

OVERTURES

OVERTURE (DEFERRED FROM SYNOD 2024)

OVERTURE 75 (DEFERRED FROM 2024)

Evaluate Polity to Clarify Relationship of Assemblies

(Deferred from 2023)

Classis Zeeland overtures synod to appoint a study committee to evaluate our church polity in light of the Scriptures, our theology, and our history, with the goal of clarifying the relationship between the council, classis, and synod. This should take particular note of the authority of the church and its various assemblies in light of the issue of discipline and excommunication on the local level, and church discipline and disaffiliation at the classical and synodical levels. The biblical and theological underpinnings should be analyzed first, turning then to recommendations for a proper polity that is biblically faithful and historically informed and addresses the issues the church is facing today. Based upon those conclusions, recommendations for structural changes should follow, including recommendations for changes to Church Order that reflect the biblical and theological and polity conclusions.

Grounds:

1. There is considerable confusion over the nature and authority of church assemblies today. This is causing chaos in the church and must be addressed.
2. These difficulties are deep and serious and can only be appropriately addressed by agreement at the biblical and theological level first, and then applied to our polity, Church Order, and practice.
3. Local churches and classes lack the time and resources to handle such an extensive biblical, theological, and historical task. It involves all our churches, so it must be addressed at the synodical level.
4. The task is significant in terms of weight, content, and impact, and it requires a full study committee to do it justice.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURES TO SYNOD 2025

OVERTURE 1

Permit Transfer of Grace Community Chapel, Teaneck, New Jersey, from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson

Classis Hudson, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overtures synod to permit the transfer of Grace Community Chapel (Teaneck, N.J.) from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson. The request originated from the Grace Community Chapel council and was approved by both classes.

Grounds:

1. Classis Hudson recently adopted a unique bicultural and bilingual approach regarding the composition of churches and ministry leaders within the classis. Grace Community Chapel also has a unique bicultural and bilingual identity in how they do ministry, and that fits well with Classis Hudson's mission, purpose, and goals.
2. Geographically, Cornerstone Church of New York, an emerging congregation and church plant of Grace Community Chapel, is located in the borough of Queens in New York City. New York City and Long Island ministries are all geographically distributed into Classis Hudson.
3. Classis Hackensack and Classis Hudson have agreed that this transfer is in the best interest of Grace Community Chapel and their affiliates.

Classis Hudson
Jeremy Mulder, stated clerk

OVERTURE 2

Allow Transfer of Grace Community Chapel, Teaneck, New Jersey, from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson

Classis Hackensack, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overtures synod to allow the transfer of Grace Community Chapel (Teaneck, N.J.) from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson. The request originated from the Grace Community Chapel council and was approved by both classes.

Grounds:

1. Classis Hudson recently adopted a unique bicultural and bilingual approach regarding the composition of churches and ministry leaders within the classis. Grace Community Chapel also has a unique bicultural and bilingual identity in how they do ministry, and that fits well with Classis Hudson's mission, purpose, and goals.
2. Geographically, Cornerstone Church of New York, an emerging congregation and church plant of Grace Community Chapel, is located in the borough of Queens in New York City. New York City and Long Island ministries are all geographically distributed into Classis Hudson.
3. Classis Hackensack and Classis Hudson have agreed that this transfer is in the best interest of Grace Community Chapel and their affiliates.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila Holmes, stated clerk

OVERTURE 3

Amend Church Order to Prohibit Concealed Handguns at All Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario, overtures Synod 2025 to amend the Church Order to prohibit concealed handguns at all ecclesiastical assemblies, regardless of local civil laws.

Grounds:

1. The consistent testimony of Scripture is to reject trust in weapons and the use of violence to protect ourselves or further the mission of the church (Ps. 20:7; Isa. 30:15-17; 31:1; Matt. 5:38-42; 26:52; John 18:11; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:20-23).
2. The one time that Jesus seems to advocate for carrying a weapon, he limited the disciples to only two swords. The type of sword indicated was commonly used for hunting, harvesting, and as a multipurpose tool. This interpretation is clearly supported later in the text: when Peter pulls out his sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant, Jesus rebukes him, saying "No more of this!" and "Put your sword away!" (Matt. 26:51-52; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:36-38, 49-51; John 18:10-11).
3. Lethal force is the responsibility for governments, not individuals (Rom. 13:3-4; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 105).
4. Early Christians did not defend themselves but laid down their lives willingly as a powerful and compelling testimony of their faith in God for protection and as witnesses of the gospel.

5. Many studies indicate that the presence of handguns does not lead to safer spaces; instead, the opposite is true. Examples from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed_carry_in_the_United_States:
 - a. A 2019 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that strengthening firearm regulations is associated with decreases in workplace homicide rates.¹
 - b. Another 2019 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that states with right-to-carry laws were associated with a 29-percent higher rate of firearm workplace homicides.²
 - c. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* found that right-to-carry laws led to an increase in overall violent crime.³
6. In a world where gun ownership sometimes rises to the level of idolatry, the prohibition of handguns at ecclesiastical assemblies will serve as a testimony to the church's trust in the Lord for life and well-being, and the commitment to peace.
7. Until recently it was uncommon for U.S. states to allow the free and unrestricted carrying of concealed weapons. Legislative changes across the U.S. in recent decades have dramatically increased the number of concealed weapons in the public sphere. Such changes have made urgent the need to address this issue.⁴

Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church,
Ancaster, Ontario
Ed Witvoet, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to Classis Hamilton at its February 22, 2025, meeting but was not adopted.

¹ Sabbath, Erika L.; Hawkins, Summer Sherburne; Baum, Christopher F. (Feb. 2020). "State-Level Changes in Firearm Laws and Workplace Homicide Rates: United States, 2011 to 2017." *American Journal of Public Health*, 110 (2): 230–36.

² Doucette, Mitchell L.; Crifasi, Cassandra K.; Frattaroli, Shannon (Dec. 2019). "Right-to-Carry Laws and Firearm Workplace Homicides: A Longitudinal Analysis (1992–2017)." *American Journal of Public Health*, 109 (12): 1747–53.

³ Donohue, John J.; Aneja, Abhay; Weber, Kyle D. (15 May 2019). "Right-to-Carry Laws and Violent Crime: A Comprehensive Assessment Using Panel Data and a State-Level Synthetic Control Analysis." *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 16 (2): 198–247.

⁴ A graphic depiction of the spread of "shall carry" and unrestricted carry of concealed weapons can be found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed_carry_in_the_United_States.

Healthy Pastoral Spouses

Note: The following overture was adopted by both Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain.

Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain overture synod to encourage each of the churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses in their church.

I. Background

Over the past decade, significant attention has been given to the spiritual health of pastors in our denomination. Resources from Thrive's Pastor and Church Support, including grants for learning and mentoring, are valuable assets that promote health and longevity in the service of our pastors.

Less attention has been given to the spiritual health of the spouses of pastors. While the current biennial conferences that are provided for spouses can be a time of encouragement and refreshment, very little is available for these spouses in the interim between the conferences. Spouses often find their own sources of care, sometimes creating independent groups for mutual encouragement. However, this can be difficult, especially for spouses who live in isolated locations. Sadly, these are the spouses who often need the most connection and care.

A. The Unique Role of Pastoral Spouses

Spouses of pastors live in a unique space in the congregation. They are not employees of the church, though they sometimes experience expectations as if they were. They are members of the church, but they occupy a more visible position than other members.

They are the one person in the church who does not have a pastor. While regional pastors may be available to support the pastors, spouses are often not included in that care. So the pastor has a pastor, the members have a pastor, but the spouse has no one.

Furthermore, they are personally affected by the decisions of the council in the same way the pastor is, but they often have less opportunity to communicate and participate in the decision-making process.

B. Healthy pastors, spouses, and churches

Churches, pastors, and their spouses live together in a system where each is affected by the other. When one entity in the system is unhealthy, the others are also affected. The correlation between the health of a pastor and the health of the church is well documented, with the health of the spouse less so. However, from observation, a pastor's health is affected by the health of the spouse, which affects the health of a church. There is a symbiosis between each part of the system.

Other than the calling of God on the pastor, the spouse's needs and opinions are usually the greatest influence on a pastor. Speaking generally, "If momma ain't happy, no one's happy." A church who wishes to support the health and longevity of the pastor will be motivated to promote the health of the pastor's spouse as well.

C. Resources for soul care

Each pastoral spouse is unique, which means the best method of soul care is unique to each individual. There is no one plan that can cover the needs of all spouses. As indicated in the graphic below, there are many various opportunities and resources for the soul care of an individual.



No one is better able to determine the right type of soul care than the pastoral spouse. A one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the needs of the individual. The church will be benefited by supporting spouses to find the best type of support for their own situation. The classis can serve as a means of communication between the churches, creating a network that would allow people to connect and work together. Regional pastors can follow up through contact with pastors to make sure that spouses are aware and have access to resources. Church visitors/advocates can ask about the health of the spouse along with the health of the pastor.

II. Overture

In conclusion, Classis Central Plains and Classis Rocky Mountain overture synod to encourage each of the churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses in their church through the following actions:

A. Encourage each church to provide at least \$500 each year for resources for soul care for the pastoral spouses in their church. The best form of soul care would be determined by the pastoral spouse.

B. That synod create a fund to supplement those churches who cannot afford this addition to their budget.

C. Regional pastors and church visitors are directed to ask after the health of the pastoral spouse in their contacts with pastors and churches.

Grounds:

1. Healthy churches depend on healthy pastors and healthy spouses.
2. There are minimal resources currently available that promote the health of the spouse.

Classis Central Plains
Jonathan Spronk, stated clerk
Classis Rocky Mountain
Shawn Richardson, stated clerk

OVERTURE 5

Rewrite *The Banner* Mandate

I. Background

There has been an increasing tension in the CRC between many (though not all) of its members and *The Banner*. It is no secret that the CRC is home to more theologically progressive and more theologically conservative members, as is the case in most large denominations. Though many progressive members think *The Banner* sometimes represents their position and sometimes does not, many conservative members (but not all) think it rarely, if ever, represents their position.¹ Though *The Banner* is tasked with encouraging dialogue and representing various views, many rather conservative and traditional members of the CRC (again, not all of them) do not find their views adequately represented.²

¹ This statement is supported by informal polling and personal discussion among the framers of this overture.

² For example, Jessica Menn Anderson has written at length presenting a conservative appraisal of *The Banner*. Though the writer(s) of this overture do not agree with everything she has written, she provides a sample of the incongruity that many conservatives experience on a regular basis with *The Banner*. It should be noted that part of her reason to disaffiliate with the CRC was her experience of reading *The Banner*. Her nine-part series can be found at the following links (accessed 1/24/25):

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-an-introduction;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-02-8-signs;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-3-a-fuller;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-4-polishing;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-5-catching;

II. Discussion

In light of the divergent perspective of *The Banner*, the following synodical mandates are not being met to a satisfactory degree, which will be commented upon in turn.

(2) provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,³

Since *The Banner* regularly provides for writing that goes *against* the convictions of many CRC members, it fails to be edifying and encouraging. Many members of the CRC report feeling disillusioned not only with *The Banner* but with the CRC as a whole after reading the latest issue. Unfortunately, as a result, many have stopped reading *The Banner* altogether, and many councils no longer provide the latest issue to their churches.

(3) stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage;

Though *The Banner* regularly stimulates critical thinking by presenting challenging viewpoints, many members and pastors of the CRC see these viewpoints as out of line with our confessional heritage. Many people desire *The Banner* to provide more grist for embracing our confessional heritage, rather than questioning it. To be sure, critical thinking is important, but it is not more important than the unity of the CRC. Therefore *The Banner* should better reflect a desire to *align* with our confessions.

[II, A, 2] Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the church and encourages biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.

Similarly, IV, G of the mandate says,

Selection of authors should aim at equity of representation (U.S./Canada, minorities, men/women, younger/older, conservative/progressive, etc.).

Many conservative members of the CRC think that their perspective is *not* presented adequately. Since these members believe their position to be “biblical and Reformed,” its exclusion is doubly distressing.

[IV, I] Nothing that serves the interest solely of one individual, organization, or group in contrast to other individuals, organizations, or groups or in neglect of the general interest of the churches should be published.

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-6-my;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-7-the;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-8-the;

jessicamennanderson.substack.com/p/issues-with-the-banner-part-9-reconsidering

³ thebanner.org/content/synodical-mandate (accessed 1/13/25). All of the following mandate quotes are taken from the same source on 1/13/25 or 1/14/25.

Many members of the CRC think *The Banner* generally serves the interest of the more progressive members.

[II, A, 3] Edifying readers so as to encourage them to grow in Christian maturity and faith and to live out their faith in daily life.

Much content in *The Banner* does not just fail to represent certain perspectives, but it also spends resources on unedifying topics, like emoji use⁴ and wristwatches.⁵

[II, A, 4] Providing a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues.

Some conservative potential contributors have noted that their submissions have been rejected by the editorial team while more progressive articles are printed in their stead. This is not a point that can be proved in this overture, but it seems to many that *The Banner* has a bias toward more progressive rather than more conservative articles, which may be substantiated by the experience of conservative submitters who are regularly rejected.

In addition to the above reflection on *The Banner* mandates, the following articles are presented as problematic (in addition to those mentioned in footnotes 2, 4, and 5), though they are by no means representative of an exhaustive list. The point of this list is to demonstrate that *The Banner* has now built a reputation for publishing material that is not in accord with the theological core of the CRCNA.

1. Convenience abortion is described as only “likely . . . probably” murder: “Non-mother-saving abortions are *likely* murder, and so in its directness, seriousness, and widespreadness should *probably* be a non-negotiable for Christian support” (emphasis added).⁶ For conservatives, convenience abortion is unequivocally murder. To say *anything* short of this is seen as opening the door to more “conversation” about killing babies and, as such, is unconscionable.

⁴ “I’m a boomer who has started to use emojis. Is that a bad thing?” (posted Nov. 27, 2023). Note that this entry is presented under the column “Big Questions.” For many, this is a trivial matter, and it does not warrant discussion in a magazine that should be centered on the eternally weighty discussion of Christ and his Church. See thebanner.org/columns/2023/11/im-a-boomer-who-has-started-to-use-emojis-is-that-a-bad-thing (accessed 1/24/25).

⁵ “Hodinkee” (posted June 3, 2022). Note that this entire post—like the one referred to the footnote above—says nothing about God. It could fit perfectly well in an atheist magazine. Furthermore, the post recommends the following: “Now that I’ve told you about Hodinkee, you can spend hours clicking around, watching, and reading about one of humanity’s most important and interesting inventions—the wristwatch.” A church magazine should recommend—and only recommend—spiritually edifying activities. Otherwise, the magazine in question is merely a magazine. *Note well*: “Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26b). See thebanner.org/mixed-media/2022/06/hodinkee (accessed 1/24/25).

⁶ “Is Abortion a Non-Negotiable Factor in a Christian’s Voting?” (published Oct. 19, 2020); thebanner.org/columns/2020/10/is-abortion-a-non-negotiable-factor-in-a-christians-voting (accessed 1/24/25).

2. *The Banner* rejected the conservative “The Abide Project” from advertising. However, the progressive “Better Together” group was allowed to advertise.⁷ When questioned, *The Banner* editor removed the ad, given the “perceptions [of Better Together] and out of courtesy to our readers.”⁸ Note that this explanation fails to recognize that Better Together’s position of allowing for same-sex activity is a progressive position. Rather, the reason the ad was removed was simply “perception” and “courtesy.”
3. *The Banner* regularly assumes or supports an egalitarian position,⁹ which may give the impression that the complementarian position is prohibited, or that the egalitarian position is the standard, but this is not the CRC’s position.¹⁰
4. *The Banner* publishes pieces that misrepresent the conservative position. The conservative position claims that certain *views* or *theological positions* are not welcome in the CRCNA (like the advocacy of homosexual activity, for example). However, *The Banner* publishes the sentiment that the conservative positions declares certain *people* unwelcome, which is a position held by no one. For example, “To me it feels like it [the CRCNA] has put up a sign that hurts to look at: ‘You are not welcome here.’”¹¹

The above information indicates that *The Banner’s* mandate is ineffective at facilitating a denominational magazine that unifies our church under one theological banner (hence the original inspiration for the name).¹² The mandate is geared toward allowing a diversity of opinions, but the result is dissatisfaction among many. Therefore *The Banner* should be retooled as a

⁷ “Better Together ad in The Banner??” by Lloyd Hemstreet (CRC minister of the Word); [youtube.com/watch?v=0sG0NxiSyK0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sG0NxiSyK0) (accessed 1/24/25).

⁸ “Clarification Statement from the Editor” (published May 2, 2023); thebanner.org/columns/2023/05/clarification-statement-from-the-editor (accessed 1/24/25).

⁹ “Penny Preaches: God Gives Good Gifts to Everyone!” (published Jan. 17, 2025); thebanner.org/mixed-media/2025/01/penny-preaches-god-gives-good-gifts-to-everyone (accessed 1/24/25).

¹⁰ “Women in Ecclesiastical Office”; cncna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/women-ecclesiastical-office (accessed 1/24/25).

¹¹ “The Church at War” (published Feb. 7, 2025); thebanner.org/columns/2025/02/the-church-at-war. The strawman of this piece continues by claiming that Neland Avenue CRC, in contrast to the CRCNA, teaches that “we are loved—every one of us.” This is as if to say conservatives reject John 3:16 and God’s love for all via common grace. But, of course, this is not the case. Again, the author claims that his church, in contrast to ours, alone has the metaphorical sign: “All are welcome in this place”—as if the CRCNA does not welcome those who disagree to attend their services. The truth is, of course, that the CRCNA’s position is to welcome *all* people, as *all* are made in the image of God and under his loving common grace so that some might hold fast to the truth and forsake lives of sin. Some, of course(!), will reject this offer. But that does not mean it is not offered to everyone. Those who reject the offer of the gospel are not afforded membership, but this is not a rejection of the person. Rather, the person is rejecting Christ (John 14:15; 15:10).

¹² thebanner.org/about-us/history

mechanism for discipleship and unity. It makes no sense to use ecclesiological energy to foster more division in a time like ours. Rather, *The Banner* should be something that new believers can read and profitably understand, youth can be disciplined by, and our denomination can rally behind.

III. Overture

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Artesia, California, overtures Synod 2025 to decide the following:

A. Create a committee to rewrite, in full, *The Banner* mandate. The new mandate should be written in such a way as to foster strict adherence to our confessional documents, rather than debate about them. Furthermore, the mandate should require that *The Banner* produce nothing but edifying material that promotes unity around our confessions, faithfulness to Christ and his gospel, and affection for our Savior, rather than merely entertaining articles. The unbiased news reporting element of *The Banner* should remain unchanged.

B. If the current staff of *The Banner* are not excited about this new direction, they should be dismissed after adequate time is given for them to acquire new employment, as determined by the committee.

Council of First Christian Reformed Church, Artesia, California
Kandi Anema, clerk of council

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 11, 2025, meeting of Classis Greater Los Angeles but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 6

Amend the Synodical Mandate and Guidelines of *The Banner*

Introduction

The synodical mandate of *The Banner* is guided by four main tasks:¹

- (1) Inform readers about what is happening in the CRC as well as the church at large,
- (2) Provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,
- (3) Stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage; and
- (4) Offer tools to help readers find fresh awareness to seek, learn, worship, and serve as Reformed Christians in contemporary society.

¹ The Synodical Mandate and General Responsibilities for *The Banner* can be found on *The Banner's* website: thebanner.org/content/synodical-mandate. See also *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 49-50.

The Banner holds general responsibilities to these various groups of people:

- its subscribers and readers in the Christian Reformed Church
- the ecclesiastical assemblies (councils, classes, synod) of the CRC
- the official agencies of the CRC

Summary: According to the synodical mandate, *The Banner* is a CRC publication intended for CRC members. As stated on *The Banner* website cited above, “*The Banner* is a publication of the Christian Reformed Church in North America rather than an independent magazine.”

II. Background

As directed by Synod 2014, the CRCNA Board of Trustees (BOT) was called upon to review the 1998 synodical mandate concerning *The Banner* (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 573-74). One of the grounds for this was “It is appropriate to review mandates from time to time.” The BOT recommended changes to the synodical mandate of *The Banner* to give greater clarification, and those were approved at Synod 2015 (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 641; see *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 49-50). What is highlighted in the overtures concerning *The Banner* in 2014-15 was concern for *The Banner*’s adherence to the publication’s synodical mandate. What was not addressed in the review of the synodical mandate was the online presence of *The Banner*.

As reported to Synod 2024, *The Banner* website averages more than 85,000 pageviews per month, *The Banner* app has more than 10,000 pageviews per month, and there are increased efforts to engage on various social media platforms (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 51-52), such as Facebook and X (formerly called Twitter).

At the time of writing this overture, *The Banner*’s Facebook page states that it is “The Official Magazine of the Christian Reformed Church.” To the casual observer of this page, this would imply that *The Banner* represents the voice of the denomination on a public platform. *The Banner* also has a presence on X. Again, *The Banner* represents the denomination on a public platform. The reality is that people outside of the denomination view the publication as officially representing the denomination.

The Banner has indicated the publication’s commitment that it is a place where controversial articles can be posted.² This is to spark conversation and be a place where the many voices of the denomination can be heard. *The Banner* has also committed to be an “anti-echo chamber” publication. This is to create a “kitchen table” location for members of the denomination to have their diverse voices heard.³

Concerns about the balance and representation of the many diverse voices of the denomination have grown in the past decade. There are concerns

² Shiao Chong, “Why We Publish ‘Controversial’ Articles,” *The Banner*, Sept. 2022. Also found at this link: thebanner.org/columns/2022/09/why-we-publish-controversial-articles.

³ Shiao Chong, “Anti-echo Chamber,” *The Banner*, November 2024. Also found at this link: thebanner.org/columns/2024/11/anti-echo-chamber.

with how *The Banner* represents the denomination on public platforms despite the lack of clear guidance on this in the synodical mandate. Sibley (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church’s council reached out to *The Banner*, specifically to editor in chief Shiao Chong, with their concerns about *The Banner’s* presence on social media and how the publication represents the denomination. Chong’s response indicated that it is not the responsibility of *The Banner* to promote the official positions of the denomination. According to the synodical mandate, this is of course correct. This gives *The Banner* license to represent the denomination without any mandates to do so or for upholding the positions of the denomination.

Division and a loss of trust in our denominational institutions are realities we are facing as a denomination, reflected in part by reduced giving. There have been repeated calls for unity, and rightly so. Now is the time to rebuild trust and unity within the denomination. Taking steps regarding our denominational publication is just one small part of that. The COD reported a decision made in May 2024 that *The Banner* should become self-sustaining by 2027 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 624). The goal is to remove ministry shares from the publication. A problem that could occur with this transition is a greater sense of freedom for the publication to adhere to the publication’s commitments, which would not properly address the growing concern and loss of trust.

Summary: There are concerns with how *The Banner* adheres to its current synodical mandate. With these concerns in mind, one wonders how *The Banner* can also represent the denomination on a public platform, despite not having a synodical mandate to do so or to hold *The Banner* accountable. The commitment to publish controversial articles and be an anti-echo chamber conflicts with the reality of representing the CRC in public spaces via social media. The kitchen table analogy implies a space of privacy where different opinions can be heard. A publication that is read by those outside of the denomination and which posts in public spaces negates this “kitchen table” analogy.

III. Overture

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to amend the synodical mandate and guidelines of *The Banner* (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~) to reflect its representative public nature as follows (see Appendix for reference of the current synodical mandate):

A. Under “The Mandate of *The Banner*,” add a fifth item that says:

(5) represent the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication.

B. Under “General Responsibilities,” amend point A, 2 to say,

(2) Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church ~~in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the~~

church and encouraging biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.

C. Under "General Responsibilities," add a fourth item that says,

D. To represent the CRCNA to the broader church and world from a faithful Reformed perspective according to our confessions and synodical decisions and as its representative publication, providing clear statements regarding the official position of the denomination in any article or report dealing with controversial or diverse viewpoints.

D. Under "Freedom of Editorial Staff," amend point E to say,

E. Provide a biblically prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation of trends within the church and society and of actions, decisions, policies, programs, etc., being considered by or already approved by ecclesiastical assemblies and agencies, with proper acknowledgment and respect for the official positions of the CRCNA and within the confines of our confessional covenant commitments.

Grounds:

1. The synodical mandate has not addressed the publication's presence on social media. The mandate does not include guidelines for representing the denomination outside of the members of the denomination. The reality is that those outside the denomination already consider the publication as a representation of the denomination at large. In a digital age, the publication is readily available to anyone globally with internet access. The guidelines should reflect this reality.
2. *The Banner* has committed to publishing controversial articles that do not represent the denomination. While it is necessary for any publication to consider and allow for diverse viewpoints, as the magazine of the CRCNA it 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.
3. Since *The Banner* does represent the CRC, the publication should do so in a way that accurately fulfills the synodical mandate to think critically on various issues in ways that are in line with the existing regulations under "Editorial Integrity," point A: "A. *The Banner* materials should be faithful to Scripture and the confessions."
4. In the midst of growing distrust, now is the time to work toward unity.
5. *The Banner* is working toward financial independence from ministry shares. This transition time is a good time to review the mandate. It is appropriate to review synodical mandates from time to time.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

APPENDIX

The Mandate of *The Banner*

Adopted by Synod 2015 (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 641)

The Banner is a publication of the Christian Reformed Church in North America rather than an independent magazine. Accordingly, the editorial staff, led by the synodically appointed editor in chief, is accountable to the church for the style and content of this magazine. This accountability to the church is realized in a number of diverse, sometimes overlapping, and at times conflicting responsibilities to various groups and structures within the denomination.

All these responsibilities are governed by *The Banner's* synodical mandate to

- (1) inform readers about what is happening in the CRC as well as the church at large,
- (2) provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living,
- (3) stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues, in line with our confessional heritage; and
- (4) offer tools to help readers find fresh awareness to seek, learn, worship, and serve as Reformed Christians in contemporary society.

Guidelines for *The Banner's* Accountability and Freedom

I. Lines of accountability

Lines of accountability have been established by previous decisions of synod and CRC Publications. For the editorial staff, accountability runs through the editor in chief, who is directly accountable to the following:

A. The Council of Delegates, the body mandated by synod to publish this denominational periodical. This accountability includes the following:

1. Reporting periodically on editorial activities and decisions.
2. Reporting reactions, criticisms, and suggestions received from readers and churches.
3. Recommending needed changes in policies and procedures.
4. Carrying out all approved policies and procedures.

B. The executive director, the administrative head appointed to manage and coordinate the work of denominational staff. This accountability includes the following:

1. Keeping him/her informed of possibly sensitive or controversial issues being addressed and listening seriously to any advice offered regarding such issues. The executive director should, at his/her discretion, consult with other CRC ministry leaders.
2. Being fiscally responsible.
3. Following approved personnel procedures.
4. Working cooperatively with Ministry Support Services.

II. General responsibilities

In addition to this direct accountability, the editorial staff carries general responsibilities inherent in the nature of a denominational magazine:

- A. To its subscribers and readers in the Christian Reformed Church for:
 - 1. Reporting in an honest and unbiased manner information about activities affecting the church.
 - 2. Presenting to the readers the issues pertinent to the life of the church in a way that shows the diverse positions held within the church and encourages biblical and Reformed thinking about these issues.
 - 3. Edifying readers so as to encourage them to grow in Christian maturity and faith and to live out their faith in daily life.
 - 4. Providing a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues.
- B. To the ecclesiastical assemblies (councils, classes, synod) of the CRC for:
 - 1. Keeping church members informed about important decisions taken.
 - 2. Reporting significant trends or policy directions.
- C. To the official agencies of the CRC for:
 - 1. Presenting and explaining their ministry on behalf of the churches, making sure the information disseminated is accurate.
 - 2. Keeping church members informed about important changes in their programs and personnel.
 - 3. Encouraging church members to support and participate in the ministries being carried out.

III. Freedom of editorial staff

In order that it may carry on these diverse responsibilities, the editorial staff must be granted the freedom to do the following:

- A. Inform its readers and subscribers about what is occurring in the church (including relevant problems, needs, and concerns) even though some persons, congregations, or agencies may prefer that such information not be disseminated.
- B. Investigate and determine the facts regarding any occurrence in the church that appears to merit reporting to readers.
- C. Lead and encourage a responsible discussion of the issues important to the life of the church through editorial comment and publication of articles that represent the various views held within the church.
- D. 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.
- E. Provide a biblically prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation of trends within the church and society and of actions, decisions, policies, programs, etc., being considered by or already approved by ecclesiastical assemblies and agencies.

IV. Editorial integrity

The following guidelines for editorial judgment will be used in determining what materials (editorials, articles, news stories, etc.) are published in the pages of *The Banner*:

- A. *The Banner* materials should be faithful to Scripture and the confessions.
- B. *The Banner* materials should edify and educate readers.
- C. Truth must be written but always in love.
- D. Criticism must be constructive and fair.
- E. Editing of materials should always maintain the intent of the author while making the writing more effective in presenting the author's views.
- F. No author should be demeaned by editorial comment or by the way an article, column, letter, etc., is presented.
- G. Selection of authors should aim at equity of representation (U.S./Canada, minorities, men/women, younger/older, conservative/progressive, etc.).
- H. Nothing deliberately inflammatory, insulting, or divisive should be published.
- I. Nothing that serves the interest solely of one individual, organization, or group in contrast to other individuals, organizations, or groups or in neglect of the general interest of the churches should be published.
- J. *The Banner* should give preference to CRC authors.
- K. Heads/titles should not be misleading or sensational; they should accurately reflect the heart of the story/article.

OVERTURE 7

Synodical Advisory Committee regarding Denominational Boards

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2025 to create a new Synodical Advisory Committee whose sole purpose is to interview and make specific recommendations to synod for all proposed denominational board positions to be voted on by synodical delegates (boards of institutions, agencies, and ministries, and the Council of Delegates), including new appointments as well as reappointments.

- A. This newly created advisory committee would have a stated mission with a stated focus to ask core Christian identity, belief, and ethical questions of each prospective nominee appointment and reappointment.
- B. Each nominee would be required to fill out a standardized questionnaire prior to being interviewed by the advisory committee, which the committee would work from to ask more in-depth follow-up questions,

- including the following: How would you articulate the gospel? What is your understanding of the Reformed faith? What are areas of concern you have in the CRC? What are areas where you've seen God at work in the CRC? How might the agency/institution you are called to serve on bless the work of God's kingdom in the CRC? How would you apply the Reformed faith to this particular board you'd be serving on?
- C. The boards affected would be the Council of Delegates, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Historical Committee, the Ecumenical Interchurch Relations Committee (EIRC), and the Loan Fund.
 - D. All prospective nominees would be interviewed either in person or via videoconference call by the advisory committee prior to synod or during synod, and if they wish to serve on a respective board they must make themselves available to the advisory committee for interview, to be arranged by the General Secretary's office.
 - E. The advisory committee will make its recommendations to synod (e.g., red light, yellow light, green light), but ultimately synod must deliberate and then vote on the committee's recommendations regarding all prospective board nominees.
 - F. Boards that have their nominees rejected by synod will not be permitted to "vacancy-fill" those positions and so would be actively encouraged to present to synod at least two prospective nominees per board position to be filled.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA, as a confessionally Reformed denomination, has a growing desire to have a firm confidence in the makeup of our denominational boards as to its members' biblical, ethical, and theological understandings, beliefs, and practices.
2. Synodical delegates (ministers, elders, and deacons), as officebearers in the church, have a specific interest in the biblical, ethical, and theological understanding, beliefs, and practices of its various board members, which requires greater involvement in the approval process.
3. Presently the names of board nominees provided to synodical delegates are total "unknowns" to many/most of the delegates (particularly to the elders and deacons), and yet they are being asked to essentially "rubber stamp" the names of nominees provided to them by the various agency boards.
4. The denominational board committees usually tasked with coming up with prospective nominees are often concerned with a multiplicity of variables and therefore do not always have a focus on the biblical, ethical, and theological beliefs and practices of nominees, which ought to be of primary importance for a denominational board position.
5. Synod has a particular interest in its boards' (which oversee and govern the work of our agencies and institutions on a more detailed basis than

- synod is able to do in one week) being an accurate reflection of the will and convictions of synod.
6. Denominational board members serve at the will of synod, not the will of the agencies and institutions they serve, and ultimately are accountable to synod, so they must have the confidence of synod.
 7. Other Reformed denominations (e.g., the Presbyterian Church in America) have such (General Assembly) advisory committees that do such interviews and make such recommendations for prospective members of its boards.
 8. Boards can often become largely self-perpetuating, creating an unhealthy insularity to them, and therefore also increasing the likelihood of their being unresponsive to the authority and will of synod on biblical, ethical, and theological issues.
 9. The denominational agencies and institutions exist to further the work of Christ's kingdom through the CRCNA, which is why they are CRCNA agencies and are not stand-alone nonprofit Christian agencies with boards not appointed by synod.
 10. Greater diversity in the CRC has meant that delegates to synod no longer have the traditional ways of getting to know other people in the denomination, so a new way now needs to be created to build community across the CRCNA and facilitate a spirit of fellowship and greater trust.
 11. There presently is a need for training of board members; such an interview process would help to support and validate new board members in their new endeavor/calling.

Classis Zeeland
Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURE 8

Celebrate the 1,700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed

I. Background

The Council of Nicaea met in the year A.D. 325 from May until the end of July and formulated an ecumenical creed (the Nicene Creed) to which the Christian Reformed Church subscribes. But why did that council meet? Here's a brief history, as taken from *A History of the Christian Church* by former Calvin Theological Seminary church history professor D.H. Kromminga, Th.M. (pp. 56ff):

Arius was a pupil of Lucian of Antioch and became a presbyter in Alexandria. He was highly esteemed, but his views of the Person of Christ at length roused his bishop, Alexander, to opposition and contradiction. Arius taught, that the Son, or Logos, was indeed the

firstborn of all creatures and the agent in creating the rest, but that He at the same time was not eternal but was Himself created. In the incarnation, he held, this Logos, or Son of God, had entered a human body, taking the place of the reasoning spirit which in ordinary cases animates and indwells our human bodies. Thus the Christ, as Arius thought of Him, was neither fully God nor fully man. The bishop Alexander of Alexandria, on the other hand, was fully convinced, that the Son of God was eternal, uncreated, and in essence like the Father. Thus they clashed.

Alexander held a synod which condemned Arius and his friends, but Arius asked and received aid from Eusebius, his old fellow-pupil of Lucian of Antioch. This man was at that time bishop of Nicomedia, which had been the imperial residence since the days of Emperor Diocletian. Arius soon found shelter with this prominent and powerful bishop, while both parties spread the dispute by writing to other bishops about it. Then [Emperor] Constantine defeated his brother-in-law Licinius in 323 and took over the rule of the East also. In the interests of the unity of the Church, which was so much desired by him, he sent a bishop from Cordova in Spain, called Hosius, to Alexandria with a letter advising to drop the dispute about this unprofitable question. Naturally the parties to the dispute thought it far from unprofitable, and the quarrel went lustily on.

Constantine then decided to try his expedient of settlement by a meeting of bishops. Since he was now sole ruler of the whole Empire, these bishops came from the West as well as from the East, though from the West there were only a few among the more than three hundred. This council met at Nicea in 325 and, from the greater importance of the question which it was called upon to determine, it has always been held to be the most important of the seven ecumenical or general Councils, of which it was the first. There were three parties. A handful stood with Arius. Another handful stood with Alexander. But the great majority of the members of this council had not given the question at issue much thought and had no clear opinions about it. Yet the Council came to a decision in a rather short time under the controlling influence of the Emperor.

The Arian party presented a creed soon after the opening of the Council, which was promptly rejected. Then Eusebius of Caesarea presented the creed of his church, which, however, dated from before the controversy and did not touch on the issue. This creed the Council took and amended so that it spoke on the issue. It was changed so that it now declared that the Son was begotten, not made, and is of one essence with the Father, while it now expressly condemned the Arian assertions that there was a time when He was not, and that He was made of things that were not. Thus altered, this creed expressed the common view of all the West and also a minority in the East.

The Nicene Creed has become one of the defining creeds for the CRCNA and remains so today in 2025.

II. Overture

Therefore Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2025 to use the occasion of the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed to celebrate the doctrinal clarity provided for Christ's church in that creed, and to provide further instruction for our churches on the important doctrinal teachings found in that creed.

The celebration and instruction of this creed could take the shape of a synodical worship-service focus, a series of articles written in *The Banner*, an instruction that denominational agencies teach and celebrate all the doctrines found in that creed, or any other possible observance.

Classis Zeeland,
Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

OVERTURE 9

Update the Covenant for Officebearers to Include the Belhar Confession

Classis Hackensack overtures Synod 2025 to include the Belhar Confession in the paragraph concerning contemporary testimonies in the Covenant for Officebearers (para. 5) so that it reads as follows:

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of the Belhar Confession and Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony as current Reformed expressions of the Christian faith that form and guide us in our present context.

I. Explanation

Synod 2017 adopted the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony for the Christian Reformed Church. As such, the Covenant for Officebearers should be updated to include it alongside the singular mention of the witness of Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony.

II. Background

"The Belhar Confession is a gift from the church to the church. By highlighting God's call to unity, justice, and reconciliation, the Belhar reminds us that when we profess our faith in Christ, we do so as part of the global church. And belonging to the global church comes with responsibilities, each part being accountable to the others" (from the CRC's website: crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/confession-belhar).

While preparing our delegates to sign the Covenant for Officebearers in accordance with Synod 2024's guidance, we discovered that the document

had not been updated to include Synod 2017's adoption of the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony.

This paragraph that is currently found in the Covenant for Officebearers, adopted in 2012, reads as follows:

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

III. Overture

We humbly request that this paragraph be updated to include the Belhar Confession so that all delegates may rejoice in the gift that it is and in the guidance that it provides to the church.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila Holmes, stated clerk

OVERTURE 10

Reaffirm the Authority of Local Consistory in Baptism

I. Summary of Overture

Classis Grand Rapids South overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

A. Eliminate any confusion that may have been caused by *Acts of Synod 2024*, Article 76 (p. 891), by reaffirming that the authority of granting baptism is held with the local consistory.

B. Affirm that the local consistory is best able to discern and make a decision regarding all the facts (including their faith) surrounding a request by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

C. Note that Article 56 of the Church Order provides that the primary criterion for baptism of a child is that the "the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members."

II. Introduction

Synod 2024 adopted the following (*Acts of Synod 2024*, Art. 76, pp. 891-92):

Response to Overture 67 (Deferred from 2023); Overtures 23, 25-26, 30-31, 33-34; Communications 8, 12, 28 (majority report)

C. Recommendations

1. That synod instruct churches who have made public statements, by their actions or in any form of media, that directly contradict synod's decision regarding unchastity to repent and to honor their covenant commitments to the CRCNA. Actions demonstrating this repentance would include the following:

- A statement to classis indicating repentance.

- A removal of any public statements opposed to the teaching of the CRCNA regarding chastity, including materials designed to teach against or otherwise contradict the denomination's position.
- A commitment not to ordain as officebearers individuals who are in a same-sex marriage or in a same-sex relationship not in keeping with a holy Christian sexual life.
- A commitment not to publicly instruct against the denomination's position in "preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living," as promised in the Covenant for Officebearers.
- A commitment not to recognize same-sex marriage as ecclesiastically valid, either in officiation or any manner of blessing a wedding rite or a baptismal rite (see Church Order Art. 56, 69-c; Supplement, Art. 69-c; Supplement, Art. 69-c; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 82, 85).
- A commitment that officebearers not serve in any organization designed to specifically advocate against the teachings and confessions of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

- a. Our desire is for the restoration of noncompliant churches under the truth of God's Word and our shared confession (1 John 1:9-10; Gal. 6:1).
- b. When synod declares an interpretation of a confession, that interpretation is "settled and binding."

All of the overtures and communications addressed by synod in Article 76 address matters of discipline, except Overture 26, which asks synod to "Require a Letter of Repentance from the Consistory of Eastern Avenue CRC" for a baptism they allowed of a child of a married gay couple.

We accept synod's decision in Article 76 entirely, except for the following statement, which we believe is in conflict with existing Church Order:

"A commitment not to recognize same-sex marriage as ecclesiastically valid, either in officiation or any manner of blessing a wedding rite or a baptismal rite."

We understand and agree with this statement as it applies to the "wedding rite," since that is a definite action contrary to our Church Order which can be objectively verified. However, applying this statement to the "baptismal rite" is problematic because our Church Order recognizes there are a number of factors involved that only a consistory can discern.

According to Article 29 of our Church Order, decisions of synod (such as in Art. 76 above) are settled and binding "unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order." Although Synod 2024 addressed Article 76 to churches "that directly contradict synod's decision regarding unchastity," the sentence about the "baptismal rite" seems to be binding on all churches. The sentence appears to be a blanket prohibition of

baptism being offered to children of same-sex couples, and thereby it takes away the authority of a local consistory to discern how God is working in a particular situation. This understanding would place it in conflict with statements from our Church Order about the authority of a local consistory to make decisions about baptism of children of all parents in keeping with Reformed polity over the generations. Following are three statements from the CRCNA, Church Order, and *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* which demonstrate this:

- “The profession of faith and membership in good standing of at least one parent are necessary for pledging covenantal promises to raise the child” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 392).
- “The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory” (Church Order Art. 55).¹
- “The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism. The consistory shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible. Upon their baptism, children shall be designated as ‘baptized member’” (Church Order, Art. 56).

III. Understanding of Baptism by the CRCNA

By means of a study committee nearly a decade ago, the CRC sought to understand how the church should respond to same-sex marriages. The majority report of the 2016 Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage was received by synod as information, and only the minority report was recommended to the churches as pastoral guidance (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 917-18). Ironically, it is in the majority report where this information is found (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 392):

May a church baptize the infants and young children of a same-sex married couple? The Church Order states that “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism” (Church Order Art. 56). In baptism, God makes covenant promises to that child. The profession of faith and membership in good standing of at least one parent are necessary for pledging covenantal promises to raise the child to know God’s love for the child in Christ.

The *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* further clarifies the above statement: “Church Order Supplement, Articles 78-81 specifies that if a confessing member is under formal discipline with their membership privileges suspended, such a person is not able to present a child for baptism.”²

¹ See also Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRCNA, 2020), pp. 305-6.

² *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRCNA, 2019), p. 210.

Looking at this issue from only the above information may lead one to conclude that a church may not baptize children of a same-sex couple. However, it is important to understand (1) the biblical and theological nature of baptism, (2) church polity, and (3) discipline.

A. Biblical and theological nature of baptism

Synod 2011 endorsed the work of its Faith Formation study committee, a committee that explored the Scriptures and our theological tradition relative to a number of issues involved in Faith Formation, including baptism. The following excerpts provide an important grounding for this present overture to Synod 2025 (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 552, 554-55, 563).

“The marvelous grace of God given through Jesus Christ and conveyed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of baptism. Through this sacrament God takes the initiative and declares that we belong to him. It is God who acts through baptism, working to nourish, sustain, comfort, challenge, teach, and assure us. . . .

The inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant of grace is ingrained in God’s plan of redemption. Covenant infants have a relationship with God (see Ps. 22:9-10; 71:6; 139:13; Jer. 1:5), and therefore covenant blessings are promised to them (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). . . .

Baptism is not intended to be a private action, but one that takes place within the worshiping community. God speaks publicly about the covenant position of the one being baptized. The recipients of baptism are publicly welcomed as members of the covenant community. And the community responds with its vows to receive baptized persons in love, to pray for them, and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers (see forms for baptism of children and baptism of adults). The covenant community lives out its vows by loving, praying for, encouraging, teaching, mentoring, and offering models of grace-filled, faithful living to every member of the congregation. . . .

At baptism, parents make important vows about their role in the faith development of their children, specifically to instruct their children in the Christian faith and to lead them by example to be Christ’s disciples (Deut. 6:4-9). . . .

Clearly, baptism is the action of God, it signifies the covenant of grace at work, and it includes both parents and the worshiping community whose belief and example will nurture this child’s development. **But** who is best able to discern a parent’s state of faith? According to our polity, the local church consistory has this responsibility.

B. Church polity

Article 56 of the Church Order and its Supplements states that “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism.”

Moreover, when seeking to understand those who enter into a CRC congregation from another denomination, “the Christian Reformed Church acknowledges that the sacrament of holy baptism is the sacrament of the church universal and, therefore, honors the administration of it by any Christian church.”³ This commentary is based on Article 58 of the Church Order: “The baptism of one who comes from another Christian denomination shall be held valid if it has been administered in the name of the triune God, by someone authorized by that denomination.”

Not only does the CRC recognize baptism as the sacrament of the church universal; the responsibility belongs to the local church and her consistory (Church Order Art. 55).⁴

Again, one of the reasons the consistory is responsible is that the local church is better able than classis or synod to discern the state of a person’s faith. Faith is not simply “all or nothing” —you either “have it or you don’t.” No, people who bring a child for baptism are all over the faith spectrum of discipleship and the need for discipline. Some have a faith that can move mountains; some have a lot of doubts, but they embody the faith beautifully; some give strong intellectual assent to theological truths, but their way of life lags behind. Which of these people is “persistently reject[ing] the admonition of the consistory” and needs to be “suspended from the privilege” of bringing a child to baptism (Church Order Supplement, Art. 78-81, b)? The Church Order clearly indicates that the local consistory is responsible for discerning whether a person can receive God’s sacramental promises in faith and can (along with the faith community) disciple a child.

C. Discipline

From both a biblical basis and our theological tradition as well as from our church polity, it is clear that baptism is the action of God, that we consider baptism a sacrament of the church universal (i.e., not just the CRC), that the children of believers are to be baptized and the worshiping community provides commitment as well, and that the local consistory holds the authority.

Therefore, no child of a same-sex couple should be barred from baptism if the local authority—the consistory—has given its consent. Moreover, even if a parent or parents of the child are under the discipline of the church, they should still be considered believers—and the children of believers are to be baptized.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁴ See also *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 305-6.

So, what do we do about the requirement that at least one parent should be in good standing (i.e., not under discipline), as indicated in Supplement, Articles 78-81, b? Consider these scenarios:

- A lesbian married couple got pregnant. This caused them to wonder about the future. They attended an Alpha program (a Christ-centered reach-out experience used by a number of Christian Reformed churches), and both women eventually decided to follow Jesus. They want their child to be baptized. What does the consistory do?
- One or both parents are not under discipline, for the elders have yet to move formally to that state.
- One or both parents are under discipline for any of a variety of reasons, not necessarily due to sexuality issues, and the elders know that situation well enough to make a judgment to proceed.
- Any other of a myriad of human situations and scenarios.

What do we do when we face these various scenarios? How do we administer discipline?

We should reaffirm that the local consistories have the authority to provide discipline and are best able to discern and make a decision regarding requests by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

IV. Overture

Therefore Classis Grand Rapids South presents this overture to Synod 2025:

A. That Synod 2025 hereby eliminate any confusion that may have been caused by *Acts of Synod 2024*, Article 76 (p. 891), by reaffirming that the authority of granting baptism is held with the local consistory.

B. That Synod 2025 affirm that the local consistory is best able to discern and make a decision regarding all the facts (including their faith) surrounding a request by any parent(s) to have their child baptized.

C. That Synod 2025 note that Article 56 of the Church Order provides that the primary criterion for baptism of a child is that the “the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members.”

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA understands that baptism is the action of God.
2. Confessing members must present their children for baptism, signifying that God’s covenant applies to each child.
3. The worshiping community responds to baptism with vows that they must follow.
4. Baptism is a sacrament of the church universal.
5. The church discipline of a member is not intended to, nor does it, compel a person to cease being a believer.

6. The Church Order recognizes that the sacraments are “administered upon the authority of the consistory” (Art. 55).⁵
7. Church Order Article 56 clearly supports this action.

Classis Grand Rapids South
Gary Bekker, stated clerk

OVERTURE 11

Reverse Requirement to Re-sign Covenant for Officebearers

Overture

We, Classis Ontario Southwest, overture that Synod 2025 reverse the decision made by Synod 2024 requiring each classis to require all officebearers to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis.

Grounds:

- a. Re-signing the Covenant of Officebearers is not, as some have argued, a reaffirmation of our ongoing commitment to the creeds and confessions. Synod is asking officebearers to remake the covenant. To put a signature on the covenant is to remake the covenant. To use an example from marriage, some have likened this to saying “I love you” to our spouse all the time . . . but synod’s decision is actually asking officebearers to say “I do” over and over again. This decision is not about fulfilling our vows. Rather, it is asking people to make them again.
- b. Synod is therefore breaking covenant with the officebearers of the denomination. The only reason to make a covenant over again (the same one) is if it has been determined that somehow the first covenant has become invalid. So in requiring officebearers to remake the covenant, synod is invalidating the word of each and every officebearer in the denomination.
- c. The consistent argument that has been given, in light of the recent decisions of synod, is that nothing has changed in our understanding of the creeds and confessions. It has just clarified a bit further what the church has always believed and how the church has always understood what the confessions teach. If nothing has changed, then there should be no reason to require people to make a commitment to something they have already committed to.
- d. This decision not only targets those who synod feels have broken covenant with the denomination by going against the creeds and confessions. It also targets those who have been consistent in upholding the creeds and confessions. And even for those who synod feels have been unfaithful, the proper response is not to require re-signing the covenant

⁵ *Ibid.*

- but to forgive. To use an example from marriage again, if a spouse is unfaithful, the relationship does not find the capability to move forward if the spouse makes the covenant all over again. It only works with forgiveness and the rebuilding of trust.
- e. This decision has been made from a perspective of distrust, with the argument being that this decision might help to rebuild trust. But that is not the case, especially since the decision requires officebearers to resign the covenant on a yearly basis. It would seem, therefore, that trust is never going to be reestablished. We will just continue not trusting each other and requiring each other to keep making the same promise over and over again. Trust cannot be built by enforcing conformity. Trust can come only by taking someone at their word and then, hopefully, watching as they are faithful to what was promised.
 - f. This decision has created even more disunity in the church than was already there due to the recent decisions of synod regarding the Human Sexuality Report. Instead of just division between those who disagree on the issue of human sexuality, this decision now creates disunity between people who agree with synod's decisions on human sexuality. There is already enough conflict and division in our denomination without the need to add more.

Ron Middel, stated clerk
Classis Ontario Southwest

OVERTURE 12

Remove the Word 'fully' from the Phrase 'fully agree with the Word of God' in the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

The Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) offers a means to encourage ongoing, vital engagement of officebearers with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions. However, the phrase "fully agree with the Word of God" has been interpreted in different ways. Taken literally, it has kept otherwise interested and qualified people from serving in local ministry leadership positions. We have the following questions and requests.

A. Provide guidance on the covenant's language

The CRCNA Office of General Secretary has been inundated with requests regarding clarity on the language of the CFO. While various documents and videos have been provided, there are differing views on what weight those pronouncements carry. Synod should make a definitive declaration.

B. Create a framework for flexibility and affirmation

1. Encourage leaders to affirm the confessions “to the best of their understanding” and to agree not to teach anything in contradiction to the creeds and confessions.
2. Develop educational resources or programs that enable leaders to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of the creeds and confessions over time, as they grow in their understanding of Reformed theology.

C. Address the challenges faced by non-English-speaking churches

1. Many churches engaging in cross-cultural ministry, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts, face additional challenges in training leaders to fully grasp and affirm the CRC’s creeds and confessions. Language barriers, differences in theological-education access, and cultural distinctives can make it difficult for otherwise faithful and qualified leaders to affirm the covenant in its current wording.
2. Synod should explore ways to provide additional support, such as theological resources translated into multiple languages, culturally contextualized leadership training, and a clear framework for how non-English-speaking leaders can faithfully engage with the CFO.

D. Address the needs of people serving in post-Christian contexts

1. What pathways or accommodations might be provided to new leaders who honor and uphold the spirit of the covenant without requiring them to affirm the confessions in a manner that feels overly rigid or premature, given their context and experience? We want people from non-CRC backgrounds (and in post-Christian contexts) to be able to lead if they are qualified biblically, even if they are not ready to say “fully agree.”
2. We wonder, “How can the phrase ‘fully agree with the Word of God’ be understood in ways that maintain the integrity of our confessional standards while allowing for the growth and understanding of leaders from non-CRC backgrounds?”

This overture is rooted in a desire to see the CRC grow as a faithful and missionally effective denomination. By addressing the challenges in the phrasing of the current CFO, we can strengthen our commitment to theological integrity among new leaders serving Christ’s church in an increasingly diverse world.

II. Overture

Classis Arizona overtures Synod 2025 to remove the word “fully” from the phrase “fully agree with the Word of God” in the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

1. Challenges in finding viable leaders in new and unchurched contexts:
In Arizona, CRC churches are breaking into new mission fields and en-

gaging unchurched populations and communities with little or no connection to the traditional CRC. While Christ has provided gifted and qualified leaders for service in these churches, these leaders often struggle with the language of the CFO, particularly the requirement to affirm that the confessions “fully agree with the Word of God.”

The burden of finding leaders who can sign the covenant without hesitation is heavy in such contexts. If the current wording of the covenant is interpreted rigidly, some churches in new mission fields may struggle to seat a full council. This creates a significant barrier to fulfilling our calling to raise up leaders and make disciples. The reality is not a lack of qualified and faithful leaders but, rather, a system that does not adequately account for the backgrounds, experiences, and theological journeys of those God is calling to serve.

2. The call to discipleship and leadership development:

Our churches feel a deep calling to disciple new believers and raise up leaders, which necessarily involves granting measures of responsibility as members of the leadership team. Many of these emerging leaders are new to the Reformed tradition and have not had the time or opportunity to fully grasp the CRC’s creeds and confessions. However, they are faithful and growing disciples of Christ who are committed to serving the church.

The current wording of the CFO, if strictly adhered to, creates a tension: it may exclude individuals who honor the spirit of the covenant, have no strong disagreements with the confessions, and are eager to grow in their understanding, but who cannot yet affirm with full confidence that the confessions “fully agree with the Word of God.” This tension unnecessarily hinders the church’s mission to develop leaders.

3. Integrity with hospitality:

The CRC has historically upheld its commitment to theological integrity through the Covenant for Officebearers and previously through the Form of Subscription. At the same time, the church is called to engage new contexts and cultures with hospitality, patience, and encouragement. The proposed approach balances these commitments by maintaining doctrinal fidelity while fostering growth and development among emerging leaders.

4. Challenges with the term “fully agree”:

For those who are new to the CRC or unfamiliar with its creeds and confessions, the requirement to affirm that these “doctrines fully agree with the Word of God” can be a significant hurdle. Even the most seasoned believer may hesitate to make such an unequivocal statement without years of theological study and reflection.

5. Respect for the spirit of the covenant:

Many emerging leaders have no strong points of disagreement with CRC confessions. They honor the spirit of the covenant and wish to

serve faithfully, but their hesitation centers on the language of “fully agree,” which may feel premature or overly restrictive.

6. Theological humility:

The Reformed tradition acknowledges the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating God’s Word. While our confessions faithfully summarize biblical truth, no human document is infallible. Leaders should be invited into a process that emphasizes learning, growth, and alignment with the Word of God, rather than an immediate and absolute affirmation of every doctrinal statement.

Classis Arizona
Anthony DeKorte, stated clerk

OVERTURE 13

Repeal the Annual Signing of the Covenant for Officebearers

I. Background

A covenant is an eternal promise, often of a religious nature, made by one entity to another. It unites that entity to the other in perpetuity. Scripture uses this word with more weight than that of a promise, with the implication being that a covenant is made to God, even when it relates to another human, and is therefore of greater significance than other commitments made between fallible humans. Covenants made by God become something that is unwaveringly true, even if they have not yet been proven or witnessed. For example, we trust the covenant made to Noah, even though the Earth *could* still flood in its entirety. God does not need to restate his covenant at the start of every hurricane season.

The covenant of baptism is a covenant that is carried out in the church and that is made by God to the one being baptized, and to God by the parents and community. It is understood to have lifelong significance. We believe in this covenant so much that people joining our churches, even after a lifetime of ungodly living, can belong as baptized members, if they had previously been baptized, and even if their baptism was performed in a different denomination. The covenant of baptism is for life, and we consider it contrary to Scripture to be rebaptized.

When a human makes a covenant with regard to another human, that act is not meant to be taken lightly, as demonstrated in the covenant of marriage. In this instance, both individuals make a covenant to God to be committed to each other, and there is no need for recommitting oneself year after year. The covenant of marriage does not expire, and we indeed mean it when we say “till death do us part.”

These examples and others demonstrate that *covenant* is a word reserved for establishing a lifelong reality; a paradigm shift in oneself that is unchangeable and irrevocable, except where permitted by God, who is the recipient

of our covenants, and therefore should be treated with reverence and used only in times of greatest necessity.

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin, in book 4, chapter 13, titled “Vows, and How Everyone Rashly Taking Them Has Miserably Entangled Himself,” highlights the detriment of making statements that cannot, or even may not be kept, and especially discourages a person or persons in power from obligating other persons to make a vow: “This happened when they [persons in power] eagerly devised vows by which a greater and stricter obligation might be added to the common chains. We have already shown how so-called ‘pastors’ in their presumptuous rule of the church have corrupted the worship of God in ensnaring miserable souls with their iniquitous laws” (4.13.1).

While we are not considering officebearers to be making their commitment under duress or without autonomy, it would defy the nature of a covenant, which is made to God, to diminish the commitment of the officebearer by suggesting that an annual renewal of a solemn vow is necessary.

Calvin further argues that, when considering whether to make a vow, it is wise and prudent to include a time period during which the vow will be kept. He says, “For though I dare not prescribe anything about number or time, anyone who obeys my advice will undertake only sober and temporary vows. . . . If you bind yourself with a perpetual vow, either you will fulfill it with great trouble and tedium, or else, wearied by its long duration, you will one day venture to break it” (*Institutes* 4.13.6). Since we defy Calvin’s advice and the Covenant for Officebearers is a lifelong commitment, we should exercise all the more consideration and, as this overture addresses, exercise caution in how it is administered.

Should we have listened to Calvin’s advice for a temporal Covenant for Officebearers, then a re-signing for each term of office would be appropriate. But, given that our covenant is binding for life, to re-sign is to diminish its nature and question our integrity, contradicting our Scripture (Matt. 5:37).

Synod 2024 decreed that the Covenant for Officebearers should be re-signed annually in order to reaffirm one’s subscription to the statements therein. According to our ecclesial wisdom and historic perspective, this would dictate that the commitment made by signing the Covenant for Officebearers should also have a time limitation. Since we do not wish to have the covenant expire, our own theological view indicates that we should refrain from diminishing the gravity of our commitment by obligating a renewal through re-signing.

In summary, the nature of a covenant, according to our theological and scriptural understanding, and the obligation to make such a covenant in order to serve in the local church no longer align with the policies regarding the Covenant for Officebearers determined by Synod 2024.

II. Overture

We, the council of Covenant CRC Winnipeg, overture that synod:

A. Repeal the decision of Synod 2024 requiring an annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers.

B. Amend Church Order Article 5-a to the following:

All professors, ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons, when ordained and/or installed in office, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers, and on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall *reaffirm* the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

1. The Church Order's current obligation to sign the Covenant for Officebearers is as a footnote to the Covenant for Officebearers, and should be more plainly stated.
2. These offices are already obligated to sign the Covenant for Officebearers and that requirement is not clear in Article 5.
3. The Synod 2024 policy change regarding the Covenant for Officebearers does not align with our theological and scriptural understanding of covenant and therefore should be repealed to better reflect what is expected from those who sign the Covenant for Officebearers.
4. To use the word *covenant* for something that is intended to be re-signed detracts from the significance of the word used in the Bible, in the sacrament of baptism, in marriages, and in our foundational understanding of God's relationship with humankind.
5. Scripture holds us Christians to account for our statements summarized in Matthew 5:37 ("All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one"). And to obligate re-signing diminishes the trust held between officebearers, which is based in the Word of God.
6. Affirming our established Covenant for Officebearers is already a prevalent practice in our denomination through actions such as standing and reciting. To re-sign diminishes the trust put in the word of our fellow officebearers, at their initial signing.
7. Claims of recent contradictions to the intended use of the Covenant for Officebearers are not justification for calling into question the integrity of the vows made by thousands of officebearers across the CRCNA. This council has not heard any firsthand accounts of this happening, and even if that were the case, the sins of a few do not justify sacrificing the integrity of all others.

Council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Rod Harris, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the September 17, 2024, meeting of Classis Lake Superior but was not adopted.

Resolve Inconsistencies in Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a

I. Background

As outlined in the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the gravamen process allows officebearers to express a personal difficulty with a point of doctrine/teaching contained in the confessions. This process has raised concerns regarding its application in the contemporary church context. Specifically, the process can unintentionally disqualify individuals with a deep commitment to Christ and the church but with limited or nuanced disagreements with specific confessional statements. The effect has been to narrow the pool of qualified candidates for the offices of elder and deacon, undermining the various gifts essential for the church to thrive in its mission.

Since Synod 2024 tightened the gravamen process, the council of Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church (PACRC) has attempted to function with less than a full slate of elders for the first time in its 64-year history. Our council is short on members because the gravamen process prohibits many of our longtime members, who have varying degrees of agreement with the confessions, from being council members. In effect, the council of PACRC has lost access to the leadership of some of our most experienced and devoted church members. In the past, when they disagreed with the confessions, they did not seek to undermine them but humbly submitted to the church's teaching. They exemplified Paul's teaching that "love bears all things." They bore with the teachings of the church despite their differing views. However, according to the current gravamen procedures, humbly submitting to the church's teaching even when officebearers disagree with the teaching is not enough, despite exemplifying a life marked by worship of God through loving God and neighbor and displaying the fruit of the Spirit.

For many congregations, the gravamen process is perceived as overly rigid. It requires a level of theological precision that is daunting for individuals who are otherwise well-suited for leadership. This rigidity can inadvertently discourage faithful, godly members from serving in church offices, even when their disagreements are minor or do not undermine the CRCNA's core confessions. As currently practiced, the process risks placing undue emphasis on doctrinal exactness at the expense of recognizing spiritual maturity and gifting.

Due to these issues and challenges, the PACRC council reviewed the changes made to the Church Order at Synod 2024 and identified some internal inconsistencies that require resolution to help churches better serve in ministry.

II. Overture

The council of Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church of Palo Alto, California, overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

A. Find that Supplement, Article 5-a of the Church Order is internally inconsistent and in need of revision.

Grounds:

1. Delegates to synod must be officebearers in the CRCNA, and officebearers must sign the Covenant for Officebearers adopted by Synod 2012.
2. Synod 2024 required that signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers must affirm, without reservation, the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA, meaning they must have no difficulty or settled conviction contrary to the doctrines contained therein (including what synod has declared to have confessional status).
3. Synod 2024 stipulated that officebearers who find themselves unable to continue as signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers shall present any difficulties to their council by submitting a confessional-difficulty gravamen.
4. Synod 2024 required that officebearers who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen must recuse themselves from being delegated to broader assemblies, including classes and synod.
5. Synod 2024 stipulated that officebearers who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen may resolve their difficulty by submitting a confessional-revision gravamen.
6. Synod 2012 stipulated that only signatories to the Covenant for Officebearers may adjudicate a confessional-revision gravamen.

It is therefore nearly impossible, if not entirely impossible, for confessional-revision gravamina submitted by members with confessional difficulties to be adopted by synod, since it is not permissible for synodical delegates to share any difficulty that may have motivated such a confessional-revision gravamen.

B. Provide a revision that remedies the inconsistencies in Supplement, Article 5-a. Such a remedy may include one or more of the following:

1. Revise the nature of the affirmation required of signers of the Covenant for Officebearers (cf. Supplement, Art. 5-a, A, 1).
2. Rescind or modify the definition and procedures governing confessional-difficulty gravamina.
3. Define a third type of gravamen, distinct from confessional-difficulty and confessional-revision gravamina.
4. Permit those with active confessional-difficulty gravamina to be delegated as voting members of broader assemblies, including classes and synod, as was the case prior to Synod 2024.

Synod may identify additional revisions that, alone or in combination with one or more of these actions, provide the required remedy.

Grounds:

- a. From time to time, the Christian Reformed Church has revised the Belgic Confession and clarified its interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism, as it did in 2022. However, with the current requirement of all delegates signing the Covenant for Officebearers as agreeing without reservation with the confessions as interpreted by the church, it would be impossible for a synod to make any more revisions unless most delegates had signed gravamina of revision about the proposed change.
- b. The intent of Synod 2024 was to ensure adherence to the creeds and confessions by delegates to the ecclesiastical assemblies. Requiring such strict adherence was a departure from the practice of the church and prevents the representation of the views of the entire church from being present in assemblies.
- c. The Covenant for Officebearers states that the undersigned heartily agree with the confessions. Church Order states that signing it means agreement without reservation to the confessions, including what synod has declared to have confessional status. There are many people in agreement with the confessions that are not in agreement with recent synodical interpretations. To state that signing a document means more than the document states or references is misleading.
- d. The confessional interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism that is supposed to be understood by the signer of the Covenant for Officebearers is only discoverable by reading the Church Order and looking for the interpretation on the CRCNA website, which, after references, sends the reader to the *Acts of Synod 2024*. That is unduly burdensome.
- e. The requirement for officebearers to agree without reservation to recent synodical interpretations prevents many people with integrity from signing the Covenant for Officebearers. As a result, some churches will not be able to constitute a functioning council. This policy will cause such churches to disaffiliate even when they would rather not, and it also encourages people to violate their sincerity by signing it.

Council of Palo Alto (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church
Tim Lindemulder, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 4, 2025, meeting of Classis Central California but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 15

Seat Delegates from Classes That Have Not Implemented the Annual Signing of the Covenant for Officebearers

We, Classis Ontario Southwest, overture that Synod 2025 seat delegates from classes that have not implemented the annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers.

Grounds:

- a. Synod 2024 did not include a timeline for implementing this re-signing on an annual basis (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 928).
- b. The authority of synod to direct classes to take actions such as requiring the annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers remains in question because the relationship between assemblies is still under study.
 1. When Synod 2024 deferred Overture 75 asking for a study committee to clarify the relationship between assemblies (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 928-29),
 - a) synod noted that “there is considerable confusion over the nature and authority of church assemblies today . . . [which] is causing chaos in the church and must be addressed” (ground 1),
 - b) synod reasoned that the task force requested by Overture 76 had greater urgency, and,
 - c) synod reasoned that “a study committee will benefit from the work of a task force to address discipline and disaffiliation and from the opportunity to observe how intervening synods apply the Church Order in these cases” (ground 6).
 2. Synod 2024 adopted Overture 76, asking for “a task force to develop Church Order procedures to discipline officebearers, including disaffiliation initiated by a major assembly” (see *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 929-31).

Ron Middel, stated clerk
Classis Ontario Southwest

OVERTURE 16

Revise the Guidelines for the Gravamen Process

I. Background

Synod 2024 revised the gravamen process for officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). Prior to Synod 2024, officebearers who had a difficulty with a doctrine contained in our confessions were able to submit a confessional-difficulty gravamen and to continue serving, provided they did not teach against or oppose the confessions of

the CRCNA. This allowed members to sign the Covenant for Officebearers and serve as ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons even if they lacked a settled conviction about a specific confessional doctrine. A confessional-difficulty gravamen provided a way to have discipleship conversations with an officebearer as they used their gifts while ensuring they would not create disruption or conflict in the congregation. No time limit was placed on this process, and many officebearers who submitted gravamina served their terms faithfully and fruitfully without fully resolving their confessional difficulties.

Synod 2024 made a number of changes and clarifications to the process for confessional-difficulty gravamina. While many of these brought helpful clarity and instruction, we believe some will be harmful to the health of congregations. These specific changes are as follows:

- As part of [the gravamen] process the council shall... set a reasonable timeline for the resolution of the confessional difficulty. The total timeline shall not exceed three years from the time the difficulty is received by a council (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 877).
- Gravamina may only be submitted by a current officebearer “subsequent to their ordination” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 875). This precludes anyone with a confessional difficulty from serving as an elder or deacon.

While we uphold and value the confessions of our denomination, we believe this change will not be a healthy or productive one for congregations in the CRC. First, discipleship in many churches in the CRC is more focused on biblical literacy, spiritual disciplines, and living out our faith. There has been a decreasing emphasis on teaching the confessions. For better or for worse, laypeople who serve as officebearers are often unfamiliar with the details of our confessions. Signing the Covenant for Officebearers has become a commitment to serving under and submitting to the doctrinal standards, rather than a full affirmation of those standards.

Second, there are many people who meet the qualifications for officebearers but may have questions or lack a settled conviction about specific aspects of our confessions. We suspect that the timing of these changes was intended to specifically address positions on human sexuality. However, there are people who have questions about infant baptism, reprobation, or the perseverance of the saints. Under the changes made by Synod 2024, such people would be disqualified from serving as officebearers.

Third, by submitting a gravamen, a potential officebearer is committing oneself to not contradicting the confessions or what synod has declared to have confessional status. In other words, an officebearer will keep their reservations to themselves. The congregation is protected from conflict or teaching that is not aligned with our confessions. When the former gravamen process was followed, it rarely, if ever, resulted in conflict or false teaching.

Fourth, the local council is in the best position to make decisions about gravamina. The council knows the personality and history of the congregation as well as the officebearer who submits the gravamen. On a case-by-case basis, the council can determine by prayer and the Holy Spirit whether an officebearer's gravamen presents a threat to the congregation. These are decisions that should be made by those "on the ground" in our local congregations.

Fifth, many CRC congregations are finding it difficult to find a sufficient number of council nominees each year. These changes to the gravamen process make that task even more difficult, especially when people are willing to serve but have a confessional difficulty that they agree to keep private.

II. Overture

A. The Council of Ferrysburg Community Church of Spring Lake, Michigan, overtures synod to revise the guidelines for the gravamen process to give discretion to local councils in the following ways:

- Councils may set their own timelines for the resolution of gravamina.
- Councils may nominate elders and deacons who have a confessional difficulty but are willing to submit to the gravamen process outlined by Synod 2024.

B. We also ask that synod update the Church Order Supplement, Article 5 to reflect these changes. We make this overture with the understanding that officebearers who have submitted a gravamen may not be delegates to broader assemblies of the CRC.

Grounds:

1. The changes to the gravamen process eliminate gifted, godly people from service as officebearers simply because they lack a settled conviction at just one point of doctrine.
2. By definition, a gravamen precludes an officebearer from contradicting or disparaging the teachings of the confessions, thereby preventing harm or conflict within the congregation.
3. Local councils are in the best position to make decisions about gravamina and should be given discretion in accepting and dealing with them.
4. The changes to the gravamen process make the difficult task of finding a sufficient number of council nominees even more difficult.

Council of Ferrysburg Community Church, Spring Lake, Michigan
Sara Meiste, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the February 20, 2025, meeting of Classis Muskegon but was not adopted.

Create a New Category of Gravamen

I. Background

For many years the Article 5 Supplement to the Church Order defined a *confessional-difficulty gravamen* as “a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions” (Church Order 2023, p. 14).

Before Synod 2024 there were multiple interpretations of how the confessional-difficulty gravamen worked and functioned within the church.

Some believed that officebearers could file a confessional-difficulty gravamen and serve as an elder or deacon, even if their theological perspective differed from that of the CRC. These individuals agreed not to speak out about the issue or cause division.

Many small CRC churches in small communities have members from diverse theological perspectives. In the past, when individuals such as these were the best potential nominees for council, they were asked to serve in leadership. They used the confessional-difficulty gravamen to acknowledge their theological differences while serving with integrity. Many served admirably in this capacity. For example, a Reformed Baptist elder committed to supporting the CRC church’s stance on paedobaptism even though it was not their preferred interpretation, and they refrained from creating division.

Others viewed the confessional-difficulty gravamen as Synod 2024 later declared—that it is intended only for persons whose theological perspectives have changed or who have developed uncertainty about specific topics. It has not been meant to accommodate settled convictions.

After Synod 2022’s decision to make the traditional view of sexuality a confessional matter, many used the confessional-difficulty gravamen to circumvent synod’s decision. Following the 2022 Frequently Asked Questions guidance, they filed a confessional-difficulty gravamen and publicly opposed the CRC’s actions. This public opposition violated previous understandings of the confessional-difficulty gravamen. This situation necessitated action. Synod chose the narrower interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen and amended the Church Order to clarify this understanding. A three-year window was established for existing council members to address the issue or resign, with a goal to create unity within the denomination on LGBTQ+ matters.

This action, however, has adversely affected many smaller CRC churches with members from diverse theological backgrounds. While their leadership agrees with Synod’s 2022–2024 decisions, they may have Reformed Baptist council members already serving or may be struggling to find new individuals willing to serve because they have lost the flexibility previously

available under the broader interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen. Their potential nominees or existing council members agree with synod's recent decision and do not want to create division, but they also want to serve with integrity and cannot "without reservation" agree to all of the statements in the Three Forms of Unity.

II. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures synod to create a new category of gravamen called a *confessional-submission gravamen*, adding the following definition and regulations to Church Order Supplement, Article 5:

A confessional-submission gravamen: A gravamen in which an elder or deacon expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions. The individual agrees to publicly support the teachings of the CRCNA and to avoid creating division in the church.

Regulations concerning the procedure for a confessional-submission gravamen:

1. *Vetting process:* This process begins during the elder and deacon vetting stages. Potential nominees must clearly communicate any theological differences to the current CRC council during the nomination process. All subsequent steps must be completed before the individual can be nominated to the congregation.
2. *Council evaluation:* The council must evaluate the weight of the theological difference and decide if it is wise to proceed, considering the number of other qualified candidates, the character of the nominee, and the makeup of the congregation. If the council deems it appropriate, they may ask the nominee to file a confessional-submission gravamen.
3. *Commitment of the nominee and leadership:* Filing a confessional-submission gravamen entails the following commitments:
 - a. The nominee agrees to publicly support CRC teachings and not create division within the church.
 - b. The local church council and classis shall remove the individual from office if they fail to uphold their commitment.
 - c. The nominee voluntarily forfeits the right to vote on theological matters related to their confessional-submission gravamen at broader assemblies (e.g., council, classis) and the right of delegation to synod.
4. *Approval process:* All confessional-submission gravamina must be reviewed by the Classical Interim Committee (CIC). The committee must concur with the council's decision before the nominee can be presented to the congregation. Consideration shall be given by the CIC as to whether the aggregate gravamina within a given council would influence the functional nature of the confessional standards

within that local congregation. If the CIC is uncertain, it may refer the matter to classis for a decision. If the classis cannot reach a conclusion or if the nominee or their council disagrees, the matter may be brought to synod for resolution.

5. *Broader assemblies participation:* Elders or deacons who have filed a confessional-submission gravamen shall not ordinarily be delegated to classis. If an exception is necessary, their seating requires prior approval from the Classical Interim Committee. The CIC and the classis stated clerk must inform the president and vice president of classis of the confessional-submission gravamen before the meeting, enabling them to determine whether the individual is ineligible to vote on any matters presented at the meeting. Officebearers who submit a confessional-submission gravamen are not eligible for delegation to synod.

Church Order Supplement revision

A revision to the “Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant of Officebearers” is necessary:

1. The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church as being doctrines taught in the Word of God. “Without reservation” means that an officebearer does not have a difficulty or hold a settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions (except those noted in a confessional-submission gravamen). This includes what synod has declared to have confessional status.

Grounds:

- a. This proposal allows local elders and deacons to serve CRC congregations with integrity, even if they cannot fully affirm all aspects of the Three Forms of Unity, as permitted under the broader interpretation of the confessional-difficulty gravamen prior to Synod 2024.
- b. It enables CRC congregations to function in diverse contexts, with the understanding that this is not intended as a normative practice but rather as an exception when necessary. Local leadership is best positioned to determine appropriateness based on their knowledge of the nominee and the congregation.
- c. The process is transparent, involving classis to prevent misuse. The potential nominee’s willingness to give up their right to vote on issues related to their theological differences mitigates the activism we saw after Synod 2022. Clear disciplinary measures are in place for noncompliance, ensuring the integrity of the process and the denomination.

Classis Columbia
Brad Vos, stated clerk

Amend Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a**I. Introduction**

This overture is to add to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a to show a distinction for discipling elders and deacons in the local church who may have a confessional-difficulty gravamen. Though elders and deacons are honorably in equal stature with ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors, the nature of their service is different with regard to their term of service and the church's support. Elders and deacons serve by volunteering as officebearers. The church is under no obligation to support them financially to serve in these roles, and their time is far more limited to ministry than is the time of ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors. Ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors don't have defined-term time limits. Elders and deacons are also examined differently than commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word are.

II. Overture

A. That synod adopt the added verbiage to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a, B, 2, c (with additions indicated by underline) to allow elders and deacons to be disciplined through their confessional-difficulty gravamen in accordance with their term limits as volunteering officebearers.

c) Set a reasonable timeline for the resolution of the confessional difficulty. The total timeline shall not exceed three years for ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors from the time the difficulty is received by a council, or exceed two term limits that elders and deacons are allowed to serve by their council (Art. 25-a) from the time the difficulty is received by their council.

Grounds:

1. This amendment helps churches to allow elders and deacons who are called by the Lord to serve at the council's decision for an appropriate length of time of service (Art. 25-a).
2. This provides a suitable time frame to disciple them to know and accept the confessions within the time frame that they have committed to serve as an elder or deacon.
3. This applies *only* to elders and deacons, *not* to ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
4. The service of these officebearers affects *only* the local church for the length of time designated by the council as appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership (Art. 25-a). This does not affect the classis or synod because these officebearers cannot be delegated to classis or synod while they have a confessional-difficulty gravamen.

5. Elders and deacons serve in a volunteer role of leadership and do not always have the same time or resources to learn about the confessions and creeds as do ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
6. This also allows a council to engage the service of younger elders and deacons who can be mentored by the council.

B. That synod adopt the added verbiage to Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a, B, 4 (with additions indicated by underline) to allow elders and deacons to be disciplined through their confessional-difficulty gravamen in accordance with their term limits as volunteering officebearers.

4. The confessional-difficulty gravamen is resolved when the officebearer either . . .
 - a) affirms the creeds and confessions without reservation, or
 - b) submits a confessional-revision gravamen, or
 - c) resigns from office as a minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, or
 - d) as an elder or deacon, completes the current term of their service determined by their council, after which time they may not be reinstated unless they affirm the creeds and confessions without reservation.

Grounds:

1. This amendment helps churches retain elders and deacons as officebearers who are called by the Lord to serve as needed in the local church.
2. This provides a wonderful way to disciple elders and deacons within the committed time frame of their installation to know and accept the confessions without reservation.
3. The service of these officebearers affects *only* the local church for the length of time designated by the council as appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership (Art. 25-a). This does not affect the classis or synod because these officebearers cannot be delegated to classis or synod while they have a confessional-difficulty gravamen.
4. Elders and deacons serve in a volunteer role of leadership and do not always have the same time or resources to learn about the confessions and creeds as do ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors.
5. This also allows a council to engage the service of younger elders and deacons who can be mentored by the council.

Classis Southeast U.S.
Vivy Cassis, stated clerk

Create a ‘Formal Act of Confessional Submission’

Classis Toronto overtures synod to do the following:

To create the category of a “Formal Act of Confessional Submission.” This act, conducted within the local council, would be a means through which an officebearer who has submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen and has completed “a process of learning” regarding the confession in question, and whose *intellectual* difficulties are *not resolved*, has the potential to decide whether to make a Formal Act of Confessional Submission or to resign from office.

Grounds:

1. This act of the will would be an expression of synod’s hopes to seek “alignment to the shared confessions.”
2. This act would acknowledge the holistic nature of the convictions we hold as human beings—namely, that we sometimes believe based on intellectual discovery (i.e., *the mind*), but we also hold convictions based on intentional act of *the will*. In fact, this is clearly stated in Scripture, such as in 1 John 3:23, which says, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”
3. This act would avoid a false view of the fall that operates behind the current process connected to the confessional-difficulty gravamen—namely, that one’s individual intellectual activity is somehow less fallen and holds a unique authority in contrast to one’s will or heart. Can we—and do we not often—willfully accept items by faith when even our *hearts* and *minds* say differently?
4. This act would also acknowledge the manner in which our convictions are shared in community. What *we believe* together has a unique authority in contrast to what *I believe* on my own. For example, we as a denomination affirm the ecumenical confessions and the Reformed confessions. This act of the will intentionally declares a *unity* of faith with the church of all ages and places while also *uniquely and distinctly locating* ourselves in unity with Reformed churches within the larger body of Christ.
5. This act would provide a new and middle way to respond to the multitude of *reasons* for which individual believers may find a multitude of *confessional difficulties* across the multitude of Reformed theological *topics* currently creating a potentially infinite number of reasons to disqualify leaders and disaffiliate churches from our denomination. Our history proves this to be more than possible, and it appears to be our likely future. There is a middle way between *compromise* and *separation*. This is not a means of taking exception. It is an act of humble submission to our shared confessions.

6. This act would encourage *more study* of the confessions as well as honesty about encountered difficulties. Without such an act of submission, leaders are more likely to avoid studying the confessions lest such an exploration cause the end of one's leadership or split the local church.
7. This act would offer a means of the very full, honest, robust, and shared alignment to the confessions that our churches seek (see "Synod 2024 FAQ Document," crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ).

Classis Toronto
Tilly Berg, stated clerk

OVERTURE 20

Retract Decision that Gravamen-Submitting Council Members May Not Serve at Classis or Synod

I. Overture

We, the council of The Journey in Longmont, Colorado, overture synod to retract the decision that council members who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen to their council are not eligible to serve in classical or denominational roles and functions.

II. Reason for Overture

Since the inception of the Christian Reformed Church, we have held that original authority resides with the local council as stated in Church Order Article 27-a: "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; *the authority of councils being original*, that of major assemblies being delegated" (emphasis added).

While both classes and synods have authority, as stated in Article 27-b—"The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the classis"—that authority is delegated authority by the local council.

If an officebearer submits a confessional-difficulty gravamen to his or her council and the council determines that his or her confessional-difficulty gravamen does not impede his or her ability to serve on the council—and by that, to serve as that council's delegate to classis or to serve in classical or denominational functions—then the classis and denomination should honor the authority of the local council by allowing that person to serve in classical and denominational capacities.

It is the local council that knows the officebearer the best. The local council knows the officebearer's character, integrity, and motivation, and it is the classis and denominational agencies' responsibility to honor the authority

of the local council by honoring those it recognizes as officebearers and their capacity to serve.

Council of The Journey, Longmont, Colorado
Jeff Peila, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 4, 2025, meeting of Classis Rocky Mountain but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 21

Provide Steps of Accountability toward Churches and Classes in Defiance and Open Rebellion

I. Preamble

Classis Iakota is concerned about the open rebellion that is taking place in the CRCNA. We believe steps are needed both in individual churches and classes—actionable steps of accountability that will help us to more deeply covenant together in our shared confessions.

II. Background

For many years the CRCNA, along with most other Christian denominations, was caught up in the debate about human sexuality. This debate, which had been publicly debated denomination-wide since 2013, centered particularly on the question of whether same-sex sexual activity was among the actions that constituted unchastity and thus was prohibited as sinful according to question and answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Synod launched two study committees to address these questions, and the second committee's Human Sexuality Report was "recommended . . . to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 919). Synod 2022 also affirmed "that 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declare[d] this affirmation 'an interpretation of [a] confession' (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 920). The whole Human Sexuality Report does not have confessional status, but the identification of same-sex sexual activity (whether in a so-called same-sex marriage or outside of one) as prohibited behavior does have confessional status as it is our denomination's understanding of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108. The only sexual activity that is permitted is between one man and one woman in the context of a biblical marriage.

Following the decisions of Synods 2022-2024, the CRCNA has faithfully determined that it is vital for the communication of the true gospel of Jesus Christ that all in leadership positions of pastor, elder, deacon, teacher, board member, trustee, staff, and standing committees, must submit to

God's Word and our three confessional forms of unity, by promoting and defending the denomination's position without exception by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

Synod 2024 instructed all classes to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 928). Furthermore, synod decided that when an officebearer signs the Covenant for Officebearers, it is a statement that he or she has no difficulty or settled convictions "contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions," and that "this includes what synod has declared to have confessional status" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 876). Thus, as we go forward, every classis will be in agreement with the rest of the denomination, and we can rebuild trust with one another as we are all in one accord as the church should be.

Regarding congregations and officebearers that have made public statements against what synod declared to be a confessional matter, Synod 2024 declared that such congregations and officebearers are to be placed on limited suspension after the conclusion of Synod 2024. This suspension includes "a loss of ability to send delegates to classis, synod, the COD, or the CRCNA agencies. Officebearers under limited suspension may attend classis with the privilege of the floor but not as a seated delegate" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 887).

However, there are several instances in which synod's clear instruction has been disregarded (public meeting minutes can be provided to the advisory committee):

- Classis Alberta North seated delegates from churches that are in protest as voting delegates (Oct. 18-19, 2024, Minutes, Art. 3).
- Classis Grand Rapids East said that "full delegations from all congregations shall conduct the ordinary business of classis, but for matters that clearly involve our denominational ties . . . the full delegations by majority vote appoint an *ad hoc* committee to make the necessary decisions during the classis meeting" (Sept. 19, 2024, Minutes, Art. 1.3).
- Alger Park CRC has said that they "will not require those who wish to serve as elders and deacons to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if they cannot do so 'without reservation'" (vimeo of congregational meeting, Jan. 19, 2025).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Heritage Fellowship CRC which calls for the seating of voting delegates who by synodical definition are under limited suspension and who by synodical decision may not vote at classical meetings (Oct. 9, 2024, Minutes, Art. 7).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Fellowship CRC and Willowdale CRC which in the name of protecting the original authority of the local council as well as honoring the authority of the classis, asks classis not to adopt or enact what they consider to be "over-reaching decisions" by Synod 2024. To "not enact" here means (1) ongoing seating of delegates regardless of limited-suspension status

and (2) that there would be no requirement to sign the Covenant for Officebearers for the next two years (Oct. 9, 2024, Minutes, Art. 8).

- The council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ontario, has appealed the decisions of Classis Toronto to Synod 2025, noting that their classis meeting was not duly constituted.

The argument of Classis Toronto, for example, is that since authority originates from the local council, neither classis nor synod have the authority to require officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if the sending council disagrees. If such is the case, then all classical and synodical decisions and instructions are regulated to advisory status only.

And so we see that this argument goes beyond the debate about sexuality; it goes to the heart of what it is to be a confessional denomination. If the doctrines in our confessions may be publicly opposed in a way other than the gravamen process to amend those confessions, then we are not a confessional church, since then our confessions are merely a statement of heritage. Similarly, if synodical decisions can be disregarded, then we are no longer a denomination but, rather, something akin to a “network” or club.

III. Overture

Therefore we overture Synod 2025 quickly and decisively to address the matter of congregations and classes in a state of defiance by means of the following:

- A. Declaring to Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, Toronto, and any other churches and classes that have done similar actions in this past year that their decisions and actions constitute open and defiant rebellion.
- B. Inviting these churches and classes to repent from their rebellious action and be restored to a confessional understanding of faith and practice.
- C. Receiving overtures from these churches and classes as communications only.
- D. Recognizing that, absent of repentance that is communicated in writing by the date of Synod 2025, as law and covenant breakers these churches and classes have cast themselves into the state of limited suspension and are in need of special discipline. The goal of this special discipline is to bring them back into fellowship with the CRCNA following the outline of Church Order Article 84.
- E. Having Synod 2026 judge if special discipline has done its good work to bring these bodies back into fellowship.

Grounds:

1. It is the task of the local classis to bring local churches and officebearers into compliance with our unified confessional ministry. That is not happening in all classes.
2. The principle of authority originating in the congregation does not negate synodical pronouncements.

3. Churches and classes similarly do not have the authority to ignore or change synodical instructions.
4. Titus 3:10-11 (ESV) says, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Synods 2022-2024 have given more than two warnings.
5. These churches and classes have not followed all three aspects of Church Order Article 83, which instructs the church to apply special discipline when officebearers “violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.”

Classis Iakota
Bernard Haan, stated clerk

OVERTURE 22

Celebrate the Repentance and Return of Disciplined Members

I. Preamble

Luke 15 records for us three parables of Jesus regarding the recovery of something lost. In the first parable, the owner of a flock of a hundred sheep leaves ninety-nine and finds the lost one. Upon returning home with his prize, “he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep’” (v. 6).

In the second parable, a woman loses one of her ten silver coins. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and finds it. Upon finding it, “she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (vv. 9-10).

In the third parable, a young man requests his share of his father’s inheritance and squanders it in a foreign country. Once destitute, he repents of his folly and returns to his father’s home with the intention of becoming a servant in the household where he was once an heir. Upon the return of his son, the father runs to his son, welcomes him, and hears his son’s plea of repentance. In return, the father says “to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate” (vv. 22-24).

Should we not also celebrate when our brothers and sisters who were once lost return to us?

II. Overture

We, Classis Northcentral Iowa, overture synod to have a feast of some kind to celebrate the repentance and return of those brothers and sisters who came under discipline as defined by the *Acts of Synod 2024*.

Grounds:

1. The return to the flock, to the household, of those who were once lost is a joyful thing, and we should make this clear.
2. The motive of discipline is not separation but reconciliation. A celebration of reconciliation makes this wholeheartedly clear.

Classis Northcentral Iowa
Steven Mulder, stated clerk

OVERTURE 23

End ‘In Communion’ Relationship with Reformed Church in America

I. Background

According to the 2014 Pella Accord, we are to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504). At that time, the accord naturally meant that ministers from the CRCNA and the RCA could pursue and accept calls in both denominations with a shorter and easier process, and thus something like a “free exchange” of ministers was codified in Church Order Articles 8 and 12 (see Supplements).

However, in the past several years, it has become apparent that the CRCNA and the RCA are not as closely aligned in belief and practice as they might have been in 2014. The “presenting” doctrinal divide has to do with human sexuality. The RCA at present keeps as its official stance the traditional and more importantly biblical understanding of marriage as consisting of one man and one woman and the understanding that sexual activity belongs only within the boundaries of such marriage.

However, in practice, many RCA pastors and congregations teach to the contrary and promote same-sex marriage as a legitimate option for Christians. This is because the RCA has a constitutional system that limits the authority of synods. The CRCNA, on the other hand, not only declared same-sex sexual activity to be unchaste behavior, but also stated that this understanding has always had confessional status in our denomination—and thus officebearers and congregations who disagree are now placed on limited suspension until they repent of their errors or disaffiliate from the denomination. The CRCNA is enacting discipline on this matter, and the RCA is not.

As evidence of this growing divide between the CRCNA and the RCA, same-sex-affirming CRC pastors and churches have left for the RCA.

RCA belief and practice is unique and therefore no longer in communion with the faith or life of the CRC. We expect that division to become more apparent in the years to come and that the free (or expedited) exchange of ministers from both denominations will prove more and more problematic.

II. Overture

Therefore Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2025 to begin the process to remove Article 8-b and other applicable sections (e.g., Supplement, Art. 12-c) from the Church Order and to update the relevant rules, in order to treat the Reformed Church in America ministers, ministries, and churches the same way that all ministers and ministries are treated from other denominations—thus ending the “free exchange” of ministers agreement, the Pella Accord (2014), and the status of being “in communion” with the RCA.

Such transfers of ministers will now require the same labor that is required from any other denomination that is not currently in communion with the CRC. RCA ministers serving on loan to the CRC are required to comply with synod’s decisions by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Article 38-h and Supplement).

Grounds:

1. Our covenantal polity and practiced faith no longer align with the RCA as much as they once did (see Overture 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 450-54). The RCA has no provision that decisions of assemblies are considered settled and binding (see Church Order, Art. 29).
2. In many of our communities the Pella Accord that once connected us to local expressions of the body of Christ now actually separate us from those same local expressions who have themselves left the RCA over biblical convictions.
3. Ending our fellowship and communion with the RCA allows for a formal avenue to address and seek fellowship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Kingdom Network, and other churches that have recently left the RCA.
4. If this overture is adopted in 2025 and implemented in 2026, ministers and congregations will have sufficient time to make adjustments.

Classis Iakota
Bernard Haan, stated clerk

Review the CRCNA's Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches

I. Background

For a large part of our history the CRCNA has taken an active role in ecumenical organizations. In the past we have been a member church of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). In 1953 the REC was faced with the question of whether or not to join with another organization, the World Council of Churches (WCC). The REC decided to refrain from this merger because the WCC permitted “essentially different interpretations of its doctrinal basis, and thus the nature of the Christian faith,” and it represented “itself as a community of faith, but is actually not this” due to member churches holding “basically divergent positions.”¹

In 1988, synod discussed whether the CRC should join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), but the motion was defeated (*Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 564). In 2002 synod reversed course and decided to apply for membership in the WARC, believing that the CRC could affirm its purposes and that the CRC could make an impact on the WARC (*Acts of Synod 2002*, pp. 485-86). After applying, our membership was soon accepted. Along with the recommendation to join the WARC, synod also decided to instruct the Interchurch Relations Committee to present a comprehensive review of the CRC's membership in the WARC to Synod 2008. This review was to include an evaluation of the fruitfulness of the CRC membership in the WARC and, in particular, whether that membership was beneficial both to the CRC and the WARC. This review was to include recommendations regarding continued CRC membership in the WARC (*Acts of Synod 2002*, p. 486).

That comprehensive review never happened. When synod met in 2008, plans were in the works for a merger between the REC and the WARC. At the recommendation of the Interchurch Relations Committee, synod decided not to complete the comprehensive review because of the anticipated merger (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 462). At a meeting at Calvin College in June 2010, the merger officially took place, forming the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). To our knowledge, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church has never officially voted to join WCRC after the merger.

II. Concerns with the WCRC

We are concerned with a number of positions taken by the WCRC. We certainly recognize, as synod and our Ecumenical Charter makes clear, that membership in an ecumenical organization does not necessarily imply endorsement of doctrinal positions or strategies made by that organization. Yet the WCRC's general secretary or appointed spokesperson often speaks

¹ Peter De Klerk and Richard De Ridder, eds. *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church* (1983), p. 329.

to news outlets as representative of the thousands of members who belong to the WCRC. The WCRC constitution gives them this authority: “The executive committee . . . authorizes the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council.”² We question whether we can still affirm the purposes of the WCRC based on the following areas of concern:

1. Questionable doctrinal statements:

- The WCRC has signed on to the *Joint Declaration on Justification* with Roman Catholics, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, and the Anglican Communion.³ This statement confuses justification with sanctification, accepting the idea that since faith produces works, we are then saved by our good works. The statement also says, “We rejoice together that the historical doctrinal differences on the doctrine of justification no longer divide us.”⁴ We wonder how this statement can be true, since there is no repudiation of the historical positions and councils of these churches. The question then arises: What would the thousands of our Reformed ancestors whose lives were snuffed out in the Reformation have said to such a statement?
- The WCRC has signed *The Wittenberg Witness* with the Lutheran World Federation, stating that the Reformed and Lutheran churches no longer have any need for separation and that our differences are not church dividing.⁵ Does this statement take into account the theological differences about the sacraments, our theology of worship, and our systems of church government?
- The 2017 General Assembly of the WCRC adopted the *Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women*, which agrees with only one of the CRC’s denominationally recognized positions on women in office and outrightly contradicts the other.⁶ A Facebook post from the WCRC has launched the #OrdainHer campaign, falsely stating that the views of complementarian churches “stem from outdated beliefs about women’s inferiority and their perceived incapacity to lead as ordained ministers.”⁷

² Art. X.G.2; wrcr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Constitution_and_Bylaws_2017-EN.pdf. See also Jordan Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel* (2010), p. 66.

³ wrcr.eu/jddj/

⁴ As presented in an appendix to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations report to Synod 2017 (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 352).

⁵ wrcr.eu/resource/wittenberg-witness/

⁶ wrcr.eu/justice/ordination-of-women/

⁷ World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), “Journey for Women’s Equality and Ordination,” Nov. 1, 2024; facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=973681844805075&id=100064898042276&_rdr.

2. Political and economic policy positions that are too specific for the institutional church and include simplistic answers to complex problems. Many of these decisions can best be left to Christian freedom:
 - The WCRC holds to the Accra Confession.⁸ The confession rejects the patenting of genetically modified organisms: “Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain” (Art. 8). It denounces specific governments and institutions: “The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with the international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic, or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners” (Art. 13). It also rejects economic policies that “privatizes those gifts of God meant for all” (Art. 25).⁹
 - A letter signed by the general secretary of the WCRC asks G20 nations to initiate a progressive wealth tax, financial transaction tax, and carbon tax at national and global levels, reintroduce capital gains and inheritance taxes, and reintroduce reparations for slavery and other social and ecological debts.¹⁰
 - The WCRC made a statement calling for peace in West Asia after Israel’s 2024 offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran’s retaliatory strikes that asks for
 - an immediate ceasefire by all involved parties.
 - an end to the ongoing genocide.
 - the cessation of all military support to Israel.
 - full compliance with the guidelines of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice.¹¹
3. A greater emphasis on social justice instead of the church’s primary calling of gospel proclamation and witness. This emphasis has overshadowed the witness of the CRCNA.

III. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures synod to create a task force to present a comprehensive review of the CRCNA’s membership in the WCRC and report back at the latest to Synod 2027. This report will include the following: (1) an analysis of the concerns of this overture, (2) a recommendation for synod’s approval or disapproval of continued membership in the WCRC, and (3) the draft of a written communication from the CRC synod to the WCRC about these concerns.

⁸ wrcr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AccraConfession-EN.pdf

⁹ See Jordan Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel*, p. 61.

¹⁰ thebanner.org/news/2020/08/world-communion-of-reformed-churches-among-four-groups-asking-g20-leaders-for-economic

¹¹ <https://wrcr.eu/world-communion-of-reformed-churches-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-amid-escalating-violence-in-west-asia>

Grounds:

1. Such a review was approved by Synod 2002 as a part of joining WARC (the predecessor to the WCRC) but was never completed.
2. Such a review would give clear guidance to the church regarding advisability of maintaining membership in the WCRC and whether or not to officially sanction its work.
3. A communication of concern helps the CRC to live out its original purpose for joining WARC: “It may reasonably be presumed that the CRC can make an impact on WARC and, through it, on other churches of Christ” (*Acts of Synod 2002*, p. 486).

Classis Illiana
Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk

OVERTURE 25

Focus on Officebearer Training

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to direct the Office of General Secretary to direct Thrive ministries to focus on officebearer training in the coming year, including collating and developing materials to be used at the classical and congregational levels that incorporate the Covenant for Officebearers, the creeds and confessions, church polity (including the Church Order), and the practical aspects of ministry including visitation, assessing needs, discipleship, and discipline. The training should also include a review of the unique nature of the individual offices and their respective spheres.

Grounds:

1. Scripture, our confessions, the Church Order, and the CRC form for ordination/installation all hold a very high view of the offices of the church. While we take seriously the training for ministers and commissioned pastors, we have often neglected the training of elders and deacons. The act of discipling an individual prior to ordination for all offices, including those of elder and deacon, shows the church respecting this high view of office and honoring those being ordained by preparing them for service in Christ’s kingdom.
2. Such a task, done well, is too substantial for an individual congregation to take on.
3. Our Reformed heritage has a high view of church office and expects to have well trained and equipped leaders for the church.
4. Educational materials for officebearer training would be of immense value to the local church for generations to come, significantly strengthening their ministry with well-equipped and trained leaders.

5. Many other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have a long standing practice of such training with great benefit. We can learn from them (and surely borrow from well-designed and -tested practices).
6. Many of these resources already exist and could be reviewed and collated or summarized for practical use in each of our congregations.
7. Due to a shift in culture, there is a growing lack of biblical and theological knowledge in the membership of our churches. To educate office-bearers through discipleship to properly prepare them for service in Christ's church is critical.

Classis Heartland,
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

OVERTURE 26

Identify, Train, and Maintain Individuals with a License to Exhort

I. Background

The past several years have proved that ministers of the Word are retiring from full-time ministry at a far greater rate than ministers of the Word are ordained into full-time ministry. The latest *Forum* published by Calvin Theological Seminary (Winter 2025) brings to light other circumstances that cause ordained ministers to transition out of ministry and points out the lack of individuals to fill these positions.

II. Overture

Therefore we, Classis Heartland, overture Synod 2025 to encourage every church within the CRCNA to identify, train, and maintain an individual with a license to exhort in their church by Synod 2027. Such an individual is to meet all the requirements of Church Order Article 43-b.

Grounds:

1. Raising up leaders in the faith who can faithfully preach and teach God's Word for the purpose of continuing discipleship is important for the faithful growth of the local church.
2. It is necessary for the work of pastors and classis to aid in identifying and raising leaders for the body of Christ, by praying, training, and encouraging the gifts of ministry.
3. God's Word commands that every church have a teaching elder who leads the flock of Christ.
4. This effort leads to greater accountability for local church leaders' faith and life.
5. This encouragement provides an opportunity to establish a disciplined course of training for the discipleship of all who are licensed to exhort

and commissioned pastors, and for the motivation to seek further ordination in the CRCNA.

6. This effort provides opportunities for more churches to be planted in the local classis.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

OVERTURE 27

Add a Supplement to Church Order Article 3

I. Overture

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2025 to add a supplement to Church Order Article 3 to include a discipleship/educational component for all offices, including those of elder and deacon. This training would benefit the church and the individual by equipping officebearers with the tools needed to fulfill the tasks of the offices to which they have been called. Therefore we recommend that synod adopt the following addition to the Church Order as Supplement, Article 3:

The church shall complete training prior to or within six months of ordination for all officebearers, including a study of the Covenant for Officebearers, the creeds and confessions, church polity, and the ministry tasks for their particular office so as to ensure that individuals are prepared and equipped for the weighty tasks that each office requires.

Grounds:

1. Scripture, our confessions, the Church Order, and the CRC form for ordination/installation—all hold a very high view of the offices of the church. While we take seriously the training for ministers and commissioned pastors, we have often neglected the training of elders and deacons. The act of discipling an individual prior to ordination for all offices, including those of elder and deacon, shows the church respecting this high view of office and honoring those being ordained by preparing them for service in Christ's kingdom.
2. On the topic of equipping the saints, H. DeMoor says, "The offices . . . are organs of Christ's gracious rule; they constitute . . . the presence of Christ enabling his people to fulfill their calling; their authority is an *administered* authority which remains the authority of the Lord of the church; [and they exist] to equip the saints for ministry" (as quoted in *Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 286, from DeMoor's book *Equipping the Saints*).
3. The official acts of the church can be performed by elders in "circumstances of special need" (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 289; see pp. 288-90). If in some circumstances the official acts of the church can be performed by

- elders, there is a definite need for discipling and further training for the office. This is all the more critical in a period where there is a growing shortage of ministers, where elders will be increasingly called upon to perform more acts of ministry.
4. For some individuals the issue is not a lack of willingness to serve in the offices of elder or deacon but, rather, a sense of inadequacy as they feel ill-equipped for the tasks required by the office.
 5. Due to a shift in culture, there is a growing lack of biblical and theological knowledge in the membership of our churches. To educate officebearers through discipleship to properly prepare them for service in Christ's church is critical.
 6. Educational materials for officebearer training would be of immense value to the local church for generations to come, significantly strengthening their ministry with well-equipped and trained leaders.
 7. Many other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have a long-standing practice of such training with great benefit. We can learn from them (and surely borrow from well-designed and -tested practices).
 8. A person's faith is not fully formed once that person becomes a member of the church or once that person is nominated to serve in the office of elder or deacon. If we take training seriously for secular vocations, how much more for spiritual vocations. Those called to fill the offices of elder and deacon should be eager to grow and develop in faith formation, that they may serve Christ and his church to the best of their ability, to God's glory and his people's good.
 9. Many of these resources already exist, but the local church often lacks the time or expertise to assemble them in a cohesive plan. They could be reviewed and collated or summarized for practical use in each of our congregations with long-term benefit.

Classis Heartland
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

OVERTURE 28

Envision Two Distinct Christian Reformed Churches

I. Process

In a concrete demonstration of respect for the weighty issues raised in this overture, and to give greater confidence in the result by way of full transparency, it is requested that the officers of Synod 2025 make the following ruling about procedure before the June session begins:

1. Two advisory committees, one made up of synodical delegates from the U.S. and one made up of delegates from Canada, will deliberate in committee independently and also report on this overture on the floor of synod independently.
2. At the time of the voting on this overture, the tally of votes by the delegates' country of origin will be made known (i.e., the votes in favour and against among the Canadian delegates, and the votes in favor and against among the U.S. delegates).
3. The outcome of the deliberation and vote by delegates will be referred to the churches for confirmation. Each church in the U.S. and Canada will be asked to vote on this ecclesiastical reorganization. Each church's decision is to be reported to the Office of General Secretary by November 1.
4. If a majority of either Canadian or U.S. churches supports the reorganization, the overture shall be considered passed.

II. Context

Canadian members of the CRCNA have, for many years, been discouraged by the ways in which ministry in Canada has been overshadowed or hindered by the binational nature and structure of the denomination. Off and on there have been calls for a separate CRC Canada, but the response has typically been to make structural changes (such as those resulting from the 2022 Structure and Leadership Task Force [SALT] report) that do not address the core problem. That is, structural changes have not allowed Canadian members, ministry leaders, churches, and classes to have full direction of ministries and resources to equip us to be more fully effective in our own context. With the increasing differences between our two countries, it is past time for the CRCNA to restructure into two sister denominations.

III. Overture

The Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario, overtures Synod 2025 to do the following:

- A. Envision the CRCNA as two distinct Christian Reformed Churches, one in Canada and one in the United States.
- B. Make the changes necessary for this ecclesiastical reorganization to be accomplished.
- C. Task the U.S. Ministry Board and the Canadian Ministry Board with rewriting the relevant joint ministry agreements to ensure continued cooperation and collaboration among agency staff.

Grounds:

1. The differing ministry contexts in each country (historical, cultural, and political) require different missional and ministry approaches with the full support of autonomous denominational structures.

Canada and the United States are different countries, with different political, religious, educational, media, and social cultures, which lead to

different assumptions and approaches in diverse matters from politics to health care, from criminal justice to patriotism. Christ's followers in each country are called to bring the gospel to bear on all aspects of life in community and to preach the good news in a way that speaks to the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. Fulfilling that calling faithfully requires contextualization by those who understand the culture from within and have the authority to make final decisions about what effective ministry looks like. In many ways, being a cross-border denomination is more harmful than helpful to the Canadian church.

For example, separate Canadian and U.S. CRC denominations will better enable effective missional initiatives and local church witness within Canada. In recent months, differences and tensions between our two countries have increased. The average Canadian (87%, according to recent polling) bristles at talk of using economic coercion to force Canada to become the 51st state. In such a context, being a minority partner within what is seen as an increasingly evangelical American denomination is harmful to our outreach.

It is difficult, within our present denominational structure, for Canadian ministry to establish itself as distinctly Canadian. This is not a new challenge; it was publicly named already back in 1957, the denomination's centennial year, in a document published by two Canadian CRC pastors, Revs. Francois Guillaume and Henry A. Venema:

Everything that applies and is good for the United States is not necessarily applicable and good for Canada. We must find a way in which each of our Church sectors fully realize their own respective rights and powers. We have our own Classes. Our own national particular synods are absolutely necessary unto these things. . . . Let us postpone it no longer.¹

Since 1957, the struggles and tensions have continued in different ways, from the failure of Synod 1999 to adopt a regional synod proposal, to the repeated loss of ministry leaders in Canada.² While the current structure that came out of the SALT report has addressed many concerns, it ultimately has not been able to satisfy all the requirements of contextualized ministry. For instance, in spite of the existence of the Canadian Ministry Board within the Council of Delegates (COD), Canadian members still have no direct means to oversee, guide, or correct our shared ministries in Canada.

2. Separate Canadian and U.S. denominations are necessary to ensure that all decisions which affect ministry in Canada are made by Canadian ministry leaders.

¹ Francois Guillaume and Henry A. Venema, *The United States and Canada in the Christian Reformed Church* (Toronto, Ont.: Pro Rege Publishing Company, 1957), p. 47.

² Ray Elgersma, "Why I Changed My Mind about the CRC's Bi-Nationality" [Letter to the editor], *Christian Courier* (2024, Mar. 4); Christiancourier.ca.

At present, the final authority on matters of ecclesiology and ministry is the annual denominational synod. This body's delegates, generally reflective of the numbers of members in each country, are 78 percent from the U.S. and 23 percent from Canada. This imbalance is slightly mitigated but still strongly reflected in the composition of the COD. It is to be expected, and is the case, that when discussing and voting on policy and ministry direction, the decisions generally reflect what is preferred and fitting for ministry in the U.S. While this is understandable, it leaves Canadian churches and our shared and individual ministries at a distinct disadvantage. In numerous examples, both past and present, ministry in Canada has suffered because Canadian needs were given a lower priority to CRCNA goals and objectives.

For example, a recent policy decision of the COD was that, in the light of faltering revenues for denominational ministries, actions taken to reduce staff or programs "should be as similar as possible on each side of the border when a specific agency program is impacted." The policy further notes that "even if [revenue decline] is a country-specific issue, many times there will be implications for joint ministry." What is missing is a parallel policy that recognizes differentiation based on context, to provide balance and guidance in cases where ministry priorities in the two countries differ. The Canadian Ministry Plan of 2004 was shelved when, during a time of fiscal restraint, the denominational structures put a higher priority on cross-border sameness over country-specific ministry needs.

Currently, decision making is divided into two spheres: ecclesiastical (synod) and ministry/operations (the COD). This is inconsistent with a Reformed emphasis on integration of word and work, something that is especially valued in the Reformational heritage within the Canadian church. Furthermore, experience in Canada shows how theological decisions affect operations (e.g., Indigenous ministries, justice ministries, and the purpose and use of gravamina). By integrating theological deliberations and ministry operations at a Canadian synod, this problematic and unnecessary dividing wall can be removed.

3. Restructuring to create denominations in each country is the best way to ensure proper governance and accountability within the CRC in Canada.

Members of Canadian churches who want to have some input into Canadian ministries are told they should speak to their classis delegate to the Council of Delegates. This person, chosen by delegates at one classis meeting, may or may not be known by church members, and the delegate may or may not take forward any suggestions or concerns that they receive or hear. There is no formal and transparent process, such as overtures, that Canadian members can use to have a more meaningful voice in decisions about priorities and directions for ministry in Canada. While concerns are acknowledged, there is no clear way of knowing if

they are taken seriously. There is no clear process of accountability back to members of churches. Appointment of a delegate to the Council of Delegates by a classis is a weak form of accountability when the desired goal is dynamic, shared ministry from local to regional to national levels.

An additional governance structure problem is the inherent conflict of interest in the exercise of duty of care. Members of the Canadian Ministry Board wear two hats. They have a responsibility to protect the best interests of Canadian CRC congregations, and they have a responsibility to protect the best interests of the whole CRCNA. Much of the time those interests may converge, but there are times when the best interests of the two may not be the same. In those moments their first priority is to the whole COD (i.e., they are required to go along with a decision of the whole COD, even if there is strong evidence that another decision would serve the interests of Canadian churches better). An example is the inability of the members of the Canadian Ministry Board to seriously consider the merits of separate U.S. and Canadian denominations. They have acknowledged that speaking in favour of that would constitute a breach of their duty of care to the larger COD. They may be genuinely convinced that the binational system serves Canada better; but, if they did not think so, they would be unable to pursue their views because it would violate their primary duty of care obligation to the COD.

It is unfair to put people in positions where they have a conflict of interest. Good governance in responsible institutions finds ways to prevent such conflicts. A Canadian CRC with a Canadian synod to deliberate and make decisions for ministry in Canada would provide the Canadian Ministry Board with a clearer mandate, more specific directions from a wider membership, and more robust accountability.

4. The creation of country-specific Christian Reformed denominations will create deliberative and collaborative spaces with the full authority to make decisions.

CRC congregations and ministry leaders in Canada currently have no space or assembly to gather together and share ideas, hopes, and goals for working together from coast to coast to coast. The result is disparate efforts and hindered imaginations. The synod-mandated Canadian gatherings are not structured or equipped to do this important work.

Canadian CRC members have demonstrated again and again their capacity for strong and creative shared ministries that have a powerful and lasting impact in society. The Christian Labour Association of Canada, the *Christian Courier*, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Redeemer University, and the Institute for Christian Studies are but a few examples. They are a demonstration of the historic Reformed understanding of the call to engage with and transform our world for Christ.

It might be argued that these successful examples demonstrate that there is no need of a distinct Canadian CRC, considering what's been accomplished and our demonstrated ability to work together. The truth is that much of our best ministry came about when Canadian members did have a collaborative space, when the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (CCRCC) was active between 1966 and 1997. Given the many areas in which Canadians have had a shared and unique interest in ministry together—reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours, campus ministry, institutional chaplaincy, prison ministry, refugee resettlement, diaconal ministry, and environmental stewardship, to name a few—one can only imagine what could be accomplished with the time and space to collaborate together. A Canadian synod would create stronger country-wide partnerships, increase formal and substantive ministry accountability, and bring together ministry knowledge, leadership skills, spiritual gifts, and other resources to better steward our shared calling within Canada.

5. A Canadian CRC will be better equipped to forge a uniquely Canadian theological culture and identity.

The theology and practice of the wider church in Canada has long been heavily influenced by Christianity in the U.S. In his foreword to *Blessed Are the Undone* by Angela Reitsma Bick and Peter Schuurman, Neal De Roo writes:

Angela and Peter point out that it is a particular kind of Christianity that is being deconstructed today: an American (and predominantly white) evangelicalism that has tied itself quite closely to certain cultural and political markers. . . . That American evangelicalism is American doesn't automatically make it suspect. But it does make it American in ways that may not fit well within our context here in Canada.³

Such deconstruction has made clearer than before that the church in Canada needs to wrestle with, debate, develop, and articulate a uniquely Canadian understanding of what it means to follow Christ. This is because the societal context for the church in each country is quite different: "Christians are—sorry to say—an embarrassed minority in Canada, while evangelicals in the U.S. are a powerful and controversial voting bloc that casts a shadow to the north."⁴

The evidence of a need (and giftedness) for differing approaches to being the church on either side of the border are already present in the CRCNA. It has long been observed that Canadian CRC congregations and members have a unique heart for certain areas of ministry and theological focus, such as diaconal work, justice advocacy, campus ministry,

³ Angela Reitsma Bick and Peter Schuurman, *Blessed Are the Undone: Testimonies of Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada* (Saskatoon, Sask.: New Leaf Network Press, 2024), p. xv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

and Indigenous reconciliation. Another example is the role of women in ecclesiastical offices. In Canada, women are seated at all classes, whereas four U.S. classes do not permit women to be delegates; 87 percent of Canadian churches have women deacons, compared to 68 percent in the U.S.; 72 percent of Canadian churches have women elders, compared to 44 percent in the U.S.

The development of a Canadian expression of Reformed Christianity is difficult as a small minority within a binational denomination. In fact, it could be argued that the identification of the CRCNA as a “binational” denomination itself reflects a U.S. understanding of nationality. In Canada, Quebec is recognized as a distinct nation within our federation. Our Indigenous neighbours are recognized as the First Nations within our country’s borders.

6. Restructuring the CRCNA into a CRC Canada and a CRC U.S. is consistent with the recently adopted global CRC initiative.

Synod 2024 adopted the report of a COD study committee tasked with exploring “the integration of international churches into the composition of the CRC.”⁵ The adoption of this report reflects a desire to bless and be blessed in turn by our sister denominations around the world through a shared Reformed identity and unique cultural and contextual differences. It is an expression of a “vision for a deeper global engagement” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 708).

While the CRCNA has decided to pursue this initiative, synod also acknowledged a number of challenges identified by the Global Vision report, including “physical distance; cultural and language differences.” They also stated that “an ever-present concern is paternalism,” along with the “concern about maintaining local autonomy” expressed by some leaders of Reformed denominations outside North America (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 691, 704). The Canadian experience suggests these global leaders are wise to be cautious, and these concerns have been repeatedly experienced and identified by CRC ministry leaders in Canada. In pursuing this Global Vision, Synod 2024 made a firm statement that free and equal partnership with churches in different countries is a high value. It was also made clear that the goal is not incorporating or absorbing those other denominations into the CRCNA and blunting their distinctiveness or unique contribution, but instead “developing an ecclesiastical body that would be the global CRC church. This body would not be a single global denomination but, rather, an opportunity for the CRCNA and its global partners to go deeper in partnership with each

⁵ See crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ, “The CRCNA’s Global Vision,” question 1.

other.”⁶ The creation of a distinct Canadian CRC in an equal partner relationship to a distinct U.S. CRC would be a consistent application of these expressed values.

Council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church,
Ancaster, Ontario,
Ed Witvoet, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to Classis Hamilton at its February 22, 2025, meeting but was not adopted.

OVERTURE 29

Prioritize Church Planting within the Denominational Budget

We take note of the anticipated decrease in funding for church planting within Resonate Global Mission’s budget and the decision to reduce/eliminate all grants for church planting.

In light of this, we overture synod to direct the general secretary, the Resonate Global Mission director, and the Church Planting Core Initiative to re-prioritize church planting within the denominational budget. Church planting is vital to our present existence and our future.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA has been experiencing a tremendous decline.
2. The elimination of grant funding for church planting is incompatible with our stated goal of reversing this trend of decline.

Classis Southeast U.S.
Vivy Cassis, stated clerk

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.