

# Frequently Asked Questions about Synod 2022 and the Human Sexuality Report

Synod 2022 discussed and took action on the [report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality](#). Following synod's actions, a number of people reached out to the ministries of the CRCNA with questions about what these decisions mean for them, their pastors, or their congregations. The office of General Secretary has gathered these questions and has worked with Church Order experts to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions. We hope that this information is helpful.

We recognize that for most, if not all of you, your interest in these church order matters is not theoretical. You are asking difficult questions that affect you as pastors, elders, deacons, and church members. We would encourage you to create intentional time for prayer, discernment, and open and respectful dialogue about these matters. Pastor Church Resources is also developing resources to assist you in this process. If you would like more information, please indicate your interest by using [this form](#).

One final note: Many of the ecclesial governance processes cited below have rarely been used in the history of the CRCNA. We have tried to answer questions to the best of our knowledge of church order and synodical rules of procedure, but we recognize that these rules are subject to the interpretation of synod and can be changed by future synods. We also anticipate that many of the issues addressed in this document will get worked through at many councils and classes in the coming year, and may be dealt with by multiple synods as well. In order to navigate all of this, a spirit of love, grace, and patience will be essential.

If you have questions that are not addressed here, we encourage you to seek advice from others in your classis, who may also be wrestling with this topic.

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 **PHONE**  
616 241-1691 US  
905 336-2920 CA

 **EMAIL**  
[info@crcna.org](mailto:info@crcna.org)

 **WEBSITE**  
[crcna.org](http://crcna.org)



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## **1. What did synod decide with regard to the Human Sexuality Report (HSR)?**

Synod 2022 made a number of decisions related to the HSR, which was on its agenda in June 2022, along with more than seventy overtures and communications from various classes and councils related to this topic. All of Synod 2022's decisions related to the HSR can be found in the *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 904-924. Please review those pages for a fuller understanding and record of synod's decisions.

Some of synod's decisions, summarized below, were recommended by every member of the advisory committee that was assigned the HSR materials. This includes the following:

- a. "That synod thank": the members of the HSR committee; those who courageously shared their stories through the HSR report, the agenda for synod, and many overtures; and those who gave many hours to pray, engage with the committee, and write overtures.
- b. "That synod solemnly take note of the pervasive sin of pornography and its harm, and lead our churches into repentance and healing."
- c. "That synod encourage the churches to make use of the curriculum prepared by Pastor Church Resources, in conjunction with members of the committee, to help small groups study and discuss aspects of the committee's report which may be controversial."
- d. "That synod recommend the pastoral care sections in the HSR as offering sound, introductory guidance to the churches and strongly encourage continuing conversations around the complex items within the HSR and how to faithfully implement these practices in the life of the church." Those continuing conversations should include:
  - i. consideration of what it means to live a healthy Christian sexual life for both married and single persons
  - ii. continued dialogue among scholars and research into the fields of biblical studies and the biological and social sciences, especially related to the topic of gender dysphoria
  - iii. listening and supporting conversations ... with a variety of unique cultural settings and geographic regions
  - iv. the contributions of those representing different generations, different cultural and geographic contexts, and different roles (areas of expertise that include social scientists, teachers, pastors, elders, counselors, students, young adults, and health care providers) will be essential for developing guidelines for pastoral care
  - v. continued conversation around pastoral care might have a powerful influence on elements of congregational life like gospel preaching, faith formation, the diaconate, our missional calling, the sacraments, and church discipline
  - vi. the churches need help balancing Scripture and the confessions with regard to the more difficult portions of Scripture. The church needs wisdom to preach and teach the solemn warning texts (i.e., 1 Cor. 6 and 11) in a way that is consistent with the confessions. Indeed, we need a better balance of radical hospitality and radical obedience as an outpouring of the lavish grace of God."
- e. Synod did not accede to overtures that asked to appoint new committees, adopt a new statement of faith on sexuality, or change the position the CRC has held since 1973 and declare that same-sex orientation is in itself sinful. The 1973 position stands, based on the biblical interpretation of the CRC, that same-sex orientation is not considered sinful, but same-sex sexual behavior is considered sinful.

Synod received both a majority and minority report from the advisory committee on the matter of human sexuality. As presented by way of the majority report, synod also adopted the following recommendations:

- a. “That synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.”
- b. “That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, polyamory, pornography and homosexual sex, all of which violate the Seventh Commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation ‘an interpretation of [a] confession’ (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.”
- c. “That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses ‘sexual violence within and outside of covenantal marriage.’”
- d. “That synod declare that Church Order 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report.” [Note: Article 69-c says: “Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that are in conflict with the Word of God.”]

Synod did not adopt a recommendation of the majority report to add a footnote to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108.

Though the minority report from the advisory committee was not debated, it was presented on the floor of synod and will be printed in the Acts of Synod. Some of the recommendations of the minority report that were not dealt with include, “That synod urge churches to prayerfully reflect on the trauma experienced by many in our congregations (ex. LGBTQ+, divorced, single, abused, and addicted individuals) as we struggle to live out our call to love God and love our neighbors,” and “that synod receive the report for information, but not adopt it,” and “not accede to Recommendations C and D,” regarding confessional status and Church Order Article 69-c.

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## 2. What did Synod 2022 say has “confessional status”?

It is important to note that Synod 2022 did not grant “confessional status” to the entire HSR report nor to the CRCNA's prior teaching on human sexuality, established in 1973. Instead, synod’s decision was quite specific: “That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, polyamory, pornography and homosexual sex, all of which violate the Seventh Commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation ‘an interpretation of [a] confession’ (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.”

Persons who are required to affirm the doctrine of the church, as contained in the creeds and Reformed confessions, are also required to affirm those interpretations of the confessions that synod adopts, including this statement. However, they are not required to affirm the entire HSR report as having “confessional status.” They should, of course, be reminded that synod did “recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.”

Persons who are required to affirm the doctrine of the church include officebearers (ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons) and confessing members of the church. The Church Order

says that “all officebearers, on occasions stipulated by council, classical and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers” (Art. 5), and “baptized members shall be encouraged to make a public profession of faith with the use of a prescribed form in a public worship service. This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the CRC. Before their profession of faith, they shall give an appropriate testimony of their faith, life, and doctrine to the elders” (Art.e 59-b).

The elders of each local congregation have authority to determine what constitutes “appropriate testimony of faith, life and doctrine.” To assist elders in situations where office bearers feel unable to indicate their affirmation of this statement, please see question 6. To assist elders in situations where confessing members are unable to indicate their affirmation of this statement, please see questions 22 and 23.

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### 3. How is this different from the position of the CRC before Synod 2022?

Prior to Synod 2022, the decisions of synods (in 1973, 2002, and 2016) regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage were recommended to the churches as pastoral advice. This means that these previous decisions of synod constituted the position of the CRC and were settled and binding, per Church Order Article 29, and as synodical decisions, all officebearers and confessing members were expected to abide by them. However, the nature and authority of those decisions and the measure of agreement expected were defined by synod itself as pastoral advice or pastoral guidance. Synod 2022’s decision regarding sexual behaviors that are in violation of the Seventh Commandment, by contrast, raises the level of agreement expected on this matter by identifying it as an interpretation of a confession that has confessional status.

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### 4. When does synod’s decision take effect? Does it need to be ratified by another synod, or by the churches and classes?

CRC polity is based on the Church Order and decisions of the assemblies, the broadest of which is the synod. Since our denomination has no constitution, there is no provision requiring ratification of synodical decisions by the churches and classes within the denomination.

Matters regarding substantive alterations to the Church Order or to the confessions ordinarily require two synods to approve them--one to propose and a second to adopt. The reason for that rule (in CO Art. 47 and its Supplement) is so that the churches and classes have the opportunity to respond to the change and submit overtures regarding it. That's also why study committee reports need to be published by Nov. 1 of a given year, in order to be considered at the following synod in June, along with any overtures and communications submitted during that time. This is called the requirement for "prior opportunity" on substantive matters.

The HSR was before the churches for much longer than the required time for churches to have an opportunity for comment and response; therefore synod made a decision that went into immediate effect. No changes were made to the Church Order or its Supplements, or to the Heidelberg Catechism.

The HSR report was published well in advance of Synod 2022—even longer than normal, since Synod 2021 was canceled due to the pandemic—and it recommended a declaration about confessional status, about which multiple overtures and communications had been submitted. This means that the churches and classes did have prior opportunity to comment. Synod might have made a recommendation for adoption at a subsequent synod if it had judged that more time was needed or that the recommendation of the majority report was different enough from the HSR's recommendation, but it did not, so the decision is currently in effect.

Note, however, that the entire HSR report was not adopted as having confessional status, only the recommendation above. In response to the entire report, Synod 2022 decided: "That synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality."

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## 5. Can synod's decision be changed? If so, how?

Synodical decisions, like the decisions of all assemblies in the CRCNA (councils, classes, and synods), are "settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order" (Art. 29). When decisions of subsequent synods differ from previous synodical decisions, the most recent decision is in effect.

Synodical decisions can be changed by one of the following three processes:

- Proposals to change a decision of synod may be brought to synod by way of overtures that are processed through a council and classis, according to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, Section V.
- Requests for a revision of a decision of a prior synod "shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented" (Church Order Ar. 31). The Supplement to Article 31 says, that "synod advised the churches that a request for revision of a decision of a major assembly must be processed as far as possible in the minor assemblies before coming to the major Assembly." This means that, like overtures and communications, such requests must also be processed through a council and classis, in order to be legally on the agenda for synod.
- Finally, since synod made a decision that has been declared to have confessional status, officebearers may submit confessional-revision gravamina to their councils regarding that matter, asking for a revision of the decision regarding confessional status. "If the gravamen is adopted by the council and the classis as its own, it becomes an overture to the broader assemblies, and therefore it is open for discussion in the whole church" (Supplement, Art. 5). See the next question for more information about gravamina.

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## 6. What if officebearers disagree with synod's decision?

If officebearers disagree with synod's decision, they may submit gravamina to their councils, indicating either that they have difficulty with this interpretation of the confessions, or that they believe it should be revised. The [Guidelines for Gravamina](#) can be found in the Supplement to Article 5 of the Church Order.

Please note this paragraph from the [Covenant for Officebearers](#): "We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority."

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## 7. Who can submit a gravamen?

Any individual officebearer may file a gravamen with his or her council. This includes ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors. The gravamen must be submitted to the council that has supervision over the officebearer.

Technically, per the Guidelines in the Supplement to Church Order Article 5, a gravamen is a document submitted by an officebearer who has already signed the Covenant for Officebearers, but a person who has been nominated for office could also submit a gravamen and ask their council to rule on it, so that the individual would be able to sign the Covenant upon his or her ordination or installation to office.

The Church Order addresses individual officebearers in its provisions for gravamina. It is conceivable that local church councils might decide to allow more than one officebearer to sign onto a gravamen when submitting it to their council.

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## 8. What kinds of gravamina are there and what is the difference between them?

There are two types of gravamina, as described in the Supplement to Church Order Article 5.

A confessional-difficulty gravamen indicates that an officebearer personally has difficulty with something in the confessions or an interpretation of the confessions and wishes to go on record with his or her church council in that regard. "In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church, since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed." (Supplement, Art. 5).

The confessional difficulty gravamen is a "personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession." The assumption is that the officebearer submitting the gravamen and the council would have a conversation that results in more information and clarification being offered to the officebearer. If, in that conversation, the council decides that the officebearer is no longer able to serve because of the gravity of the difficulty, the council would take appropriate next steps (Arts. 82-83). If they are satisfied that the difficulty does not exclude the officebearer, then the gravamen would stand. If the officebearer

was satisfied that his/her belief was not really in conflict with the confession, the gravamen could be withdrawn.

If the council “is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment” (Supplement, Art. 5). Likewise, if the classis is not able to judge the gravamen, it shall submit it to synod.

A confessional-revision gravamen indicates that an officebearer has difficulty with something in the confessions or an interpretation of the confessions and believes it should be revised. Such a gravamen would be submitted to the officebearer’s council and, if adopted, it would go to classis and synod as “an overture to the broader assemblies and therefore it becomes open for discussion in the whole church.” See the Supplement to Article 5 for the complete “Guidelines for Gravamina.”

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## 9. Does a council have an obligation to say anything to classis about a gravamen they've accepted?

If a council accepts a confessional-difficulty gravamen, it does not have to say anything to classis. Council only goes to classis if it isn’t able to judge whether to accept the gravamen.

If a council receives a confessional-revision gravamen, the council would need to forward it to classis, and then the gravamen would become an overture to classis, and to synod. This is because a difficulty is a personal matter, whereas a proposal for revision would affect all officebearers.

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## 10. Does a council have an obligation to say anything to the congregation about a gravamen they've accepted?

No. This is addressed by the Church Order supplement with regard to article 5 re confessional gravamina:

*“In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church, since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed.”*

A confessional-difficulty gravamen is not open to discussion in the congregation. However, if the council accepts an officebearer's confessional-difficulty gravamen, that fact should be recorded in the minutes of the council. In that way, the officebearer is "on record" with his/her disagreement.

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## 11. If a council accepts an officebearer’s confessional-difficulty gravamen, what does that mean? What can or can’t the officebearer do?

The Guidelines for Gravamina in the Supplement to Church Order Article 5 do not offer specific guidance for this question. It is generally agreed upon by Church Order commentators that persons who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen must not crusade for their position nor publicly advocate for

it; instead they must respect the judgment of the broader assembly and be open to whatever action the local council or the broader assemblies wish to take in the matter. This is not a requirement for silence, but is similar to the obligation of officebearers to respect decisions of synod that are "settled and binding," even if officebearers respectfully disagree, and to abide by those decisions.

For confessional matters, this public disagreement would likely require the filing of a gravamen, which could be seen as equivalent to registering a negative vote or respectfully disagreeing with a non-confessional matter. Such officebearers could be allowed to serve with whatever restrictions the council gives as far as communicating their position openly. Some councils report having such agreements with officebearers regarding their views on infant baptism, the end times, and so on. As mentioned above, it is important to remember that the decision of Synod 2022 regarding "confessional status" did not apply to the entire HSR, but to the list of sexual behaviors that are considered to be violations of the seventh commandment.

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## 12. Is the submission of a confessional-difficulty gravamen a way of exercising a "local option" on this issue? For example, if an entire council submitted gravamina would it enable them to act in ways that oppose what Synod 2022 decided?

The gravamina process is *not* a "local option." Despite voicing a concern or disagreement through the confessional difficulty gravamina, office bearers will remain bound by the confessional positions of the CRCNA (both on same sex sexual relationships, but also on things like infant baptism, reprobation, limited atonement, etc.) which are settled and binding matters with confessional authority. Office bearers are expected to respect this decision according to the principles articulated in Q&A 11 above. In contrast, different views on women's ordination are permissible according to the Church Order Art. 3 and supplement. With regard to the matter of the CRCNA's position on same sex sex, no local option exists. In fact, synod decided against overtures that sought a "local option" in June.

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## 13. What if a person has been asked to serve as an elder or a deacon, but is reluctant to sign the Covenant for Officebearers now?

As mentioned above, individuals who are being nominated for office should indicate immediately that they would sign the Covenant for Officebearers but with a reservation, naming their difficulty. The council can then decide whether the person can stand for election or not. If officebearers have been elected and not yet installed, they should, in as timely a manner as possible, indicate that they have a difficulty, and then council can decide whether to install them as scheduled, delay their installation, or deny their installation. The requirement to sign the Covenant for Officebearers typically happens at the time the officebearer first attends a council meeting as an elected officebearer.

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14. If an officebearer disagrees with synod's decision but doesn't file a gravamen, will that officebearer be disciplined?

This matter would be up to the discernment of the local council that supervises the officebearer.

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15. If officebearers are not allowed to register negative votes on the confessions or a confessional interpretation, why were registered negative votes allowed at Synod 2022 with regard to the recommendation on confessional status?

While, according to Synod 1975, an officebearer is not allowed to register a negative vote on a confession or an interpretation of a confession, the recommendation before Synod 2022 was to affirm that a particular aspect of the HSR be declared as a confessional interpretation. Delegates who voted against that recommendation, including delegates who registered their negative votes, may not have been indicating disagreement with the confessions themselves, or an interpretation thereof, but with some aspect of the recommendation before them, which also clarified that the position of the CRC on same sex sex (which had been classified as "settled and binding" pastoral advice) has the status of the interpretation of a confession. It is likely that neither the delegates nor the officers of synod had the restriction noted by Synod 1975 in mind.

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16. Can I be a delegate to classis if I disagree with Synod 2022's decision? How about as a delegate to synod?

Officebearers who are delegated by their councils to classis and by their classes to synod and who have proper credentials to deliberate and vote on all matters before the assembly, per Church Order Article 34, would be able to serve in the broader assemblies. Officebearers who are placed under special discipline and have had the privileges and duties of their office suspended would typically not be delegates to the broader assemblies, and persons who have been deposed from office would not be eligible to serve as delegates, since the assemblies are made up of officebearers. Those who have filed gravamina which have been accepted by their councils would be considered officebearers in good standing and therefore eligible to serve as delegates to the broader assemblies.

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17. Must an officebearer whose gravamen has been accepted by their local council also submit a gravamen to each broader assembly to which they've been delegated?

If a confessional-difficulty gravamen is accepted by the officebearer's council, then the officebearer can serve fully in the office to which s/he has been installed, including delegation to classis and synod. The decision has been made by the council and is not up for consideration by the classis. Such delegates to classis and synod would be able to signify agreement with the Covenant for Officebearers at the broader

assemblies because their gravamen has been accepted by their local council. There is no requirement in the Church Order or Rules for Synodical Procedure for them to submit the gravamen again to the broader assemblies. Boards of denominational institutions and agencies have their own policies in place for confessional difficulty issues.

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## 18. What does Synod 2022's decision mean for chaplains, missionaries, and other kinds of specialized ministers?

For officebearers serving in specialized positions, the same rules regarding gravamina would apply. An officebearer's gravamen needs to be submitted to their supervising council. If an officebearer, particularly a minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, is under the joint supervision of a council and another employer outside of that local church, it would be a courtesy for the council to also inform the employer about the gravamen. If the council accepts the gravamen, then the matter ends. But if the gravamen is not accepted and the officebearer is put under special discipline, then the council is obligated to inform the employer prior to taking any action that would affect the person's employment or ordination status (see Supplement, Art. 13-b). If an officebearer's gravamen is not accepted by the council, that decision of the council could be appealed to the classis--the next assembly in order--per Art. 30-a.

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## 19. With the women-in-office matter, the CRC allowed for different practices among the churches. Will that also be true for human sexuality?

Synod 2022 did not make any decisions that would allow for different practices among the churches. In the case of women in office, Church Order Supplement, Article 3 states that churches are allowed--but not required--to ordain women to all of the offices. This Supplement also states that "every classis shall respect the prerogative of its constituent churches to call and ordain officebearers according to their own biblical convictions." This is based on the CRC position that allows for two different perspectives on this issue, both considered valid interpretations of Scripture. Synod 2022 recommended the HSR to the churches as providing a "useful summary" of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality. (For more information about how this is different than the women in ecclesiastical office issue, please see question 12).

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## 20. The CRC has a long history of not binding consciences. Did synod account for that in its decisions?

The CRC does have a long history of believing that the church should not bind the consciences of believers more than Scripture does, going back to concerns expressed by John Calvin in his day. This key theme of Reformed theology and polity was noted by Synod 1995, which acknowledged "two different perspectives and convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, on the issue of whether women are allowed to serve in the offices of elder, minister and evangelist." (Women had already been

allowed to serve as deacons.) The decision of Synod 1995 led to the local option for churches and classes on this issue, and the Supplement to Article 3 notes that officebearers, including synodical deputies and classical and synodical delegates, shall not be required to participate against their convictions. Synod 2022 did not address the matter of binding consciences in its decisions. (For more information about how this is different than the women in ecclesiastical office issue, please see question 12)

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## 21. Did synod decide anything about transgender persons?

No, Synod 2022 did not make any decisions specifically about transgender persons.

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## 22. Did synod decide anything about pornography?

Yes, synod decided to “solemnly take note of the pervasive sin of pornography and its harm, and lead our churches into repentance and healing.” Further, it included pornography in the list of sexual sins that are understood to be included in the Heidelberg Catechism’s reference to “unchastity” and that violate the Seventh Commandment. Synod decided that the church’s teaching on these sins is the CRC’s interpretation of a confession, and synod said that “therefore it has confessional status.”

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## 23. What does Synod 2022’s decision mean for confessing members of the church, and how might this affect our practices of profession of faith and general discipline?

Confessing members of the church make “a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church” when they make profession of faith, after they “give an appropriate testimony of their faith, life, and doctrine to the elders” (Church Order Art. 59-b). As a result of Synod 2022’s decision affirming an interpretation of a confession as having confessional status, elders could inquire of persons seeking to profess their faith to determine whether their views on this matter align with the CRCNA’s interpretation of the confessions, and whether to approve of their profession of faith.

Current confessing members who have already made profession of faith could express any reservations they have to their elders, who would take such information under advisement as they disciple their members. It is a matter for the consistory (elders) to decide what, if any, steps should be taken next.

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24. If a confessing member disagrees with the CRC position since 1973 that same-sex orientation is not sinful, will that member be disciplined?

Local consistories are responsible for disciplining members and disciplining them if necessary, if concerns arise regarding their doctrine or life, so this is a question for the local bodies to discern. The decisions of Synod 2022 did not change the position of the CRC that same-sex orientation is not sinful. All confessing members should abide by this synodical pronouncement, even if they respectfully disagree with it.

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25. Under what (if any) circumstances would disciplined pastors lose their pension benefits?

A disciplined pastor would cease to be eligible for the Ministers' Pension Plan (MPP) only if a minister is deposed or released from office, and is no longer a CRC minister. According to the pension plan, once deposed (withdrawn), the service accrual ends and the three year average salary in effect at that time will be used to determine the pension benefit. Since vesting in the Plan is now immediate, the retirement benefit will not be lost. However, the unreduced benefit is payable at normal retirement age (age 66). If the participant wants to get the funds earlier, it would be with an actuarial reduction for the age when benefits begin (but not before age 55). A withdrawn pastor could also be eligible to take a lump sum distribution from the MPP to close out any further benefit from the Plan. It is worth noting that lump sum withdrawals are quite minimal as the Plan exists to provide a lifelong benefit at retirement instead of a one-time present value amount.

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26. What did Synod 2022 decide about Neland Avenue CRC and Classis Grand Rapids East?

Synod adopted the following recommendations regarding Neland Avenue CRC and Classis Grand Rapids East:

- a. "That synod instruct Neland Avenue CRC to immediately rescind its decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage, thus nullifying this deacon's current term."
- b. "That synod instruct Neland Avenue CRC to uphold our shared denominational covenants and procedures as laid out in the Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers."
- c. "That synod instruct the general secretary to appoint a committee *in loco* with the following mandate:
  1. Meet with Neland Avenue CRC to oversee its compliance to synod's rulings.
  2. Meet with Classis Grand Rapids East to admonish them regarding their responsibility to uphold our shared denominational covenants and procedures as laid out in the Church Order and the Covenant for Officebearers.
  3. Report to Classis Grand Rapids East at the autumn meeting (September 15, 2022; classisgreast.org) and make pertinent recommendations for its deliberations and action.

4. If necessary, invite three other classes to assist the committee in dealing with the issues regarding Neland Avenue CRC.
5. Report to Synod 2023 by way of the published Agenda its own actions and any classical actions taken and present its recommendations.”

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## 27. What is a “committee in loco”?

There is no definition of a committee in loco in the Church Order or Rules for Synodical Procedure. The practice of synod sending a committee in loco to a local church has occurred at least twice in the history of the CRC. Since “in loco” means “in place” or “in the proper place,” and the phrase “in loco parentis” means “in the place of a parent,” one could assume that a committee in loco is one that takes the place of synod in giving advice and assistance to a local church or classis. Church Order Article 33-a states, “The assemblies may delegate to committees the execution of their decisions or the preparation of reports for future consideration. They shall give every committee a well-defined mandate, and shall require of them regular and complete reports of their work.”

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## 28. How do churches affiliate with the CRC?

Congregations that wish to join the CRCNA should follow the provisions of Church Order Article 38-c: “When a non-Christian Reformed congregation wishes to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church, including the transfer of its pastor and other ministry staff, the procedure and regulations established by synod shall be followed.” The Supplement to Article 38-c indicates that “Synod 2016 endorsed a revised Affiliation Process and Procedure for congregations that desire to affiliate with the CRCNA. The process and procedure document is included in the *Manual for Synodical Deputies* and has been provided for every stated clerk of classis.” See also [crcna.org/affiliation](http://crcna.org/affiliation).

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## 29. How do churches disaffiliate with the CRC?

Congregations that wish to disaffiliate from the CRCNA should follow the provisions of Church Order Article 38-f: “When a council decides to disaffiliate from the denomination, the set process for disaffiliation adopted by synod shall be followed.” The Supplement to Article 38-f gives extensive instructions for the process of disaffiliation, including meetings of the council and congregation with classis representatives, who will attempt to dissuade them from leaving the denomination, and at least two congregational votes no less than one month apart. If the congregation’s second vote favors disaffiliation and the council follows through on its decision to disaffiliate, the separation will be complete when classis declares that it acquiesces in the decision of the congregation to disaffiliate from the denomination. See [this document](#).

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### 30. If my church disaffiliates from the CRCNA and I am a CRC pastor, will I lose the pension benefits I've collected through service time?

If a minister's church chooses to disaffiliate from the CRCNA, the minister would have to decide whether to go with that church and request release from office by Art. 14-b, or whether to continue to be a CRCNA minister and be released from that particular call. If they choose to be released from their call, they would follow the Art. 17-a process and be declared eligible for call.

If the minister is released from a call, but not from CRCNA ministry, the minister can continue to participate in the pension plan.

If a minister chooses to leave the CRCNA with their congregation, their service accrual in the Ministers' Pension Plan (MPP) will end and the three year average salary in effect at that time will be used to determine the pension benefit. Since vesting in the Plan is now immediate, the retirement benefit will not be lost. However, the unreduced benefit is payable at normal retirement age (age 66). If the participant wants to get the funds earlier, it would be with an actuarial reduction for the age when benefits begin (but not before age 55). A withdrawn pastor could also be eligible to take a lump sum distribution from the MPP to close out any further benefit from the Plan. It is worth noting that lump sum withdrawals are quite minimal as the Plan exists to provide a lifelong benefit at retirement instead of a one-time present value amount.

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### 31. Is there a procedure for forcing a church out of the denomination?

No, there is no procedure in the CRC Church Order for forcing a church to disaffiliate, or for disaffiliating a church by the initiative of a broader assembly. An overture to Synod 2022 asking for the development of such a process was deferred to Synod 2023 and, therefore, no action has been taken on it.

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### 32. How can a person join the CRC?

Individuals join the CRC by joining one of its congregations. If they have never been baptized, that sacrament would be their entry to the body of Christ and the institutional church. If they have been baptized, they could join as baptized members or they could make public profession of faith and become confessing members. See Church Order Article 59 for more details.

Members who are coming from other CRC congregations "shall be admitted to confessing membership in the congregation upon the presentation of certificates of membership attesting to their soundness in doctrine and life." Members from denominations in communion (formerly "churches in ecclesiastical fellowship") with the CRC "shall be admitted as confessing members of the congregation upon the presentation of certificates or statements of membership after the consistory has satisfied itself concerning the doctrine and conduct of the members."

And members from other Christian churches “shall be admitted as confessing members of the congregation only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and conduct. The consistory shall determine in each case whether to admit them directly or by public reaffirmation or profession of faith. Their names shall be announced to the congregation for approval.”

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### 33. How can a CRC member leave the CRC?

Members who wish to leave the CRC may request the transfer of their membership to another CRC congregation or to a congregation in a denomination that is in communion (formerly “churches in ecclesiastical fellowship”) with the CRC. Members who wish to leave the CRC for a congregation outside the CRC or a denomination not in communion with the CRC may request a statement of membership to be provided for them to bring to their new church. Members who leave the CRC without requesting a transfer or a membership statement to bring to another church may be *lapsed* after two years, following the provisions of Church Order Article 67 and its Supplement. If those members are not known to be involved in another Christian church, the elders should not propose lapsing their membership, but should attempt to reach out to them and ensure their involvement in a church. If not, the elders’ responsibility would be to disciple them and, if necessary, take disciplinary action.

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