting has lasted for two hours, and since we are from different parts of the continent, we appreciate the wonderful technology of Zoom that has allowed us to meet. The DT also holds an annual two-day in-person meeting allowing its members to interact and to grow as a team, to review past involvements, and to be supported and encouraged by members of Thrive.

As for our workload—for nearly three years the DT has been attempting to fulfill our mandate, and we have received ten different official requests for involvement since we began in 2022. Most of the situations have involved an assertion that power has been abused. One of the questions that we ask of those who approach the DT for help has to do with what resources have they used and what avenues have they followed to seek to resolve the issues at hand. When it appears that some avenues have not been utilized, our approach is to encourage them to use the present existing resources that congregations, classes, and the denomination have available, such as church visitors, safe church teams and coordinators, Thrive, classical interim committees, and so on. Besides our monthly meetings, there have often been follow-up calls or Zoom meetings, and emails, as well as written advice. Our practice after giving recommendations is to follow up with an applicant, as an exercise of encouragement and accountability. On three occasions members of the DT have traveled to visit with an applicant in person. In a couple of situations, it was clear that what was being requested was not within our purview, so we redirected the applicant to seek support elsewhere. We have listened to many painful stories. Attempts have been made to bring people together to talk to one another. Reconciliation has been our goal, but that does not always come easily.

2. We are functioning with a budget of \$10,000 (USD), which allows for travel and our annual in-person meeting.
3. Our place in the denomination and our connection to Thrive have been part of an ongoing discussion, and with the recent resignation of Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen, questions in these areas have intensified.
4. A new charter has been written and needs the approval of synod (see COD Supplement, Appendix G).

As a preface to the charter, the DT wishes to note the following:

The Dignity Team desires to maintain its nimbleness in relating to people instead of becoming very structured. It is important to include in the purpose statement a description of what the Dignity

Team does, rather than including that in a listing of responsibilities. It is important that the committee have an odd number of members without specifics of nationality so that the membership number is five.

5. We have been delighted to add Rev. David Spoelma from Holland, Michigan, to the team. He was officially appointed by the COD at their January 2025 meeting. We are saddened by the early resignation of Dr. Lee Hollaar and wish to express our gratitude for his work on the team since its beginning.
6. It should be noted that three of the remaining four members are presently approaching the end of their first three-year term.

III. Reflection on trends of abuse

A. Introduction

As noted in the opening statements of this report, the DT was created in 2022 to **prevent** abuse of power; to **respond** to abuses of power that occur within CRC circles in nimble, less formal, pastoral ways; and to **report** trends of abuse and gaps related to abuse within the denomination. The first two parts of this mandate have been addressed earlier in this report. And here follow some observations about what we are seeing in the denomination. The DT recognizes that there may be a boldness in such observation, but we would be remiss if we did not say something, in as much as we have been involved in potential abuses of power in the denomination, including senior leadership, classis leadership, and local church leadership.

Perhaps a good place to begin might be to reflect on ministry leadership and its use of power. To do that, it seems appropriate to listen to what direction we, as a denomination, have adopted as a touchstone to power, leadership, and abuse, from the preamble to the Code of Conduct (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 996):

Mark 10:35-45 displays two very different approaches to the use of power. The disciples are exposed as being power hungry and vulnerable to a worldly expression of power. Jesus intervened by clarifying that a worldly view of power “lord[s] it over” those whom it influences. Jesus proclaimed, “No so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (v. 43). Jesus displays that power and influence are not negative in themselves but are a gift of God for good. However, Jesus also insists that a misuse of power is not acceptable for leaders in his kingdom. Rather, he demands that they lead as humble servants for the glory of God and the thriving of others. After all, they follow the one who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45). . . .

Jesus himself, in response to the desire for power expressed by his disciples, called them (and us) to use power to bring glory to God

and serve people—a way of holding power that confronts and contrasts with the ways that the world uses power. . . .

That being said, until Christ returns and brings us to perfection, we will continue to wrestle with the urge to misuse power and abuse others. Ugly realities such as verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse are found among us. The power that we hold by virtue of our person or our position can always be twisted into the project of building up ourselves and our own kingdoms at the expense of others. This is true for pastors, lay ministry leaders, and church members alike.

In awareness of these ugly realities and in the beautiful hope of Christ’s transforming work, the following code of conduct is offered to ministry leaders. . . . It emerges out of a response by Synod 2018 to patterns of abuse that had been brought to its attention and is aimed at preventing such abuse in the future. May God’s peace be among us.

B. Reflection

Abuse of power can and does present itself sometimes even in our collective bodies such as church councils, classes, and even synod. So we would caution the denomination that with the seeming depreciation of the deliberative nature of our assemblies, when delegates hold firm positions prior to coming to meetings, when discussion is limited, when caucusing takes place and power blocs are formed, when outcomes seem to be assured, there exists the ability to abuse power, diminishing the essential deliberative ecclesiastical process as well as an openness to the Spirit’s leading.

Synod’s 2024 invocation of “confessional status” leading to a process to “guide into compliance” those who think otherwise, and the requirement of the signing of the Covenant of Officebearers annually, leaves less room than in the past for debate, disagreement, learning, curiosity, and/or adjusting—any kind of wrestling—hence setting the stage for possible further abuse of power. We need to set the stage well for managing polarities.

Jesus, who is the head of the unified body of which we are a part, is a shared connection. So, as Paul writes, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” (1 Cor. 12:21). Christ brings his peace not through coercion or silencing other voices but with deeds full of truth and grace. We must be careful to assume that our correctness is beyond reproach or beyond adjusting in order to ensure that we do not squeeze out any other voices. We need to look into the mirror of the “spirit of the age” and ask ourselves, How well can we walk together and wrestle respectfully with what it means to be part of the body anchored by the story that Scripture tells? The story of Scripture surely seems contrary to the “spirit of the age.” When communions refuse to allow a reasonable and generous consideration in the pursuit of faithfulness, they can become authoritarian and abusive of power. We are called to

be a faithful living tradition. We are going to have to find a better way to live with each other, a way that should never stifle healthy conversation. As Pastor Phil Reinders, a CRC pastor, put it:

There is a spirit of the age that is binding and blinding the church, influencing all towards destructive and divisive ways. We live in an age of rage. . . . The church's ways of working out disagreements are all too often indistinguishable from the world's. . . .

Whenever someone lays down the ultimatum, "If synod does this, I'm leaving," you're likely engaging with someone who is bound to the terms of engagement set by our world. Whenever you hear someone say, "there is no other way," that's often someone blinded by the powers.

(Christian Courier, June 5, 2023)

IV. Closing

Thank you for allowing us to serve on this team. It has been a blessing despite some of the very difficult situations in which we have found ourselves. May the Lord be honored and receive the glory through all that we have done and will do.

Dignity Team
Sherry Fakkema
Carel Geleynse
Lee Hollaar
Sheila Holmes
David Spoelma

APPENDIX J

Interim Report of the Task Force to Review Governance Costs

I. Introduction

The Council of Delegates, at its February 2025 meeting, approved the creation of a task force to consider ways to reduce governance costs, fund synod, and use time wisely. The task force is made up of members from the COD Finance and Synodical Services committees, along with relevant staff. COD members on the task force are Henry Eygenraam, Drew Sweetman (chair), Janet deVries, Andre VanRyk, Tom Byma (reporter), Mike Koetje, Phil Apoll, and Rob Toornstra. Staff members supporting the task force are Brian Van Doeselaar, Joel Vande Werken, Shirley DeVries, and Ashley Medendorp. The COD requested completion of a full report by October 2025 and an interim report by the time of its May 2025 meeting. The interim report follows.

II. Our historical commitment to covenant ministry

For the past 160 years, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has been committed to doing ministry covenantally. For much of this history, the CRCNA has utilized the ministry shares program (under various names) to fund its mission and ministry work. This program has enabled churches within the denomination to participate in broad ministry and mission initiatives beyond their local congregations, providing churches of all sizes the opportunity to contribute to larger-scale ministry efforts that they could not undertake independently.

The best-known examples of this covenantal commitment to ministry lie in shared support for the agencies developed by the CRCNA over the years. The denomination has supported global mission and church planting for well over a century, and today Resonate Global Mission supports over 140 missionaries and partner missionaries, as well as church plants across North America and discipleship programs at established congregations. Another agency, ReFrame Ministries, began as a single radio program called *The Back to God Hour* and now operates a multiplatform ministry operating around the world in ten languages. Thrive, the CRCNA's newest agency, supports and strengthens churches within the denomination. Instead of seeking external support, churches can access a range of services through Thrive, including assistance during challenging times and support for renewal. The ministry shares program has also facilitated the development of a framework for supporting and funding World Renew. Although World Renew does not receive direct ministry share funding, the collaborative approach and resource-sharing principles fostered by the program have enabled it to flourish as a leader in development and disaster relief.

The CRCNA has also established Calvin University, a globally recognized institution, and a seminary that attracts students from around the world to train as pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders. Through collective financial contributions, the CRCNA has achieved significant kingdom growth. What was once a denomination made up primarily of Dutch immigrants is now growing in ethnic diversity and is recognized and trusted by governments worldwide for its humanitarian aid and demonstration of Christ's love and by educational institutions for its academic rigor.

Beyond these agencies and institutions, the CRCNA's commitment to shared ministry has taken shape through other expressions as well. Denominational revenues fund core services, including the annual synod meeting, Council of Delegates meetings, candidacy requirements, and oversight of Church Order as communal commitments. Other services, such as the Loan Fund, *The Banner*, The Network, and the Minister's Pension programs, which are not considered core functions of the CRCNA, have been established at the request of the churches and extend its ministry reach. All of these entities exist because of our belief in the power of collaborative ministry as evidence of our shared witness to Christ.

III. Background information and data

However, this collaborative spirit is waning. Churches increasingly prioritize local ministries and operate independently, contributing to decline in support for the CRCNA as a denomination. While this shift in priorities represents a healthy desire for congregations to engage with their own communities, this reality produces challenges for the core services of the denomination, as well as for the ministries we undertake together. To address these challenges, the COD commissioned this task force to review the costs of synod and of church governance in general.

The task force began its work by looking at the big-picture costs of synod, both the staffing and program costs. The biggest costs people associate with synod is the week of in-person meetings, but it became clear to the task force that the year-round program and staffing of synodical operations has a much larger cost. The week of synod costs around \$500,000 (USD), but the full cost of running the CRC's core services as mandated by synod is closer to \$3,200,000 (USD) per year. The task force looked at a variety of financial information, including the costs of the following operations:

- Administration (general secretary, chief administrative officer, and administrative assistants salaries and program costs)
- Synodical Services (director of ecclesiastical governance, coordinator of synodical operations, and administrative support and program costs)
- Communications (director of communications and administrative support and programs)
- Candidacy (director of Candidacy and administrative support and programs)

These costs have been steadily increasing over the past five years:

Fiscal Year	OGS expenses as a percentage of ministry shares collected	Total Amount (all ministry share programs)
2019-2020	11.2%	\$20.6 million USD
2020-2021	12.5%	\$21.6 million USD
2021-2022	13.9%	\$19.0 million USD
2022-2023	17.5%	\$17.7 million USD
2023-2024	15.5%	\$17.4 million USD
2024-2025 (projected)	20.8%	\$16.3 million USD
2025-2026 (projected)	24.5%	\$14.3 million USD

Note: The 2023-2024 totals reflect cost savings in the Office of General Secretary, but these savings will be offset by the significant decrease in denominational ministry share revenue in the coming year.

Given the numbers reviewed, the task force noted that running the CRC's core synodical services costs about \$13.69 (USD) per member per year, based on the number of active adult professing members in 2024. This is a large part of what it means to be a denomination and to maintain the values we hold.

IV. Possible steps forward

To begin its work, the task force formed two focus groups: one to concentrate on synodical logistics, and the other to concentrate on questions of finance.

The synodical logistics group shared the following ideas:

- Conduct synod meetings online (least desirable option)
- Reduce the number of delegates that each classis sends to synod. This would reduce travel and lodging costs as well as staff time in making the arrangements.
- Reduce the number of classes by merger.
- Set a dollar amount for each classis to contribute for synodical operations.
- Hold synod at an offsite location.

The finance group shared the following ideas:

- Allocate ministry shares on two tiers:
 - specified amount to governance
 - specified amount to ministries
- Direct-bill classes a fee for governance costs
- Cut costs on synod logistics and synodical service operations:
 - examine costs of travel and lodging
 - reduce number of delegates
 - review operational side of Office of General Secretary
- Other efficiencies we could realize?
- Additional fundraising?

The two groups met together again later to review their discussions and formulate some ideas for moving forward. Some things suggested were a 10 percent cut to the Office of General Secretary budget, or to find ways to enlist more direct classical funding for synod. It was noted that it would be difficult to make substantial cuts in the synodical services budget, particularly due to synodical mandates for various programs. Items for consideration about classical funding included providing a set amount that each classis would pay directly toward the costs of travel and lodging for synodical delegates. It was suggested that this approach also be applied to the costs of travel and lodging for COD meetings.

Another significant discussion focused on the idea of a two-tiered model for allocating ministry shares, with a set portion of ministry shares going toward governance (synod, COD, candidacy, etc.) and a set portion going toward CRCNA ministries (Thrive, Resonate, ReFrame, etc., based on approved allocation percentages or designations made by congregations).

IV. Conclusion/Next steps

Thus far, the task force agrees to the following conclusions:

- Reduced ministry shares has resulted in the denominational agencies reducing costs. The Office of General Secretary must also reduce its costs.
- One of the largest expenses of synod and COD is lodging and transportation.
- A reduction in the number of classes would serve the denomination well; however, that matter would require significant discussion with and among the classes.
- Holding synod virtually would be a least desirable solution.
- We need to distinguish between synodically mandated meetings (e.g. synod, COD) and other gatherings (e.g. stated clerk gathering).

Over the next several months, the task force will work on the following:

- Developing models for a two-tiered ministry share program
- Developing models for classis funding toward the costs of holding COD and synod meetings
- Creating and analyzing several scenarios, developing cost models as well as conducting a review of the merits and limitations of each scenario. Scenarios currently under consideration are the following:
 - holding synod every other year
 - reducing the number of delegates (from four to three for each classis)
 - holding synod at a venue in a major city (airline hub)
 - holding synod online
 - including an additional online COD meeting

Following a comprehensive review of the proposed scenarios, the task force will submit its final report (including recommendations) for discussion at the October COD meeting.

COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs

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