

# OVERTURES



# OVERTURE (DEFERRED FROM SYNOD 2025)

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## OVERTURE 75 (DEFERRED FROM 2025)

### **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 2026

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## OVERTURE 1

### **Permit the Transfer of Orange Korean Church from Classis California South to Classis Ko-Am**

#### **Overture**

Classis Ko-Am, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overtures synod to permit the transfer of Orange Korean Church from Classis California South to Classis Ko-Am.

This request originated from the council of Orange Korean Church and has been approved by both Classis California South and Classis Ko-Am.

#### *Grounds:*

- A. Orange Korean Church's newly called pastor, Rev. You Sung Jung, already has established relationships within Classis Ko-Am. These existing connections will greatly facilitate the training, mentoring, and integration of Orange Korean Church leaders into the regional and collegial life of the classis.
- B. Rev. You Sung Jung desires to actively network and collaborate with fellow pastors in Classis Ko-Am and believes he can contribute meaningfully to the shared ministry and mission within the Korean-American ecclesiastical context of the classis.
- C. The congregation of Orange Korean Church has reached a stage in its ministry where connection with a Korean-speaking classis is more appropriate and beneficial than continued participation in a primarily English-speaking classis. Alignment with Classis Ko-Am is expected to result in greater engagement at the classis level, as well as more effective pastoral care, counsel, mutual accountability, and encouragement among colleagues who share a common language and cultural context.

Classis Ko-Am  
Daniel Yi, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 2

### **Allow the Transfer of Orange Korean Church from Classis California South to Classis Ko-Am**

#### **Overture**

We, Classis California South, in accordance with Church Order Article 39, overture synod to allow the transfer of Orange Korean Church from Classis California South to Classis Ko-Am.

This request originated from the council of Orange Korean Church and has been approved by both Classis California South and Classis Ko-Am.

The following grounds express our rationale:

#### *Grounds:*

- A. Orange Korean Church's new pastor, Rev. You Sung Jung, already has connections in Classis Ko-Am, which will facilitate training Orange Korean Church leaders in the regional life of the church.
- B. Pastor You Sung Jung desires to network with the pastors in Classis Ko-Am and feels he is able to contribute much in the Korean-American setting of Classis Ko-Am. The congregation is at a point where connecting with a Korean-speaking classis is preferable to connecting with a primarily English-speaking classis.
- C. The ministry would be more inspired to participate at the classis level and be more effectively counseled and held accountable by their colleagues in Classis Ko-Am.

Classis California South,  
Becca Triemstra, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 3

### **Amend the Rules for Synodical Procedure regarding Overtures and Communications**

#### **I. Background**

Section V, B, 3 of the Rules for Synodical Procedure addresses both overtures and communications to synod. This overture seeks (1) to clarify how an overture comes before synod, and (2) recommends creating a separate classification for communications. There are two distinct types of communications: one requiring a response, and one received for information which may receive a response.

The current process for bringing an overture before synod currently over-emphasizes the congregational spirit within the CRCNA and undermines its Reformed heritage, which highly values mutual accountability.

The current process allows an overture to be considered by synod without the approval of a council and/or classis. The current process devalues the

council's and classis' role in the process and places an undue burden on synod. In 2022 about 28.5 percent of the overtures considered were not approved by a council and/or a classis. In 2023 the percentage rose to about 34.2 percent, and in 2024 the percentage declined to about 29.4 percent. The current process, in addition, does not foster mutual accountability and the call to submit to one another in humility.

Church councils and classes throughout the CRCNA invest significant time in processing overtures. Each body must assess every overture scripturally, theologically, and confessionally, considering also its implications, intended and unintended, for the CRCNA. When an overture is not approved by a council or classis and is then forwarded to synod without addressing the identified concerns and objections, it devalues a council's or classis' wisdom and service to the church.

## II. Overture

Classis Holland overtures synod to amend the Rules for Synodical Procedure<sup>1</sup> to clarify how an overture comes before synod and to create a separate category for communications, as follows (additions indicated by underline; deletions indicated by ~~striketrough~~):

### **Proposed Changes to Rules for Synodical Procedure** (section V, B, 3)

#### 3. Overtures and Communications to Synod

- a. ~~Overtures and communications~~ from a classis (whether originated by or adopted by a classis) or from an assembly organized according to Article 44-b of the Church Order.

*(Acts of Synod 1993, p. 574)*

- b. ~~Overtures and communications which have failed to gain adoption of a council and/or classis but which an individual or council desire to submit for~~ come before synod's consideration through the following process:

- 1) An overture generally originates with an individual, who submits it to the council of their congregation for consideration. In the case of an individual who is part of an emerging congregation, the overture is submitted to the supervising congregation's council.
- 2) If a council adopts an overture, it is forwarded to the classis for consideration.
- 3) If a council does not adopt an overture, the individual submitting the overture may forward it to classis for consideration along with an appeal, not to exceed 500 words, that explains

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<sup>1</sup> Section VIII, N of the Rules for Synodical Procedure states, "These Rules for Synodical Procedure may be suspended, amended, revised, or abrogated by a majority vote of synod." It does not specify how changes are to be brought before synod.

how the council which did not adopt the overture erred biblically, theologically, or procedurally. The council which did not adopt the overture may also submit a rebuttal, not to exceed 500 words, that addresses the matters raised in the appeal.

- 4) Classis shall consider an overture adopted by a council according to its policies and procedures.
- 5) Classis shall consider an overture not adopted by a council if an appeal is attached. The classis, before processing the overture, must consider the appeal and the rebuttal, if submitted, and either grant or deny the appeal by simple majority. If the appeal is granted, the classis shall consider the overture on its own merits. If the appeal is denied, then the overture will not be considered.
- 6) If an overture is adopted by classis, it will be forwarded to synod for consideration.
- 7) If an overture is not adopted by classis, a synodical advisory committee may consider the overture if an appeal is attached. The appeal, not to exceed 500 words, must explain how the classis erred biblically, theologically, or procedurally. The classis may submit a rebuttal, not to exceed 500 words, that addresses the matters raised in the appeal.
- 8) Synod shall consider an overture adopted by a classis according to its policies and procedures.
- 9) Synod shall consider an overture not adopted by a classis if an appeal is attached. The synodical advisory committee, before processing the overture, must consider the appeal and the rebuttal, if submitted, and either grant or deny the appeal by simple majority. If the appeal is granted, the synodical advisory committee shall consider the overture on its own merits. If the appeal is denied, then the overture will not be considered.

b. Communications from a classis (whether originated by or adopted by a classis) or from an assembly organized according to Article 44-b of the Church Order.

*(Acts of Synod 1993, p. 574)*

- 1) A communication generally originates with an individual, who submits it to the council of their congregation for consideration. In the case of an individual who is part of an emerging congregation, the communication is submitted to the supervising congregation's council.
- 2) If a council adopts a communication, it is forwarded to the classis for consideration.

- 3) If a council does not adopt a communication, the individual submitting the overture may forward it to classis for consideration along with an appeal, not to exceed 500 words, that explains how the council which did not adopt the communication erred biblically, theologically, or procedurally. The council which did not adopt the communication may also submit a rebuttal, not to exceed 500 words, that addresses the matters raised in the appeal.
- 4) Classis shall consider a communication adopted by a council according to its policies and procedures.
- 5) Classis shall consider a communication not adopted by a council if an appeal is attached. The classis, before processing the communication, must consider the appeal and the rebuttal, if submitted, and either grant or deny the appeal by simple majority. If the appeal is granted, the classis shall consider the communication on its own merits. If the appeal is denied, then the communication will not be considered.
- 6) If a communication is adopted by classis, it will be forwarded to synod for consideration.
- 7) If a communication is not adopted by classis, a synodical advisory committee may consider the communication if an appeal is attached. The appeal, not to exceed 500 words, must explain how the classis erred biblically, theologically, or procedurally. The classis may submit a rebuttal not to exceed 500 words that addresses the matters raised in the appeal.
- 8) Synod shall consider a communication adopted by a classis according to its policies and procedures.
- 9) Synod shall consider a communication not adopted by a classis if an appeal is attached. The synodical advisory committee, before processing the communication, must consider the appeal and the rebuttal, if submitted, and either grant or deny the appeal by simple majority. If the appeal is granted, the synodical advisory committee shall consider the communication on its own merits. If the appeal is denied, then the communication will not be considered.
- 1) ~~Overtures and communications from a council (whether originated by or adopted by council) which have been submitted to classis but not adopted by classis as its own.~~
- 2) ~~Overtures and communications of an individual which have been submitted to council and classis but which have not been adopted by either council or classis.~~

~~3) Overtures and communications of an individual which were submitted to council, adopted by council as its own, and submitted to classis by council, but which classis has not adopted as its own, which council has not submitted to synod, and which the initiating individual submits to synod.~~

*[subsection c unchanged]*

*Grounds:*

- a. Overtures and communications are two distinct types of communication and should be treated separately.
- b. The overture ought to reflect the conciliar nature of CRCNA polity.
- c. The proposed process in the overture recognizes the value of the deliberative process as well as the authority and wisdom of councils and classes.
- d. The proposed process in the overture provides a means for appealing decisions and processing them in an orderly manner.

Classis Holland  
Jennifer Rozema, stated clerk

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## **OVERTURE 4**

### **Establish a Common Format for Reports to Synod**

#### **I. Background**

The Rules for Synodical Procedure describe the roles of and composition of task forces and study committees (section VI, D, 1). It is curious that the rules provide no guidance for these teams on the structure and length of their reports.

The intent of this overture is to establish report writing parameters to ensure consistency, clarity, accessibility, and consideration of the primary issue(s) addressed in the report. Delegates since 2021 have been asked to process two lengthy reports—from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (2021, deferred to 2022: 175 pp.) and from the Church Order Review Task Force (2024: 103 pp.).

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Holland overtures synod to provide guidance to facilitate the reading of, processing of, and engagement with reports by inserting the following as section VI, D, 2 in the Rules for Synodical Procedure and by renumbering the remaining points in section VI, D (additions indicated by underline; deletions indicated by ~~striketrough~~).

**Proposed addition to Rules for Synodical Procedure** (section VI, D)

2. A report is a document submitted by a study committee or task force describing the work performed in response to their mandate and presenting recommendations for action. The report to synod shall not exceed 5,000 words (20 pages @ 250 words per page; see sub-points a-f below), excluding appendices. Reports should be clear and concise and should focus on the group's findings and recommendations. Additional materials (i.e., descriptions of methodology, supporting arguments, testimonies) are to be included in appropriate appendices.

Minority reports shall not normally exceed 2,500 words.

Reports to synod should generally follow this common format:

- a. Mandate: a restatement of the mandate with a brief description of its scope.
- b. Recommendations: the report's recommendations for synod's consideration.
- c. Methodology: a summary description of how the mandate was pursued.
- d. Biblical, theological, and historical underpinnings for the recommendations: a summary of the biblical and theological rationale historically informed for the recommendations offered.
- e. A synopsis of relevant "finds" from other fields and testimonies that informed the recommendations.
- f. Additional questions to be addressed that were identified and were considered outside the scope of the mandate.

A minority report should follow the same format and specifically address where the majority report erred and offer a viable alternative.

23. All boards and committee members . . .

*[The remaining points in section VI, D are to be renumbered but are otherwise unchanged.]*

*Grounds:*

- a. A common report format enables delegates to focus on the report's content rather than on discerning its structure.
- b. Limiting the length of the report (except for appendices) allows delegates to focus on the primary arguments and to engage with the appendices if additional information is needed.
- c. Moving the recommendations toward the beginning of the report allows the reader to evaluate whether the information/data presented supports the recommendations.

Classis Holland  
Jennifer Rozema, stated clerk

## **Conform COD Membership to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession**

### **I. Introduction**

The Council of Delegates (COD) has served our denomination well since its founding. It handles the necessary interim work between synods, serves as a connecting point between our classes and agencies, and helps lead those same agencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the COD was also forced to meet in lieu of Synods 2020 and 2021. While we hope never to repeat those circumstances, they do highlight just how broad the ecclesiastical responsibility of the COD can be. As Article 33-b of our Church Order instructs interim bodies, an ongoing responsibility of the COD is “to act for them in matters which cannot await action by the assemblies themselves.” Further, though the regular meeting structure of the COD includes time for separate meetings of the Canadian and U.S. ministry boards to satisfy legal requirements, that time takes up less than a third of their meeting schedule, with the vast majority of time spent as the full Council of Delegates. These meetings open with worship and devotional meditations and are bathed in prayer. Largely mirroring the proceedings at synod, a COD meeting is clearly an ecclesiastical gathering because it fills a role of leadership within the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

### **II. Background**

The need for an interim body between synods was recognized early in our denomination’s history. The Synodical Interim Committee (SIC) was first composed exclusively of ministers (*Acts of Synod 1890*, p. 34) and later only of current or former officebearers (*Acts of Synod 1971*, p. 74). This was a very logical criterion for membership, since this body served synod and was also called to make, at the very least, preliminary decisions and judgments between synods. The only voting members of any synod are the delegates, made up exclusively of current officebearers within the CRCNA. Because synods meet for only a week or two, and because our polity rotates elders and deacons on typically three-year terms, it makes sense that the membership of an interim standing committee will not always align with those cycles. Further, since our elders and deacons are often employed outside of the church, serving concurrently on a local council as well as in a body like the COD may be an overly taxing expectation.

The requirement that the SIC be made up of current or former officebearers was dropped with the adoption of a more corporate or academic model when synod established the Board of Trustees (BOT) in 1993 (*Acts of Synod 1993*, pp. 582-83; *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 622). During this transition, membership broadened to mirror other denominational committees, thus opening it to any church member in good standing. However, both the name change to Board of Trustees and the broadened membership separated this committee from its original clear purpose: serving synod on an interim basis

with members who were qualified to serve at synod. When the Council of Delegate model was adopted in 2017, we significantly strengthened the structural unity between synod and classes, since the classes elect or appoint the majority of COD members, just as they do their delegates to synod. However, the membership requirements were not reverted back to those of the SIC.

### **III. Confessional Considerations**

As Reformed believers, we confess that Christ gave his Church three offices for its leadership: ministers, elders, and deacons (Belgic Confession, Art. 31). Also, Article 30 of the Belgic Confession states, “We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word.” Unlike standing committees that oversee the candidacy process, interdenominational relationships, or the boards of our academic institutions, the COD is unique. It leads the denomination between synods, and sometimes in place of synods. At its core, it is ecclesiastical in its role and thus should conform to our Reformed understanding of and expectations for ecclesiastical leadership.

### **IV. Overture**

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2026 to direct the Council of Delegates to revise its membership requirements so that, moving forward for all new members, membership is limited to current or former officebearers.

*Grounds:*

- a. The COD is a body of ecclesiastical leadership within the CRCNA.
- b. Reformed churches are to be led by officebearers.
- c. Having served on a local council gives an important perspective of how the decisions of the COD may be received by our churches.
- d. The COD's name presupposes officebearers, given the synodical tied word of “delegates” (not trustees, commissioners, etc.).
- e. There is wisdom in Abraham Kuyper’s insight on sphere sovereignty — we don’t run a church like a corporation. In an age of ever-growing corporatization, the church must resist the trend and renew the biblical modes and models of leadership.
- f. While we are always seeking to reform our church in line with God's Word, this is not a matter that we judge demands the expulsion of any present nonconforming board members. Implementing it as the standard moving forward seems prudent.

Classis Zeeland  
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 6

### **Confessional Integrity of Denominational Employees, Writers, Boards, and Agencies**

#### **Overture**

Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2026 to instruct the COD and the Office of General Secretary to require all ministry staff employed for denominational service related to the CRCNA and its mission to have confessional integrity. This includes but is not limited to all those employed at our denominational agencies: *The Banner*, *Resonate*, *Thrive*, as well as all who populate volunteer boards, must show that they are professing members of a congregation in the CRCNA who fully support and defend the fullness of God's Word and that the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA faithfully reflect Scripture's revelation.

#### *Grounds:*

- A. The Office of General Secretary, denominational boards, and agency leadership exercise significant influence over policy, communication, and direction of the CRCNA. Confessional alignment is therefore essential to strengthening trust and partnership between congregations, classes, and denominational leadership.
- B. Denominational funds, contributed by member churches through ministry shares and other offerings, ought to support work carried out by those who are personally committed to the CRCNA's confessional standards and ecclesial life.

Classis Iakota  
Bernard Haan, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 7

### **Restore the Previous Gravamen Policy**

#### **I. Introduction**

A member of Covenant Life Church of Grand Haven, Michigan, is writing to express concern regarding the changes to the gravamen/gravamina policy at Synods 2024 and 2025 (Supplement, Church Order Article 5-a). A request for reconsideration: that church polity allowing gravamina for church leaders (and members) be changed to the previously stated policy, which had provisions for a gravamen *which could be held indefinitely*. On the issue of gravamen policy, Synods 2024 and 2025 exerted overreach in dealing with divisive issues, using the change of rules regarding gravamina to accomplish their objectives.

This request is based on two factors: (1) newly discovered evidence that the data and facts concerning actual membership loss and church disaffiliation numbers were not fully understood nor realized when the decision was

made in 2024 and 2025; nor were the implications of dissension in this action fully understood (reference CRCNA factual reports on disaffiliation and closures); and (2) the error of accurate data not provided misled the decision makers of Synods 2024 and 2025 in not realizing the impact of their decisions over time and into the future. This combined action has resulted in further division within the CRCNA, membership loss, acceleration of the continued exodus within the denomination, and the loss of church congregations through the disaffiliation process. It remains an ongoing issue and is problematic to the denomination, with negative long-term implications.

## **II. Brief history/background**

Gravamen policy was formalized and adopted for the first time in 1976 as official policy introducing “guidelines and regulations as a Supplement to Article 5 of the Church Order” (*Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 68-70). This policy served the denomination well throughout nearly fifty years—including times of difficult and contentious issues, such as the women in church office debate and other divisive issues. It was an effective and reasonable provision to address “theological differences” of interpretation and conflicting opinion within the denomination, preventing further church division and enhancing overall church unity. The actions of synod in 2024 and 2025 changed that with the tightening of gravamen provision and the addition of a three-year period limit to the gravamen.

## **III. Premise**

The strength of any organization (particularly the church) is in how it handles differences of opinion, thought, and particularly faith/theology positions which are “not matters of salvation.” Theological differences are a given within any denomination. If this church denomination is to stabilize loss and prevent further divisions, this provision must be made to restore church unity and get back on mission and purpose—evangelism, discipleship, and fellowship in unity.

## **IV. Overture**

This overture is a request to restore the previous gravamen policy:

Allow for theological differences that are classified as “not matters of salvation” to be allowed through a restored gravamen policy in the CRCNA and to be able to be held indefinitely *without regard to a specified time limit*. Restore and return gravamen policy to the previously adopted language prior to Synod 2024, whose foundation was formally established in the language of the *Acts of Synod 1976*.

*Grounds:*

### **a. A method for reasonable disagreement**

This solution allows for a reasonable method of established means of disagreement, a pathway of “reasonable disagreement and differences” on matters of theology and faith within the church on controversial and current topics, without prompting further decline in membership and

additional church disaffiliation. The CRCNA has a concerning history of division and separation within the church which has had serious historical consequences and ramifications, often reflecting poorly on our faith and denomination. Theological differences need to be respected and allowed in all other matters not of salvation.

b. Church division

Whereas the change in gravamen policy has further divided the church, causing a lack in confidence with CRCNA church polity and the ability to handle theological differences and divisions, Synod 2025 worsened this situation of divide and accelerated membership loss and exit of congregations from the CRCNA denomination.

c. The future of the CRCNA denomination

The denomination has set a policy precedent which is not helpful for its stabilization and eventual potential growth in the future due to its rigid demands. (One must consider, What will be the next issue raised where compliance with it produces division and conflict within the church?) The revised policy of Synod 2025 has been detrimental and harmful to church unity, threatens individual church and denomination survivability, and merits reconsideration. Without a process to disagree, the future of the denomination is at risk. A change to revert to the former gravamen policy is needed. I believe it would better serve the denomination for the long term, benefit stabilization of loss within the denomination, and prevent further decline.

Member of Covenant Life Church, Grand Haven, Michigan  
Mark A. Werkema

*Note:* This overture was submitted to the council of Covenant Life Church, Grand Haven, Michigan, for consideration at the December 16, 2025, council meeting but was not adopted. This overture was then submitted to Clasis Muskegon at its February 26, 2026, meeting but was not adopted.

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## **OVERTURE 8**

### **Concerning Confessional-Revision Gravamina**

#### **I. Background**

The Covenant for Officebearers basically requires that all officers affirm that the Three Forms of Unity are in full agreement with the Scriptures. This implies that the writings of human beings can be sufficiently perfect that they may stand on equal footing with the Scriptures. Fortunately the CRC Church Order recognizes that people are fallible, so it provides a way to modify the Three Forms of Unity should the need arise. The submission of a confessional-revision gravamen initiates this process. As might be expected, such submissions rarely occur.

A confessional-revision gravamen could pursue a change along various different lines. First, it could seek to change an actual interpretation of Scripture along with the related Three Forms of Unity content. This effort would be a profound and daunting task, for the existing interpretation rests on hundreds of years of history and acceptance. Few would succeed at this, even if they were correct. Another avenue would be to remove the item of concern from the Three Forms of Unity. This strategy would assume that the change would consist of minor matters over which total agreement would not need to be required. Many such matters of faith exist already. This serves to loosen the doctrinal requirements a bit, thereby enlarging the tent of the CRC faithful, thus promoting a broader Christian fellowship. Undoubtedly, a confessional-revision gravamen could apply other strategies of change as well.

This overture seeks to address situations in which the matter being set forth in a confessional-revision gravamen would merit attention, and thus synod would not want to reject it, and yet the matter would deviate sufficiently from historical understanding that synod would not want to change the Three Forms of Unity.

## II. Overture

To address such situations, I overture synod to create a Three Forms of Unity Alternate List. The process would take a confessional-revision gravamen and put it onto the Alternate List. The Covenant for Officebearers would then be modified to recognize the Three Forms of Unity with any of the alternates. Alternates would of course have to be approved by synod. This process would allow synod to recognize that there may be sufficient grounds to support several views on a matter while not dropping the matter from the Three Forms of Unity.

The process would go as follows:

1. Create a Three Forms of Unity Alternate List (made of gravamina).
2. Update the Church Order related to confessional-revision gravamina to allow synod to add the confessional-revision gravamina to the Alternate List (addition indicated by underline):

Supplement, Article 5-a, C, 6

6. A revision of the confessions, or an addition to the Three Forms of Unity Alternate List, shall not be adopted by synod until the whole church membership has had adequate opportunity to consider it.
3. Update the Covenant for Officebearers to allow affirmation of the Three Forms of Unity with the Alternate List (addition indicated by underline):

Supplement, Article 5-a

*Covenant for Officebearers*  
*[paragraphs 1-2 unchanged]*

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, along with the Alternate List— . . .

*[remaining text unchanged]*

Elder at Christ Community Church, Tualatin, Oregon  
John Shaw

*Note:* This overture was submitted to the council of Christ Community Church, Tualatin, Oregon, on September 18, 2025, but was not adopted. This overture was then submitted to Classis Columbia at its October 4, 2025, meeting but was not adopted.

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## OVERTURE 9

### **Amend Gravamen Regulations to Clarify Confessional Difficulty**

As a preliminary note, we request that due consideration be given to the fact that this overture comes from the remaining churches in Classis Grand Rapids East who continue to pursue alignment with the CRCNA. This overture has no intent of creating loopholes or covertly pushing for any agenda that undermines the theology of our confessions or what has been identified as having confessional status. It aims for further clarity in the processes and provisions for flexibility and pastoral space for growth in the calling of officebearers. The remaining ambiguity regarding gravamina disproportionately presents barriers for leaders formed outside the CRCNA ecosystem, particularly those in multiethnic, urban, or first-generation contexts, even when they are fully aligned with the church’s mission and willing to adhere to its doctrine.

#### **I. Purposes of the overture**

Classis Grand Rapids East submits this overture to Synod 2026 with the following purposes:

A. Eliminate any confusion that may be caused by recent decisions of synod (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 867-71; *Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 669-73) and by denominational communications provided to explain the meanings of various phrases by incorporating the appropriate language in the Church Order supplemental material itself.

B. Provide clarity for the local council’s discernment in making decisions regarding the nature and extent of an individual’s expressed difficulties when considering their initial call to serve as an officebearer.

C. Note that providing measured flexibility in what individuals may believe on certain doctrines does not weaken our collective commitment to the confessions and confessional unity but increases opportunity and expectation that we grow “in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel” (Covenant for Officebearers).

D. Ensure that gifted and qualified leaders do not self-select to decline or be rejected in the nomination process for officebearers based not on their rejection of the church’s teaching but because of their honesty about having unresolved theological difficulty.

## II. Introduction

At Synod 2024, Advisory Committee 9, discussing gravamen matters, explicitly acknowledged two different understandings concerning the nature and use of a confessional-difficulty gravamen (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 868-69):

- 1) In one understanding, an officebearer uses a confessional-difficulty gravamen to express a personal difficulty to a council. The council would then judge whether they could tolerate the officebearer’s disagreement with the confessions. If so, the officebearer could continue to serve with the gravamen submitted to their local council.
- 2) In the other understanding, an officebearer uses a gravamen to express a personal difficulty to a council. However, the purpose of expressing the difficulty is to determine whether the officebearer’s gravamen is in line with the doctrines of our confessions, and if not, to help the officebearer pursue a path toward alignment—enlisting the help of the classis and synod if necessary.

The advisory committee conceded that “currently, both understandings of confessional-difficulty gravamen have some merit because the current wording of the Church Order is not sufficiently clear” (p. 869). The past two synods understandably sought clarity regarding the use of gravamen because of its inconsistent and imprecise usage across the denomination. However, the language adopted in the Church Order Supplement has not entirely achieved that clarity, but, rather, by restricting the gravamen process with new procedures and eliminating one of the previous uses, the updated wording in the Church Order Supplement has generated new areas of confusion and concern. This is clearly demonstrated by the need for denominational leaders to produce explanatory documents on [crcna.org](http://crcna.org) such as the Synod FAQs, “Guidance on ‘Affirming the Confessions,’” and “In Search of Wisdom in the Midst of Doubt” to navigate the complexities involved.

The intent here is not to reopen gravamen categories or propose a new gravamen category but to address remaining internal ambiguity regarding the weight and timing of when an individual's difficulty necessitates the filing of a confessional-difficulty gravamen that then disqualifies them to begin service as an officebearer. Ongoing ambiguity in implementation is resulting in the loss of the particular giftings, contributions, ministry, and service of otherwise qualified leaders who have a nonsettled disagreement with a confessional teaching that has historically been interpreted differently within the Reformed tradition, yet have no intent to undermine or advocate against the doctrines contained in our shared confessions and are fully willing to live and serve in accordance with the collective teaching of the CRCNA. For this reason, we need clarity on the degree of flexibility for councils to discern the eligibility of incoming officebearers.

### **III. Understanding the Language of Confessional Difficulty in the CRCNA**

At Synod 2025, Advisory Committee 3, discussing the Church Order and its Supplements, asserted in a preamble to its recommendations, "A deeper engagement with Church Order Article 5-a and its supplement can help address many of the concerns that have prompted calls for a third category of gravamen. These existing resources already make space for honest wrestling, careful discernment, and communal trust, without weakening the integrity of our confessional commitments" (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p 671). Yet our "deeper engagement" with Church Order Article 5, its supplement, and the Covenant for Officebearers has still resulted in many questions and indicates the need for further work.

The most recent post from the general secretary, "In Search of Wisdom in the Midst of Doubt" (on [network.crcna.org](http://network.crcna.org); Dec. 10, 2025), reinforces this problem when it acknowledges that "synod seemed to be saying incompatible things: officebearers must affirm our shared doctrine 'without reservation,' and officebearers may have doubts. As a result, many congregations (and their leaders) are confused." It is quite evident that, following the decisions of Synod 2025, many churches—including those supportive of the decisions and direction regarding matters related to sexuality and marriage—have had concerns, questions, and confusion about the implications and implementation of the changes to the Church Order Supplement on gravamina and the Covenant for Officebearers.

The following discussion examines lingering discrepancies in how gravamen-related terms such as "difficulty," "reservation," "doubt," and "conviction" are used across the Church Order, *Acts of Synod*, and in subsequent guidance, and this discussion demonstrates why these inconsistencies create uncertainty for councils charged with faithful discernment about when a disagreement may be weighty enough to require formal action.

A. *What is a personal difficulty that “rises to the weight of requiring a gravamen”?*  
The introduction to the article issued by the Office of General Secretary, “Guidance on ‘Affirming the Confessions’” (on [network.crcna.org](http://network.crcna.org); Oct. 1, 2025) acknowledges,

In some minds, the “full agreement” required by synodical regulations has set an impossibly high bar for church leaders who desire to uphold their calling to lead with integrity, humility, and submission to the Word of God and to our Reformed confessions. . . . The answer to the question about what it means to “affirm the doctrines in the confessions without reservation” requires some careful reflection on the meaning and purpose of our denominational covenants.

The article then points to several of the key phrases from the Covenant for Officebearers and its supplemental material before acknowledging that “Synod has not specified the relative weight to be given to those various phrases, so in many ways it falls to the local council (and classis, if there is need for further clarification) to discern how to balance the various aspects of confessional adherence in the local church,” and then later helpfully concludes that a council “has the authority to judge *whether* a given difficulty rises to the weight of requiring a gravamen.”

Thankfully, the wisdom offered in these posts has been useful, beneficial, and encouraging. Yet, since the discernment and decision-making about whether a potential officebearer has a difficulty must be done by the local council, it is imperative that the wording that has binding on the local council (i.e., Church Order and synodical decisions) not be inconsistent, unclear, and confusing when we have spent significant time and energy at recent synods seeking clarity on these very matters.

The “Guidance” article states, “The word ‘gravamen’ indicates a weighty, serious matter: in the words of synod, ‘a persistent serious doubt or a settled conviction’ (Supplement, Church Order Art. 5-a, A, 2).” Likewise, “In Search of Wisdom” echoes this when it states:

If these interactions [between council and potential officebearer] reveal that the difficulty is serious and persistent, or that they reflect a settled belief that the doctrine in our confessions is not a teaching of God’s Word, then synod asks that councils graciously and humbly continue to engage that person as a member of the congregation, but decline to permit that person to serve in ordained office.

This seems to be a correct way of reading Synod 2025’s amendments to the Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a (A, 2):

“Without reservation” means that an officebearer does not have—to the best of their knowledge—either a difficulty persistent serious doubt or held a settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions. (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 672)

This reading of the material reasonably sees that a “reservation” at least includes “a persistent serious doubt or a settled conviction” and might refer

to the same thing conceptually as a “difficulty.” Such an understanding also corresponds to Supplement, Article 5-b, B, 7 when referring to a confessional difficulty, stating that “an assembly may not merely acknowledge an officebearer’s *reservation* regarding a confession—it must work toward resolving it” (emphasis ours). The guidance to local councils, then, is that a “gravamen-worthy” difficulty is when the reservation rises to the weight of “a persistent serious doubt or a settled conviction.”

The problem is that the distinctions set forth at Synod 2024 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 870-71) as currently articulated in Church Order Supplement, Article 5-b, B, 7 explicitly state that “a confessional-difficulty gravamen is *not* a settled conviction contrary to the confessions themselves or to anything that holds confessional status” (emphasis ours). Similarly Supplement, Article 5-b, B, 2-a states that the council shall do the following:

Examine and judge the nature and extent of the difficulty in question and discern whether an officebearer has a sincere difficulty *or* a settled conviction contrary to the confessions better served by filing a confessional-revision gravamen. (emphasis ours)

This statement specifies that a “settled conviction” corresponds to “filing a confessional-revision gravamen,” and is therefore different from a “sincere difficulty” that may require a confessional-difficulty gravamen. The “Guidance” and “Wisdom” seem to focus on the meaning of a gravamen that reaches the confessional-revision level but conflate it with “difficulty.”

To add to the confusion, Church Order Supplement, Article 5-b, B, 7 supplies a definition that “this type of gravamen [confessional-difficulty] is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession,” which is also expressed in the Synod 2024 FAQ: “A confessional-difficulty gravamen is used by an officebearer to provide formal notice to their council about their difficulty with some aspect of the confessions. The process around gravamina then provides a way for officebearers to seek clarification” ([crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ](http://crcna.org/Synod2024FAQ)). Such a description of a confessional-difficulty gravamen as “information and/or clarification” does not carry much, if any, weightiness that would require a council to discern if that individual reservation/difficulty “rises to the weight of requiring” a gravamen. A mere request for information or clarification is also far different from the description in the Synod 2025 Advisory Committee 3 preamble that states, “A confessional-difficulty gravamen is not merely a note of discomfort or curiosity—it signifies a *genuine obstacle* in affirming the church’s doctrine” (emphasis ours, *Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 670). Would not a “note of . . . curiosity” be “a request for information and/or clarification,” which by the definition in Supplement, Article 5-b, B, 7 is a confessional-difficulty gravamen?

Finally, Synod 2025 also added Supplement, Article 5-b, A, 3, saying that when one signs the Covenant for Officebearers “without reservation,” that does not mean “that a signatory does not struggle emotionally with some doctrine” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 672). This is also more broadly expressed in

the Synod 2025 FAQ: “Synod clarified that there is a difference between a confessional difficulty and the wrestling, doubts, and concerns that officebearers often have in the course of ministry” (crcna.org/Synod2025FAQ). This too seems to go beyond “a personal request for information and/or clarification.”

This brief survey of communication about confessional-difficulty gravamen reveals that the current language of the Church Order Supplement still has not sufficiently articulated the expectations of officebearers when it comes to reservations, difficulties, disagreements, or concerns with one or more specific doctrines contained in our confessions. Using these various sources, some of which have authority and some which are only interpretations, we can identify three “levels” of what these written words say about when a reservation/difficulty “rises to the weight of requiring a gravamen”:

- may sign “without reservation” because it does not rise to the weight of any gravamen: doubt, honest wrestling, emotional struggle, discomfort, curiosity
- rises to the weight of a confessional-difficulty gravamen and cannot begin to serve as an officebearer: currently “a personal request for information and/or clarification”
- rises to the weight of a confessional-revision gravamen: settled conviction/persistent serious doubt

It seems quite inconsistent that a “personal request for information and/or clarification” is weightier than doubt, honest wrestling, emotional struggle, or discomfort, and that it is not at least similar to curiosity. It should not be surprising that, as currently articulated, these “levels” of difficulties require multiple external clarifications. What does a council do when presented with a potential officebearer who has their own individual difficulty about a specific doctrine contained in the confessions and who, as they read the wording in the Covenant for Officebearers with its explanations in the Church Order Supplement and these external online articles from the denomination, are not only confused but even grow frustrated? Both they and the council have to consult numerous sources, with admittedly apparent discrepancies, to attempt to discern whether their difficulty rises to the weight of a belief that disqualifies them from beginning to serve in office.

*B. When can a potential officebearer have a personal difficulty?*

Clarifying when a personal difficulty “rises to the weight of requiring” a confessional-difficulty gravamen further raises important questions about the assertion that such a difficulty arises only “subsequent to their ordination” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, guideline 1). Nearly all theological disagreements or reservations that would necessitate a confessional-difficulty gravamen emerge from prior church background, theological formation, teaching, study, and sustained reflection, rather than only after one begins serving in office. This is particularly the case for those in CRCNA

churches that serve multiethnic or ethnic-minority communities that necessitate having representative leadership in order to more effectively minister in culturally relevant, authentic, relatable, and empathetic ways that address the unique needs of that congregation and community.

The phrase, “Should we come to believe . . .” in the Covenant for Officebearers should not be understood as referring exclusively to something that must happen after ordination. Certainly, in practice, this has not been the assumption, as councils and potential officebearers routinely engage in discussions about theological views that may differ from the church’s teaching. More significantly, the 2012 revision of the Form of Subscription to the Covenant for Officebearers replaced “if in the future we come to have any difficulty with these doctrines . . .” with the broader, not explicitly time-oriented phrasing, “Should we come to believe. . .” As part of their reasoning for wording changes, the 2012 Revision Committee explained:

We increasingly realize that we are part of a broader body of Christ and are working toward greater unity with our brothers and sisters in various places and that our common creedal heritage connects us to a deep historical reality that gives strength and breadth to our witness of Jesus Christ in the world. (Agenda for Synod 2012, p. 456)

While, of course, this revision did not lower confessional expectations for officebearers, it did reframe confessional commitment in covenantal, relational terms and acknowledged that the CRCNA operates within the broader church and has been gifted with leaders whose theological formation occurred outside the Reformed tradition. The revised wording (“Should we come to believe . . .”), which removed “in the future,” no longer explicitly specified when a difficulty arises, at least allowing for the possibility that it occurs at any point, including before one begins serving in office. This does not and should not preclude ongoing theological formation before, during, and after one begins serving as an officebearer.

When Synod 2024 added the language “subsequent to their ordination, develops and then,” it also sought to ensure stronger confessional faithfulness. However, the effect of inserting this phrase unintentionally discourages potential officebearers from pursuing thorough exploration of the confessions prior to ordination. Since the present wording for a confessional-difficulty gravamen insists that a “request for information and/or clarification” automatically disqualifies one from beginning to serve as an officebearer, it has the unintended effect of encouraging potential officebearers to delay rigorous engagement with confessional teachings until after ordination, in order to leave the necessary room for difficulties to arise only in the future. Our concern is procedural distortion, not theological laxity.

Our Church Order processes and language ought to encourage, prioritize, and incentivize deep, robust, rigorous, and intellectually curious theological exploration by our officebearers, especially on the hard and controversial

doctrines. A framework that permits councils to address confessional-difficulty gravamina before officebearers begin serving aligns more faithfully with the nature of theological formation, supports robust confessional teaching, and restores the flexibility evident from the 2012 revision resulting in the Covenant for Officebearers. If we truly desire the strengthened teaching and learning of our confessions that recent synods have rightly insisted on—and that the Reformed tradition has historically valued—then in our present moment what is needed is not an appearance of unqualified agreement but the pastoral space to struggle with the doctrines contained in our confessions so that they can shine forth with the richness and beauty they truly have.

#### **IV. Possible scenarios**

Consider that a person in your church came to faith in Jesus and was raised, nurtured, and formed in a Baptist church where the gospel was faithfully preached; people were disciplined in community revolving around the Word, healthy relationships, and the celebration of the sacraments in gathered worship; and followers of Jesus were held accountable through pastorally careful discipline to live in obedience to Scripture. Later this person joined your Christian Reformed Church and grew deeply appreciative of its theology and the covenantal life of faith, actively serving as a trusted member of the congregation who demonstrated spiritual maturity, pastoral wisdom, and humble service. Many in the congregation, including current officebearers, recognized the gifts and biblical qualifications described in Scripture for elders and deacons.

When approached by the council to serve as an officebearer, this leader affirmed commitment to the Covenant for Officebearers and hearty support for the church's beliefs without any interest in advocating for or teaching any views to the contrary. The potential officebearer stated clear affirmation to uphold, promote, and defend the church's teachings and practices, including covenant baptism.

However, this individual questioned whether the confessional teaching that infants should also be baptized fully agrees with the Word of God. The individual's upbringing and faith formation instilled not only an intellectual framework for making the case for believers' baptism but also a love for the community of people convinced by that view, who faithfully trust and follow Jesus with their whole lives. This perspective has not been expressed as opposition or rejection but as a personal difficulty with a specific confessional doctrine. There has been no need to request more information or clarification about the confessions' teaching because the leader understands and can accurately explain the Reformed view on covenant baptism. The struggle is not with the church's teaching and practice of baptizing infants but with whether this personal view would be considered as saying that the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching that infants should also be baptized "is

not the teaching of God’s Word.” Throughout conversations about this matter, the individual has remained open, teachable, and enthusiastic to “seek a fuller understanding of the gospel” together with the council.

This leaves both the leader and the council facing significant questions:

- Does this unsettled conviction on baptism automatically disqualify a person from beginning to serve as an officebearer?
- Must the person assert that the CRCNA’s view is the only faithful way of interpreting and applying the Bible’s teaching on baptism, or is it sufficient for them to acknowledge that they can see how Reformed Christians draw these conclusions from Scripture?

Asserting that the confessions’ teaching on baptizing infants cannot be justifiably drawn from Scripture (i.e., “is not the teaching of God’s Word”) is much different from acknowledging that covenant baptism is a possible theological conclusion of faithful interpretation of the Bible and that there are others. There are different angles to saying one believes “that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God’s Word.” Holding the first view would rightly disqualify a person from serving as an officebearer in a confessional church, but does holding the second?

Now replace “covenant baptism” with “limited atonement,” “annihilationism,” “meticulous providence,” or any other of a myriad of possible individual theological views on the doctrines contained in the confessions that locate us within the larger body of Christ but are viewed differently by true Christian believers in other parts of the one single catholic or universal church.

What do we do when we face these various scenarios? How do we faithfully discern if a gifted leader is disqualified from beginning service as an officebearer when the language of Church Order and its Supplement is inconsistent and requires external explanation to address sincere questions of implementation?

The purpose of this illustration is not to have synod construct detailed parameters or parse out every key word but to demonstrate that there are still unclear challenges in the implementation of synod’s recent declarations that need to be resolved by synod and not only, or primarily, through online summaries and guidance, or even through preambles in the *Acts of Synod*.

We should clarify for local councils what determines when an individual reservation/difficulty regarding a specific teaching in the confessions rises to the weight of necessitating the filing of a confessional-difficulty gravamen or possibly a confessional-revision gravamen. In practice, councils are already discerning whether a personal difficulty is serious enough to limit service in office, but often they must do so apart from the wording of the Church Order Supplement, unfortunately sometimes even setting it aside or ignoring it. Aligning the wording in our procedures with the lived dis-

cernment of councils reinforces the corporate covenantal nature of Reformed governance and allows councils to act with integrity, consistency, and confidence.

## V. Overture

Classis Grand Rapids East therefore presents this overture to Synod 2026:

That synod adopt the following amendments to Supplement, Church Order Article 5-a and 5-a, B, 7 (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~) to clarify when a difficulty “rises to the weight” of a gravamen, to reduce any unintentional incentivizing of less-developed engagement with the confessions prior to ordination, and to have consistency with the description of a confessional-difficulty gravamen in both the Church Order Supplement and external explanations offered by the denomination:

Supplement, Article 5-a

*Guidelines and Regulations re Gravamina*

Synod declares that gravamina fall into two types:

1. *A confessional-difficulty gravamen:* a temporary gravamen in which an officebearer, ~~subsequent to their ordination, develops and then~~ expresses a weighty personal difficulty with a point of doctrine/teaching contained in the confessions but does not have a settled conviction contrary to and does not call for a revision of the confessions.

Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a, B. 7

7. In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall be handled with grace and truth. It shall not be open for discussion by the whole church, since this type of gravamen is a ~~personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. A confessional-difficulty gravamen is not~~ weighty personal difficulty, which may include a request for information and/or clarification of the confession but does not rise to the weight of a settled conviction contrary to the confessions themselves or to anything that holds confessional status.

*Grounds:*

- a. The CRCNA has been working on clarifying the proper extent and use of the two types of gravamina, which has resulted in misinterpretation at minimum and internal inconsistencies and discrepancies across the denomination. Following both Synod 2024 and Synod 2025, churches continue to need external explanation on what constitutes a confessional-difficulty gravamen and when it should be used.

- b. Various churches throughout the denomination have received different interpretations on whether they are in alignment with what synod has decided on these matters. Councils need a consistent message that is stated in the Church Order Supplement itself and not dependent on additional denominational explanations in person or in writing. This is especially the case for churches discerning their faithful next steps regarding how or whether they can live with integrity as part of the CRCNA.
- c. Including the term “weighty” in the description of this gravamen reflects its Latin root (to weigh down) and has been used in the Church Order Supplement in reference to other significant decisions regarding leadership in the CRCNA. This would aid councils in their consideration of when a difficulty is beyond “the wrestling, doubts, and concerns that officebearers often have in the course of ministry” (Synod 2025 FAQ).
- d. Striking the phrase “subsequent to their ordination, develops and then” restores the implicit broadening of theological space in the 2012 change from the Form of Subscription to the Covenant for Officebearers in the recognition that the CRCNA is only one part of the much bigger church and kingdom of God. God has gifted many of our congregations with people who have been taught, raised, and nurtured in non-Reformed Christian settings and have the giftings and qualifications required of officebearers. This is particularly necessary for churches whose leaders have been formed across multiple theological traditions and cultural environments, a reality increasingly common across the CRCNA.
- e. Replacing the confusing phrase “personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession” is essential in order to be consistent with Synod 2025’s declaration that a confessional difficulty is not a “note of . . . curiosity” and with denominational explanations that a confessional difficulty consists not merely of questions or wonderings about what is being taught.
- f. As the CRCNA continues to “seek a fuller understanding of the gospel” in following Jesus’ commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20) and strives to be a visible reflection of the universal church, the communion of saints, and a people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9), we are richer because of the ethnic-minority and multiethnic churches in our denomination. Our polity must coherently support the covenantal nature of confessional commitment without assuming a uniform path of theological formation. The practical effects of an unclear Church Order language on gravamen are not evenly distributed but fall with particular weight on ethnic-minority, multiethnic, and urban churches as they seek to faithfully discern the call of qualified leaders who are deeply committed to the church’s doctrine and mission and willing to be “formed and governed by them,” yet who may have unsettled, nonadversarial difficulties with particular confessional teach-

ings. While not all Christian Reformed churches will or can be multiethnic, our denomination must ensure that its polity can faithfully serve churches whose leaders were not formed in the same theological or cultural settings, so that they can thrive and serve with integrity as part of the denomination. Our procedures should not create unnecessary barriers that disproportionately affect churches seeking to call qualified leaders who reflect and represent the ethnic and cultural makeup of their communities and whose experiences, perspectives, and challenges correspond to those of the people they serve. Clearly articulated expectations in the Church Order Supplement itself foster faithful council discernment in precisely those contexts.

Classis Grand Rapids East  
Robert Arbogast, stated clerk

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## **OVERTURE 10**

### **Set Aside Time to Celebrate Retiring Ministers**

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2026 to set aside time during every synod, in coordination with the celebration of new candidates for ministry, to invite, recognize, give thanks for, and celebrate those retiring from ministry in the previous calendar year.

*Grounds:*

1. As every pastor begins their ministry at synod, with approval from the entire body representing the entire denomination, so it would be most appropriate to conclude full-time ministry at synod, with thanks from the entire body representing the entire denomination.
2. As important as it is to begin well, it is even more important to end well. A lifetime of ministry in devotion to Christ, his people, and the Christian Reformed Church is extremely significant and worth synod's time and effort.
3. As we are continually looking for more people to enter into ministry, it would be of significant encouragement and motivation to see those who have been in ministry honored and recognized for a lifetime of labor in Christ's church.
4. As we look for people to model and motivate people for ministry, it would be meaningful to honor and lift up people who have persevered faithfully, who flourished, who blessed many, and who ended well.
5. As we recognize candidates for ministry at synod, it would be most appropriate to recognize alongside them those retiring from ministry, seeing in real and palpable ways the baton of gospel proclamation being passed from generation to generation.

6. Though there may be some cost to inviting all retiring pastors to join synod for one morning if the body decides to supplement their travel and accommodation, after a lifetime of devoted service it is the least we could do as a denomination. Ministry can be difficult and come at great cost to pastor and family. For the church as a body to honor them in word and deed, in concrete and meaningful ways, publicly and formally, would show the entire church that we value the labor and sacrifices of her pastors and that this calling is noble and worthy of honoring.

Classis Heartland  
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 11

### **Appoint a Task Force to Amend Church Order Article 38**

#### **I. Background**

The Church Order has long required the attention and oversight of synodical deputies whenever classes make decisions about the ordination, resignation, separation, discipline, or reinstatement of a minister of the Word. Increasingly, as more churches rely on commissioned pastors for ministry, this attention is being extended to matters regarding them as well. This is important and good because the character, doctrine, and gifts of those to whom the churches entrust their ministry influences the broader church in many ways. Bringing ministers and pastors into the denomination concerns the whole church, releasing them is weighty and potentially harmful and ought to be done with careful attention to respect, dignity, and proper procedure. For these reasons, synodical deputies are asked to concur in the deliberations of classes concerning these matters.

However, no synodical attention is given to the affiliation or disaffiliation and the organization or disbanding of congregations, which arguably affect the broader church in just as many, if not more, ways. It is our conviction that the movement of congregations into or out of the denomination also concerns the whole church and therefore merits the attention and concurrence of synodical deputies.

This has not been the historical practice of the denomination, but this is not surprising. When Article 38 of the Church Order was formulated, it was a different time. The movement of organized congregations into or out of the denomination was incredibly rare. The emergence and organization of church plants was generally predictable—the result of family growth and immigration, rather than evangelism or discipleship of the unchurched.

Today the church faces a new reality. Most classes in the denomination have faced at least the possibility of overseeing church closures or disaffiliations, sometimes facing challenging questions about the distribution and

ownership of assets and property. At the same time, many classes are fielding inquiries from established congregations exploring possible affiliation with the CRCNA. Many classes have had difficult conversations about how or whether to organize church plants that have not made the Reformed tradition central to their ministry or identity. In all of these conversations and deliberations, there is great potential for harm but also wonderful opportunity for the church to model the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These are common realities across the denomination, matters that concern the churches in common.

Synodical deputies are appointed by the classes and approved by synod precisely to attend to matters that concern the churches in common. For these reasons we believe it is time to review the Church Order to require the involvement of synodical deputies in matters concerning the organization, affiliation, disaffiliation, and disbanding of congregations within the CRCNA. Most of these changes will require modifications to Article 38 of the Church Order, but because of the complexity and interrelatedness of the Church Order and the significance and sensitivity of these changes, we recommend that synod appoint a task force to make recommended changes to the Church Order.

## **II. Overture**

Classis Muskegon overtures synod to appoint a task force to amend the Church Order to require synodical-deputy oversight for the organization, affiliation, disaffiliation, and disbanding of congregations within the CRCNA.

*Ground:* The congregations that make up the CRCNA are as important to the overall denomination as are individual ministers.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

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## **OVERTURE 12**

### **Remove Mention of Contemporary Testimony from the Covenant for Officebearers**

#### **I. Preamble**

Church Order Article 31 states: “A request for revision of a decision shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented.”

We believe such grounds now exist. Since the adoption of the Covenant for Officebearers in 2012, the inclusion mentioning Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony has resulted in ongoing—though unintended—ambiguity regarding its doctrinal weight and the expectations

placed upon officebearers. This ambiguity has become more evident over time, including, for example, the rationale of an overture to Synod 2025 proposing the addition of the Belhar Confession to the Covenant for Officebearers.

Because synod alone has authority to revise the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order, Art. 28–29), and because the presence of Our World Belongs to God has created uncertainty that is inconsistent with Reformed confessional subscription, we request that synod act specifically to remove the mention of Our World Belongs to God from the Covenant for Officebearers and to clarify that contemporary testimonies are nonbinding and devotional in nature.

## II. Background

In 2012, synod replaced the Form of Subscription with the Covenant for Officebearers to express confessional commitment in contemporary language (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 761–64). As part of this change, the mention of Our World Belongs to God was included because it is a document that “forms and guides us in our present context.”

At Synod 2025, an overture argued that the Belhar Confession should be added to the Covenant for Officebearers on the grounds that Our World Belongs to God—also a contemporary testimony—was already included (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 356–57). While synod declined that request (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 652–53), the reasoning of the overture revealed that the presence of Our World Belongs to God in the Covenant for Officebearers has produced ongoing uncertainty about the status and authority of contemporary testimonies.

Over the past decade, the broader and more pastoral tone of the Covenant for Officebearers, combined with the inclusion of the name of a contemporary testimony, has led to differing understandings of how the Covenant for Officebearers relates to confessional subscription within the CRCNA. Removing the mention of this contemporary testimony will add clarity to the Covenant for Officebearers.

## III. Overture

Classis Georgetown overtures Synod 2026 to do the following:

A. Amend the Covenant for Officebearers to remove the mention of Our World Belongs to God, thereby removing reference to contemporary testimonies from the covenant altogether. The covenant would be amended as follows (deletions indicated by ~~strikethrough~~):

### **Supplement, Article 5-a**

*Covenant for Officebearers*

*[paragraphs 1–4 unchanged]*

~~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.~~

*[remaining paragraphs unchanged]*

B. Affirm that the Covenant for Officebearers shall reference only the creeds and confessions (Three Forms of Unity) as doctrinal standards for subscription, and that contemporary testimonies, statements, or contextual documents shall not be added to the Covenant for Officebearers in the future.

*Grounds:*

1. Confessional documents bind; testimonies inspire.

The Covenant for Officebearers should be reserved for subscription to the creeds and Three Forms of Unity, which are the church's doctrinal standards. Contemporary testimonies may remain useful pastorally and/or devotionally, but they should not function as part of a subscription covenant.

Synod 2025 said that *confessional interpretations* require officebearers to agree that those doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. This was differentiated from the *doctrinal applications* category, which includes contemporary testimonies (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 690-91). Testimonies that allow for discernment to be applied locally should not be included among statements of affirmation from all officebearers.

2. The inclusion of Our World Belongs to God in the Covenant for Officebearers has created a hybrid doctrinal category, leading to ambiguity about what binds the conscience of officebearers.

Describing Our World Belongs to God as a document that “forms and guides us” has resulted in inconsistent assumptions about its authority. Synod has previously rejected hybrid doctrinal categories—most notably in the Belhar process—and should do so again for the sake of clarity and unity.

3. The Three Forms of Unity, alongside the ecumenical creeds, remain sufficient as *Repetitio Sacrae Scripturae*.

These confessions provide the enduring, faithful summary of Scripture necessary for confessional subscription. Removing contemporary testimonies from the Covenant for Officebearers preserves this historic Reformed foundation.

Classis Georgetown  
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

## Church Order Changes Pertaining to Classis Red Mesa

### I. Background

The Church Order of the CRCNA has a couple of article supplements pertaining to Classis Red Mesa that have become irrelevant. The stipulations of Supplement, Article 4-a have become more standard in the CRCNA, and the parameters of Article 7 have largely shifted to applications of Article 23. On the other hand, Supplement, Article 40-a allows Classis Red Mesa councils to delegate any combination of officebearers to classis meetings if a minister, elder, or deacon is not available. Classis Red Mesa believes this allowance should remain standing, along with that of Supplement, Article 40-c, which allows Classis Red Mesa to select any officebearer to preside over a classis meeting.

### II. Overture

Classis Red Mesa overtures synod to remove the supplements to Church Order Articles 4 and 7 that pertain to Classis Red Mesa, but to maintain Supplement, Article 40-a and -c as written (deletions indicated by strikethrough).

Supplement, Article 4-a

*Modification for Churches of Classis Red Mesa*

~~In calling to an office, the council shall present to the congregation a nomination of one or more persons for each position to be filled.~~

*(Acts of Synod 1983, p. 660)*

*Use of Lot in Elections*

The use of the lot in the election of officebearers is permitted when a congregational vote is part of the process.

*(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 609)*

Supplement, Article 7

*[sections A-B remain unchanged]*

~~C. Special Advice for Classis Red Mesa~~

- ~~1. That the following be the method by which the ordination of native workers is to be effected:
  - ~~a. That capable persons, who feel the call to the gospel ministry, be encouraged to pursue the regular course of study for ordination.~~
  - ~~b. That those who are not able to pursue that course, and who possess exceptional gifts, be advised to seek ordination under the pattern prescribed by Article 7 of the Church Order, and make known their desire to their council, the classis, and the Candidacy Committee.~~~~

- ~~2. For those seeking ordination by way of Article 7 of the Church Order, the following procedure is recommended:~~
- ~~a. The written credentials of the council and the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team concerning the required qualifications stated in Article 7 are to be forwarded to the Candidacy Committee.~~
  - ~~b. Upon receipt of application, together with the recommendation of the council and the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team, the Candidacy Committee shall determine whether it considers the applicant eligible for further consideration to become ordained under Article 7.~~
  - ~~c. If the preliminary judgment is favorable, the Candidacy Committee is authorized to issue the applicant a preaching license so that the applicant can preach at several of the churches in the classis.~~
  - ~~d. All other procedures of the Candidacy Committee (as approved by Synod 2006) shall apply.~~
  - ~~e. The examination for ordination follows later according to existing rules, except in the classical languages.~~

*(Adapted from Acts of Synod 1958, pp. 87-88)*  
*(Acts of Synod 2006, p. 663)*

Classis Red Mesa  
John Greydanus, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 14

### **Establish a Standing Committee to Advise the COD and Synod on Church Order Matters**

#### **I. Background**

The Church Order presents the common wisdom of the church for regulating all ecclesiastical affairs “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). Article 47 of the Church Order states, “No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of proposed changes.” Nevertheless, every year, changes are made to the Church Order and Its Supplements. Sometimes these changes are directly from overtures or agency reports released in the *Agenda for Synod*. But often these changes are compromises formulated by advisory committees which have not appeared before the churches in any way. This has led to a Church Order that feels

less and less coherent, as articles are modified in isolation without attention to the broader unity of the Church Order.

It has been over sixty years since the last *comprehensive* review of the Church Order. The most recent Church Order Review Task Force, which reported to synod in 2024, was focused on only specific sections of the Church Order. Specifically their work was focused on the articles related to the ordination and supervision of ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors. To illustrate the importance of the committee we propose, Synod 2024 approved two conflicting changes to Supplement, Church Order Article 15, one from recommendations adopted by Synod 2023 in support of bivocational pastors (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 54-55; see *Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 306-8, and *Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 963-64) and the other from the Council of Delegates in relation to pensions (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 623-24), which had to be resolved by denominational staff before implementation (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 35).

Synod in the past has established permanent standing committees for the tasks listed in Article 47. Committees for Bible translations, liturgical forms, hymnals, and revisions or translations of the creeds and confessions have existed in various forms throughout the history of our denomination. It is our perspective that the church is well served by the *permanence* of these committees. A standing Liturgical Committee was approved by synod in 1964 (*Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 60) but was eventually placed under the authority of the CRC Publications Board and disbanded by the publications staff after the year 2000 (*Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 683-84; *Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 488). A standing Bible Translations Committee was established by synod in 1969; it was dissolved in 1982, and another was reestablished by Synod 2018 in response to an overture (*Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 49-50; *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 70; *Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 764). Our stewardship of these committees is vital for synod's faithful and consistent attention to the tasks delineated in Article 47.

## II. Overture

Classis Muskegon overtures synod to establish a permanent standing committee on Church Order, which shall advise our denomination and its congregations on recommended changes to the Church Order, with special attention to the unity and consistency of the Church Order in the rapidly changing ministry context of the CRCNA.

### *Grounds:*

1. Article 47 clearly assigns the stewardship of the Church Order to synod and emphasizes caution and deliberation in adopting changes.
2. Many changes to the Church Order in recent years were changes proposed by advisory committees to synod, which the broader church had no prior opportunity to consider before they went into effect.

3. The rapid adoption of changes to the Church Order has led to a fragmented and confusing Church Order that many councils feel ill-equipped to navigate.
4. In 2024, synod adopted contradictory changes to the Church Order Supplement that caused confusion and unnecessary expense.
5. The church is well-served by permanent standing committees that devote their attention to the ecclesiastical tasks of synod.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 15

### **Require the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees and Faculty to Sign a Covenant of Confessional Commitment**

#### **I. Background**

Legitimate questions have arisen about the strength of Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS)'s commitment to our Reformed creeds and confessions. Between Synod 2022 and Synod 2024, some CTS faculty and staff were opposed to the Christian Reformed Church's (CRC) confessional teaching on human sexuality. Following Synod 2024's clarification of what it means for officebearers to subscribe to the confessions "without reservation," some of these faculty and staff left the seminary, whereas others simply transferred their membership and ordination to the Reformed Church in America (RCA).

Due in part to these circumstances, Synod 2024 instructed the CTS Board of Trustees (BOT) as well as other denominational boards "to review and revise, as needed, their gravamina policies (e.g., exceptions) related to the decision of Synod 2024 and report on their actions to Synod 2025" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 880). It is important to note that Synod 2024 gave this instruction to the BOT despite the BOT's having submitted to synod "A Statement on Our Confessional Commitment by the CTS Faculty." Synod 2024 noted this statement as a "good faith response" but was clearly not satisfied (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 809).

In their report to Synod 2025, the BOT reported that CTS has not had a gravamina policy, nor have they had a process of noting "exceptions" since 1991, when synod created separate boards for Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. The BOT also pointed Synod 2025 back to its earlier 2024 statement regarding the faculty's confessional commitment. While grateful for the BOT's fulfillment of its 2024 mandate, many delegates at Synod 2025 remained concerned about the ambiguous nature of the seminary's confessional commitment. Accordingly, Synod 2025 instructed the

BOT to “provide information to Synod 2026 as to the adherence of all instructional personnel to the CRC’s teachings, especially the creeds and confessions,” noting in the grounds the concern about the confessional “commitment of regularly appointed teaching faculty” as well as “those serving in other teaching roles” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 691-92).

A review of the CTS Faculty Handbook (i.e., the rules and procedures governing faculty standards, hiring, and discipline) reveals that Synod 2024’s and Synod 2025’s concerns about the seminary’s confessional commitment are well founded. While other confessionally Reformed seminaries have adopted the practice of requiring their faculty to subscribe to Reformed confessions, CTS does not officially require its faculty to subscribe at any time. (Reformed seminaries in the United States that require faculty subscription—sometimes both annually and in writing—include Covenant Theological Seminary; Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Mid-America Reformed Seminary; Reformed Theological Seminary; Westminster Theological Seminary, California; and Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.)

Presumably, this lack of a faculty requirement to subscribe to the confessions reflects a time when all CTS faculty were ministers of the Word in the CRC. As a result, it was assumed that those with faculty status would have signed the Covenant for Officebearers with their local council and have signed according to the CRC’s understanding of subscription (see Church Order, Art. 5). Today, however, the Faculty Handbook merely states that CTS faculty will “ordinarily . . . be ordained within the Christian Reformed Church . . .” (section 1.2). Therefore, confessional subscription is not a requirement to hold faculty status at CTS. Instead, people with faculty status are only required to profess a vague “commit[ment] to the Reformed confessions” (section 1.2).

This lack of a requirement for those with faculty status to subscribe to the confessions undermines other portions of the Faculty Handbook, which once provided a means for dismissing heterodox faculty. According to the Faculty Handbook, “Grounds for dismissal of a faculty member shall include . . . [a] clear contradiction (by conduct or through teaching) of the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church to which faculty members subscribe . . .” (section 1.8). As already explained, however, faculty members are not required to subscribe to the CRC’s doctrinal standards. And even if a faculty member had at one time subscribed to the CRC’s doctrinal standards, their subscription would be nullified by transferring their ministerial credentials to the RCA (as some current CTS faculty have done).

This ambiguity of the seminary’s commitment to the confessions is compounded by its giving faculty status to people who not only are not required to subscribe to the confessions but are also not required to have a synodical interview. Currently, this category includes the dean of students, the dean of international students, the director of distance learning, the theological librarians, all term-contract professors, all lecturers, all ministry

partner professors, and the Huizinga missionary-in-residence. These individuals are permitted to influence the outcome of faculty meetings (i.e., the chief means of seminary self-government) by their participation in the meeting's deliberative process, including, in some cases, by having the privilege of voting. These individuals are also permitted to serve on faculty committees, including tenure-track faculty search committees, and on the Faculty Status and Development Committee, one of the seminary's most powerful committees, which (among many other things) is responsible for ensuring that "CTS faculty possess a firm Christian commitment and way of life . . ." (section 6.4).

Some may argue that the BOT's "Statement on our Confessional Commitment" (submitted to Synods 2024 and 2025) should allay our concerns about the strength of the seminary's confessionalism. Yet there are good reasons why this statement has proven repeatedly unconvincing. First, the statement was written and adopted prior to Synod 2024's clarification of what it means for officebearers to subscribe to the confessions "without reservation." Accordingly, when the statement says that the CTS Faculty are "committed to the Covenant for Officebearers" the nature of that commitment is unclear. In fact, given that some of the faculty were opposed to the CRC's confessional teaching on human sexuality at the time the statement was written, we can confidently say that, for some faculty, the word "commitment" did not mean what many delegates at Synods 2024 and 2025 thought it should mean.

Second, the statement's second paragraph is worded in such a way as to allow for different interpretations. According to the statement, "[the Faculty] profess the teachings of Scripture summarized by the Reformed confessions as interpreted by the decisions of synod." This assertion can be interpreted in more than one way. On the one hand, the statement could mean that the faculty affirm "without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions [as interpreted by synod] as being doctrines taught in the Word of God" (Church Order, Supplement, Art. 5-a). This would mean (among other things) that all those with faculty status in 2023 agreed that same-sex sexual relationships are contrary to God's law. On the other hand, the statement could be interpreted to mean that the faculty profess only those teachings in the Reformed confessions (as interpreted by synod) that are the teaching of God's Word. This second interpretation leaves open the possibility that there are some teachings in the confessions (as interpreted by synod) that a faculty member does not profess, because the faculty member does not believe that what the confessions teach (as interpreted by synod) is the teaching of God's Word.

As already indicated, it is our estimation that this second way of interpreting the faculty's statement is the correct one. Again we note that, following Synod 2024's clarification of what it means for officebearers to subscribe to the confessions "without reservation," some of those with faculty status either left the seminary or transferred their ministerial credentials to the RCA.

This strongly suggests that some of the faculty who endorsed the CTS “Statement on our Confessional Commitment” in 2023 did so only because it did not require them to profess “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions [as interpreted by synod] as being doctrines taught in the Word of God” (Church Order, Supplement, Art. 5-a).

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the damage that the seminary’s confessional ambiguity is having on its reputation in our denomination. According to the BOT’s handbook, CTS’s vision is that it would be “readily trusted for counsel within the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and naturally chosen by Christian Reformed students and others for graduate professional ministry preparation” (Board Handbook, p. 5). Instead, potential Christian Reformed students are being encouraged to attend other Reformed seminaries, because those seminaries have a clearer confessional commitment to our understanding of Scripture. For some students, the decision to attend CTS is ultimately made not because of their confidence in the institution but because they do not want to pay the financial penalty that non-CTS graduates must pay to become candidates for ministry.

## **II. Overture**

Therefore, Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2026 to instruct the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees as follows:

- A. to require all trustees, all regular teaching faculty, and all persons with the privilege of attending faculty meetings to subscribe annually, in writing, to the following Covenant of Confessional Commitment (adapted from the CRCNA Covenant for Officebearers; Church Order, Supplement, Art. 5-a):

### **Covenant of Confessional Commitment**

We, [the undersigned], believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God’s creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God’s Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend

their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

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.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary. If the Board of Trustees asks, we will give a full explanation of our views.

Further, we promise to submit to the Board of Trustees' judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

B. to instruct the faculty as follows:

1. to update the Faculty Handbook to reflect the above requirement.
2. to develop a process for the resolution of confessional difficulties among those with faculty status that substantially mirrors Church Order, Supplement, Article 5.

This process should be time limited and lead either to the resolution of the faculty member's difficulty or to their dismissal from the seminary.

C. to report back to Synod 2027 on the seminary's progress in fulfilling these instructions.

*Grounds:*

1. Church Order Article 19 says, "The churches shall maintain a theological seminary at which persons are trained for the ministry of the Word. The seminary shall be governed by synod through a board of trustees appointed by synod and responsible to it."
2. Church Order, Article 20, states, "The task of the ministers of the Word who are appointed as professors of theology is to . . . vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors." "Sound doctrine" includes all the doctrines contained in the CRCNA's creeds and confessions.
3. Requiring all trustees, all regular faculty members, and all persons with the privilege of attending faculty meetings to sign the Covenant addresses concerns about CTS's confessional commitments.

4. All members of the Board of Trustees, all regular faculty members, and all persons with the privilege of influencing faculty decisions by their attendance and/or vote at faculty meetings should be aligned with the confessional commitments of our denomination.
5. Our churches and seminary students deserve to know beyond a reasonable doubt that our seminary faculty and faculty administration are aligned with the confessional commitments of our denomination.
6. Signing the proposed Covenant brings CTS into alignment with the standard practice of confessionally Reformed seminaries in our context.

Classis Illiana  
Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 16

### **Require Full Confessional Alignment for Faculty at Calvin University**

#### **I. Background**

Synod 2024 processed several overtures asking that officebearers, board members, and institutional faculty not be allowed to take exceptions to our confessions. Some of them had asked that those who were unable to personally agree with our confessional beliefs would be required to resign from their position or be removed. In answer to these overtures, synod instructed all agencies and institutions to revise their gravamina policies and report back to Synod 2025 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 880). Further, synod instructed the Calvin University Board of Trustees to “define the differences in Calvin’s use of ‘confessional difficulties’ in relation to the decisions of synod concerning gravamina and to develop language and processes in alignment with those in the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 882). To be “in alignment” should mean that the university has a similar process to the Church Order Article 5 supplemental material pertaining to officebearers. That process allows for personal difficulties but not settled convictions that are contrary to the confessions. The signatory promises that they affirm our doctrines “without reservation.” The process calls for a resolution to the difficulty with either full affirmation of the confessions, submission of a confessional-revision gravamen, or resignation from office.

Calvin University (CU) reported to Synod 2025 a revised confessional framework related to confessional subscription (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 167-73). At the time of hiring, faculty need not affirm our three confessions but only the three creeds. They must agree to align personal and professional conduct with the positions of the CRCNA. Upon a three-year re-appointment, faculty are then required to sign the Covenant for Faculty Members and must submit in writing any confessional-difficulty gravamen. Upon evaluation, the Board of Trustees (BOT) is allowed to determine

whether or not the difficulty is either disqualifying for further employment or whether it leads to a two- to three-year period of discernment and mentoring. Upon the six-year reappointment, any faculty member with a confessional-difficulty gravamen may then submit a confessional-exception gravamen. This exception may be deemed by the BOT as either disqualifying or permitted. At the end of this process, then, the BOT is permitted to grant indefinite exceptions to our confessions or synodical interpretations.

In response to these reports, Synod 2025 affirmed CU in their work to respond to the Synod 2024 request but also instructed them to further define “indefinite exceptions” to confessional subscription for faculty and the reasons that these may be granted (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613). While this process is a good start, it does not adequately answer synod’s instruction to be in alignment with the process of the CRC. All officebearers sign the Covenant for Officebearers immediately upon ordination, while faculty members wait three years. Officebearers are not allowed exceptions, and any confessional difficulties must be resolved after three years. On the other hand, Calvin University is allowed what is called a “confessional exception gravamen.”

## II. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2026 to instruct the Calvin University Board of Trustees to do the following:

- A. Require all faculty, including those newly appointed, to subscribe to the Covenant for Faculty Members.
- B. Not permit any exceptions to our confessions for faculty at any time of their service to CU unless the CU BOT has been granted an exception by synod in any particular confessional area.

### *Grounds:*

1. These requirements would bring the university into alignment with the Church Order Article 5 process of confessional subscription as instructed by synod.
2. Academic freedom for Christian institutions is subject to the authority of the Word of God, as interpreted through the Reformed Confessions.
3. Synod has asserted that the church “does indeed adequately and directly supervise and operate the College” (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 97).
4. The church has a vested interest in maintaining the biblical and confessional character of institutions of higher learning, since both work together to “instruct the youth in the Scriptures and in the creeds and the confessions of the church” (Church Order, Art. 63-b).

Classis Illiana  
Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk

## **Require Full Confessional Alignment for Trustees at Calvin University**

### **I. Background**

Synod 2024 processed several overtures asking, among other things, that board members of denominational institutions not be allowed to take exceptions to our confessions. Some of them had asked that those who were unable to personally agree with our confessional beliefs would be required to resign from their position or be removed. In answer to these overtures, synod instructed all agencies and institutions to revise their gravamina policies and report back to Synod 2025 (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 880). Further, synod instructed the Calvin University Board of Trustees to “define the differences in Calvin’s use of ‘confessional difficulties’ in relation to the decisions of synod concerning gravamina and to develop language and processes in alignment with those in the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 882). To be “in alignment” should mean that the university and its board has a similar process to the Church Order Article 5 supplemental material pertaining to officebearers. That process allows for personal difficulties but not settled convictions that are contrary to the confessions. The signatory promises that they affirm our doctrines “without reservation.” The process calls for a resolution to the difficulty with either full affirmation of the confessions, submission of a confessional-revision gravamen, or resignation from office.

Calvin University (CU) reported to Synod 2025 a revised confessional framework related to confessional subscription (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 167-73). CU offered a two-tiered alignment model for its Board of Trustees (BOT). Classis region trustees are required to hold full convictional alignment but at-large and alumni trustees are not (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 164). Current CU board makeup is as follows:

- Regional trustees: 6 regions, 10 regional at-large, 16 total
- Alumni trustees: 3
- At-large trustees: 12

This means that under the current two-tiered alignment model, 16 members of the BOT are required to be confessionally aligned and 15 are not. At synod, incoming board chair Perrin Rynders said that at the time 28 (out of 31 total) board members were confessionally aligned, and that recently all new board members were. Even though he expressed the desire to have more than just a “bare majority,” it would be more effective to require all board members to fully agree, especially when they direct the Christian and Reformed direction for the university.

In response to these reports, Synod 2025 affirmed CU in their work to respond to the Synod 2024 request but also instructed the CU BOT to “consider a higher level than a simple majority of confessional alignment” for trustees (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 613). While this process is a good start, it does not adequately answer synod’s instruction to be in alignment with the

process of the CRC. Officebearers are not allowed to enter into office with exceptions, but trustees have no requirement to be confessionally aligned without exception. Even professing members of the CRC testify that they sincerely believe in the doctrines of the church (Form for Profession of Faith, 1932). Their public profession of faith “includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church” (Church Order, Art. 59-b). Should not all trustees, who are not required to be officebearers or even members of the Christian Reformed Church, profess the same doctrines that we heartily believe?

## II. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2026 to instruct the Calvin University Board of Trustees to do the following:

- A. Require all Board of Trustees members to subscribe annually to the Covenant for Faculty Members without exceptions.
- B. Reduce or eliminate at-large delegates to have more representation from the churches.

### *Grounds:*

1. These requirements would bring CU trustees into alignment with the Church Order Article 5 process of confessional subscription as instructed by synod.
2. Synod has asserted that the church “does indeed adequately and directly supervise and operate the College” (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 97).
3. The church has a vested interest in maintaining the biblical and confessional character of institutions of higher learning, since both work together to “instruct the youth in the Scriptures and in the creeds and the confessions of the church” (Church Order, Art. 63-b).

Classis Illiana  
Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 18

### **Proactively Articulate Qualities Desired in Our Next Seminary President**

#### **I. Background**

On November 25, 2025, the Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) president, Julius Medenblik, announced his plan to retire at the end of the 2026-2027 academic year. That same day, the CTS Board of Trustees chair, Rev. Scott Greenway, announced that the board intends to appoint a transition team and a search committee to identify the person of God’s choosing to serve as the next president of Calvin Theological Seminary.

Since our Church Order states that the seminary is governed by synod and that the CTS Board of Trustees is responsible to synod (Art. 19), synod should proactively articulate some of the key qualities that it desires to have in the next president of our seminary.

## II. Overture

Classis Georgetown overtures Synod 2026 to instruct the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees to identify a presidential candidate who meets the following description:

- A. Will focus the seminary's attention on training and equipping students to become pastors in local churches.

*Grounds:*

1. The purpose of our seminary as articulated in Church Order Article 19 is to train students for the ministry of the Word.
2. Our denomination has a number of vacant churches that need their pulpits filled by well-trained ministers of the Word.

- B. Will be a leading voice in publicly vindicating sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

*Ground:* Church Order Article 20 states that one of the duties of the seminary faculty is to "vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors." It is critical that the seminary president leads, encourages, and galvanizes the faculty in this task.

- C. Is an ordained and experienced minister of the Word with a well-known reputation for faithfully expounding the Word of God.

*Grounds:*

1. An ordained and experienced minister of the Word should lead the institution that trains future ministers of the Word.
2. A stated task for our seminary faculty is to "expound the Word of God" (Church Order Article 20), and this ability should be found in and regularly exercised by our next president.

- D. Has a well-known reputation for godliness.

*Ground:* The Scriptures stress the importance of godliness in church leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), as does our Church Order (Art. 10-b).

- E. Wholeheartedly affirms the authority, sufficiency, inerrancy, and clarity of the Word of God without compromise in accordance with Belgic Confession Articles 5-7 and Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21.

*Ground:* Having a president with a high view of Scripture is vital in a secular, skeptical, and post-Christian age. Our seminary will continue to receive students who will need to be shown that the Word of God is reliable and can be taught and preached with confidence.

Classis Georgetown  
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

## **Amend Church Order to Include Prayer in Description of Ministerial Calling**

### **I. Background**

A praying church is not just a church that prays. Everything changes when seeking God's presence and discerning the Spirit's leading become the foundation for ministry. Prayer, then, is not the only thing the church does but the *first and continual* thing the church does.

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 116 states that "prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us."

Prayer should be the foundation of gospel witness and mission. Prayer should be the foundation of the study and presentation of the Word. These are as true of us today as they were for Jesus and Paul.

Gordon Fee, in his book *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (p. 147) says it this way:

What is clear from Paul's letters is that he was a *pray-er* before he was a missionary or a thinker. His life was devoted to prayer, and his relationship with his converts was primarily sustained by way of thanksgiving and prayer. To eliminate prayer from Paul's personal piety would be to investigate the workings of a gas-combustion engine without recognizing the significance of oil. Paul did not simply believe in prayer or talk about prayer. He prayed, regularly and continuously, and urged the same on his churches (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

The priority of prayer is demonstrated for us in the ministry of Jesus as he regularly steps aside from ministry to commune with the Father. In Paul's ministry, he repeatedly writes to the many churches that he prays for them and urges the churches to do the same (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

If that is how Jesus and Paul prayed, then we should recognize our dependence upon God through prayer and make clear that this should be the first and continual thing that the pastors in the Christian Reformed Church do as well.

### **II. Overture**

Classis Northern Illinois overtures Synod 2026 to amend the Church Order Articles 11, 12-a, and 25-b (with additions indicated by underline):

#### *Article 11*

The calling of a minister of the Word is to be devoted to prayer, to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up.

#### *Article 12-a*

- a. A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall pray, preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public

worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service. The minister, with other officebearers, shall supervise the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, see to it that everything is done decently and in order, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism and diaconal outreach.

*Article 25-b*

- b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall pray for the congregation, shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall provide counsel and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. As shepherds of the church, they shall encourage and support the members in their Christian life. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord's Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

*Grounds:*

1. Biblical precedent

In the beginning of the life of the church, when the disciples were increasingly pressured from busier ministry, they focused on their responsibilities: they devoted themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). It is the calling of pastors and leaders today to do the same.

2. Historical precedent

The original Dort Church Order, Article 16, used in the CRC before 1965, included prayer as part of the description of the calling and responsibility of the minister:

The office of the Minister is to continue in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, to dispense the Sacraments, to watch over his brethren, the Elders and Deacons, as well and the Congregation, and finally, with the Elders, to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

3. Pastoral expectation

The primacy of prayer has been an expectation for pastors in the ordination forms for the minister of the Word.

The 1959 ordination form states:

It is the office of the ministers publicly to call upon the Name of God in behalf of the whole congregation; for what the apostles say in Acts 6:4, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word," these pastors have in common with the apostles; to which St. Paul alludes what he speaks thus to Timothy: I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and

all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

The Form for the Ordination/Installation of Ministers (1986) states:

In all this work, the minister proclaims, explains, and applies Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ. For this work, the minister devotes himself to the ministry of prayer, joining all Christians in confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

Classis Northern Illinois  
Wendy Haack, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 20

### **Update the Vision and Mission Statements of the CRCNA**

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2026 to replace the denomination's current vision and mission statements:

#### **Current Statements**

##### *Our Vision*

The Christian Reformed Church is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.

##### *Our Mission*

As people called by God,

We gather to praise God, listen to him, and respond.

We nurture each other in faith and obedience to Christ.

We love and care for one another as God's people.

We commit ourselves to serve and to tell others about Jesus.

We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life.

#### **Proposed Replacements**

##### *Our Vision*

The Christian Reformed Church seeks to be individual congregations covenanted together in a combined effort to make disciples by baptizing them into the name of the triune God and teaching them to obey all that Jesus Christ commanded. We are unified by our commitment to God's Word as it is summarized by our Three Forms of Unity—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort—in order that we may proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God.

### *Our Mission*

To equip and support member congregations in fulfilling the Great Commission according to the means God has ordained: the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them, and the practice of church discipline, each as governed by the Word of God.

The CRCNA fulfills this mission through agencies and ministries that serve and strengthen the local congregations and classes by leveraging and enhancing our combined efforts.

#### *Grounds:*

1. The current vision statement relies on broad, abstract language that does not adequately define the CRCNA or explain our purpose or vision. This statement mentions nothing of Christ, the mission he gave his church, or the CRCNA's confessional commitment. Terms like "diverse family," "healthy," and "transforms" are vague and could be interpreted in a variety of ways. As a result, it offers little doctrinal or missional clarity to unify the denomination or direct its ministry with biblical precision.
2. The proposed vision statement offers greater biblical, Christ-centered, and confessional clarity by rooting the identity and vision of our denomination explicitly in the Great Commission and in our shared commitment to God's Word as summarized by the Three Forms of Unity. Denominational agencies and ministries, which are not explicitly referenced in the proposed vision statement, remain essential to the life and mission of the church. They find their place in the mission statement that follows, which focuses on what we do in service of the congregations and their calling. This distinction preserves the primacy of the local church while affirming that shared ministries exist to support, extend, and coordinate the work Christ has given to his church.
3. The current mission statement, while pastorally warm and biblically resonant, relies on broad and generic language that lacks clear ecclesiastical, confessional, and Christ-centered definition. It does not objectively describe the ordinary means Christ has given his church to carry out its calling; nor does it provide a biblical or confessional standard by which faithfulness or success may be discerned. As a result, the statement functions more as a vague description of Christian life than as a mission statement for a Reformed denomination.
4. The proposed mission statement clearly defines both the denomination's purpose and the standard by which its faithfulness may be assessed by rooting its work in the biblical and confessional marks of the church. It establishes an objective focus on the ordinary means Christ has given for the building up of his church (preaching, sacraments, and discipline) while rightly identifying repentance, faith, and obedience as the fruit God ordinarily brings through them.

The mission statement communicates what the denomination does (equip and support member congregations) and how this mission is accomplished (through agencies and ministries that serve and strengthen the local congregations and classes).

By distinguishing between the calling of local congregations and the supportive role of denominational agencies, the statement reinforces historically Reformed ecclesiology and polity. This clarity provides a durable, theologically grounded framework to guide denominational priorities and shared ministry.

Classis Minnkota  
Ryan A.K. VanderWees, stated clerk

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## **OVERTURE 21**

### **Do Not Recognize Exclusively Digital Ministries as Churches**

#### **I. Preamble**

Synod 2025 affirmed the value of the internet and digital tools for Christian ministry and outreach but did not decide whether “virtual churches” (i.e., Christian communities that are exclusively digital or online) may properly be considered churches. In the absence of clear guidance, there is a danger that these ministries will come to be viewed or treated as churches by default.

However, as a denomination that confesses Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, we may not recognize a ministry as a church, or permit it to be called a church, unless we genuinely believe the following three marks to be present:

- the pure preaching of the gospel
- the administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them
- the practice of church discipline

Because these marks define the true church, any ministry that is to be recognized as a church in the CRCNA must faithfully embody them. Until it is clearly demonstrated that these marks are present in virtual churches, synod should clarify that the CRCNA does not presently recognize them as churches.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Atlantic Northeast overtures Synod 2026 to decide as follows:

A. Declare that the CRCNA does not at present recognize exclusively digital ministries as churches.

B. Direct exclusively digital ministries in the CRCNA to refrain from using the term “church” in their official names or in descriptions of their ministry.

C. Direct denominational offices to refrain from characterizing or presenting exclusively digital ministries as churches in official communications, on the CRCNA website, or in any other denominational materials.

*Grounds:*

1. Referring to exclusively digital ministries as churches has the potential to cause confusion among members and the public.
2. The Lord calls his church to assemble (Lev. 23:3; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:18), and the Word of God proclaims the benefits of God's people gathering together (Ps. 133:1; Acts 4:31). It has not yet been demonstrated that a digital or virtual-only ministry can do justice to the Bible's emphasis on the church gathering together as an assembled congregation (1 Cor. 5:4; Heb. 10:24-25).
3. It has not yet been demonstrated that the three marks of the church, as set forth in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, can be truly manifest in a digital or virtual-only ministry context.
4. The Belgic Confession teaches that all people are "obliged to join and unite with" the true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 28). In view of this, the CRCNA should not treat a ministry as a church unless it sincerely believes it to be that true church which believers are obliged to join and unite with.
5. Synod has a responsibility to maintain the confessional understanding of the church and to guard the use of the term "church" within the CRCNA.

Classis Atlantic Northeast,  
David D. Poolman, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 22

### **Revise Church Order Language and Process for Tracking Membership**

#### **I. Background**

Article 67 of the Church Order addresses what happens to a person's membership when they "move to localities where there is no Christian Reformed Church and no church in communion." The article's supplement addresses the practice of "lapsing," or terminating memberships of members who "move away from the area of their church so that a meaningful church relationship is no longer possible." The guidance of this article clearly represents a bygone time of denominational loyalty and is in dire need of updating for our current religious cultural context. Because of the undertone of disciplinary action involved in "lapsing" membership, many churches have either discontinued the practice, opting instead for "inactivating" membership (a process ungoverned by Church Order) or using "lapsing" in place of

formal church discipline, which is governed under Article 81 of the Church Order. Both of these have caused issues of governance in local congregational meetings in the recent history of our denomination, as “inactive” members technically retain all the rights and privileges of full membership according to Church Order.

Membership in our churches is fraught with questions of genuine relationship, spiritual authority, and voluntary association. While most evangelical churches in North America define membership as a voluntary association, in the Reformed tradition we continue to value the covenant nature of our mutual relationships in the body of Christ. People become members of our churches not by saying a prayer or simply attending our worship services but by making vows to God and his people, including a vow to “submit to the authority and discipline of the church.” When members stop attending church or start attending other churches without informing the council, the situation quickly becomes tense.

But the process is not any easier for people who do, in good faith, try to communicate clearly with their council. Currently, if a member decides to move their membership to a church that is not in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCNA, the process requires them not merely to inform the council or request a transfer of their membership but, instead, to “resign” their membership in the church, indicating a breaking of fellowship. This too, reflects a bygone era of ecclesiastical superiority, when our Church Order and theology reflected a belief in denominational superiority and rejected other Christian traditions as “false churches,” a position synod explicitly rejected and repented of already in 1944 (*Agenda for Synod 1944*, p. 359).

## **II. A few case studies**

Allow us to share a few case studies that demonstrate a profound need for revision concerning the language and practice of membership:

- Marcus and Sheryl went through a difficult divorce. Prior to the divorce, due to increasing tension in their marriage and their family, they attended church much less frequently. The leadership of the church explained this away because their oldest son, Freddy, had severe developmental disabilities and mobility issues, which became more demanding for the couple as he grew into adulthood. The church was caught by surprise when Marcus and Sheryl announced their divorce. After the divorce, Sheryl moved away and began attending a Baptist church. Marcus remained and continued to look after Freddy but did not return to church. Three years later, the council decided to lapse both of their memberships. Marcus thought he was being disciplined for not attending church services, which was impossible due to his role as Freddy’s caretaker and the church’s lack of accessibility. Sheryl thought she was being disciplined for joining a Baptist church in her new community. This experience left Marcus

and Sheryl feeling resentful of the congregation and denomination they had grown up in.

- Tonya moved away to attend university after graduating from the local Christian school. While living on campus, she started attending a Pentecostal campus ministry and joined a local Pentecostal church. When she told her parents, they told her she should write the council to transfer her membership, which she did. In response, she received a long email explaining that since the Pentecostal church is not in ecumenical fellowship with the CRC, they could not transfer her membership, but that the council had acquiesced to her resignation from the church. The experience left Tonya feeling devastated, rejected, and confused.
- Kwame joined a local CRC while studying and working in Grand Rapids for fifteen years. When he moved back to Nigeria, he returned to the Anglican church he had grown up in. Two years later, he received an email from the church office explaining that since he had not been in attendance for over two years, his membership was being lapsed. Kwame was unfamiliar with that language, so he looked up the word in the dictionary:

**1:** an error typically due to forgetfulness, inattention, or incompetence: see BLUNDER; **2:** a deviation or fall from a higher to a lower state: see DECLINE; **3:** the termination of a right or privilege through neglect: see DISCONTINUANCE; **4:** the abandonment of a religious faith: see APOSTASY

Kwame was horrified and offended by the connotations of this word being applied to his faith.

We encourage synod to recognize that when it comes to church attendance, our polity should match our theology. We believe that Christians in denominations outside of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition are members together with us of the “one holy catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed). The truth of the matter is that even churches that share ecumenical fellowship with our denomination do not track or keep membership papers in the same way we do. Our membership papers are a mere *symbol* of spiritual authority and covenant relationship.

Therefore, we recommend doing away with the negative language that concerns lapsing and resigning membership, and we recommend recognizing that our keeping of membership papers is, precisely, a matter of internal recordkeeping. We suggest moving to the language of “archiving” membership in cases that do not involve formal discipline. Members whose membership is archived ought to be informed of this, with an invitation that their membership will be unarchived if they ever decide to rejoin the CRCNA. We also feel that councils ought to be reminded that real spiritual authority is found in the genuine, living covenant relationship between a congregation’s members and its council, and to be admonished to value relationship over polity when it comes to matters of internal recordkeeping.

## II. Overture

Classis Muskegon overtures synod to replace Article 67 of the Church Order and Its supplement with the following:

### Article 67

Members who leave the Christian Reformed Church for a church that is not in communion with the Christian Reformed Church may notify their council of this move, at which point the council shall archive their membership.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 67

### Supplement, Article 67

#### *Guidelines for Archiving Membership*

1. Councils are encouraged to note any extended and unexplained absence by members of the church, and to communicate regularly with those who are not regularly attending church services so that all members may receive proper discipleship, pastoral care, and encouragement in the faith.
2. In the case of extended and unexplained absence, or an inability on the part of the council to communicate with a member due to lack of accurate contact information, the council may take the initiative to archive memberships. This may be done only when . . .
  - the council believes the person remains committed to the Christian faith and is worshiping elsewhere.
  - the council is not aware of any public sin requiring discipline.
  - the council has made every good faith effort to establish communication with the person.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 23

### Replace Church Order Article 52 and Its Supplement

#### I. Background

The CRCNA has adopted a number of synodical reports and statements throughout its history that articulate a robust biblical and Reformed theology of corporate worship and are intended to guide ministers, worship planners, and worship committees. Church Order Article 52 refers to several of these synodical decisions and guidelines, but does so in a manner that provides limited clarity regarding their content and practical application. The current Article 52 and its supplement also do not reference any of our confessions' sound, yet succinct, teaching on corporate worship.

When governing principles are inaccessible to those charged with applying them, the Church Order itself fails in its instructive function. In the absence of clear theological guidance in the Church Order, consistories are left either to improvise or to follow prevailing cultural models of worship that are often contrary to biblical principles.

The proposed replacement of Article 52 and its supplement does not introduce any new requirements or prescriptions for corporate worship. Rather, it seeks to clarify, summarize, and make accessible the principles, decisions, and guidelines for corporate worship that have already been adopted by synod.

In other words, we are not proposing any changes to how our churches ought to worship from what has already been determined. We are simply proposing that the biblical wisdom that has been developed over the church's history be more practically communicated in our Church Order.

## II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2026 to adopt the proposed replacement of Church Order Article 52 and its supplement and to submit the revised article to the classes for consideration, with ratification by Synod 2027.

Proposed replacement of Church Order Article 52 and its supplement

### *Article 52*

a. The consistory shall regulate the worship services in such a way that God is not worshiped in any other way than has been commanded in his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96), rejecting all human innovations (Belgic Confession, Art. 32) and utilizing the means of grace he has prescribed (Canons of Dort, Point 5, 14).

b. The consistory shall ensure that all songs, liturgical forms and resources used in public worship are biblically sound and confessionally faithful according to our governing principles of worship. Churches are encouraged to emphasize Psalm singing. see to it that the principles and elements of worship approved by synod are observed, including the use of liturgical forms, songs, and synodically approved Bible versions. If liturgical forms are adapted or additional psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are used in worship, these elements should conform to synodical guidelines.

— Cf. Supplement, Article 52-b

c. Corporate worship services shall be a covenantal meeting between our triune God and his people which is structured by and saturated with the Bible. It shall be ordered as a dialogue in which God speaks through his Word and sacraments (when they are administered), and the congregation responds in confession, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, offerings, and obedient faith.

— Cf. Supplement, Article 52-c

A. Governing principles of worship

Worship is a microcosm of the entire gospel, of the whole life of a gospel people, and of life in Christ, in which God himself meets with, speaks with, transforms, and sends out his people. The liturgy shapes us into the very image of Christ, by the Spirit, to the glory of the Father, who alone is worthy to be worshiped.

**Worship is covenant dialogue**

Worship is a **dialogue between God and his people**, in which God speaks and acts and the congregation responds in faith, obedience, praise, and prayer.

**God is the primary actor in worship**

Worship begins with **God's gracious initiative**: his Word proclaimed, his promises announced, his sacraments administered. Human response is real and necessary, but always secondary and responsive.

**Worship is corporate action**

Worship is the act of **the gathered congregation**, not a performance by clergy nor a private devotion carried on in parallel. The whole people of God participate as priests before him.

**The Word of God is central**

Scripture—read, sung, preached and prayed—forms the **structural backbone** of worship. Preaching is not an add-on but the defining element of the church's liturgical life.

**Sacrament completes the dialogue**

The sacraments are not separate from the Word but bring the dialogue to a **visible and enacted convergence**, where proclamation and response occur together in faith-filled action.

**Edification governs order and freedom**

The Spirit grants freedom in worship, but that freedom is exercised **within order aimed at edification**, intelligibility, and congregational participation.

**Corporate worship is distinct but tied to all of life**

While all of life is lived before God, corporate worship is a **distinct, irreplaceable act** of the gathered church.

B. Bible versions **Bible versions** recommended by synod for use in worship services are listed online at crna.org and include the King James Version (KJV), the American Standard Version (ASV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New International Version (NIV),

the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Today's New International Version (TNIV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the New Living Translation (NLT).

- ~~— **Liturgical forms, songs, and elements of worship** approved by synod are contained in the latest edition (currently 1987) of the denomination's *Psalter Hymnal*. Forms, subsequent revisions of forms that are synodically approved, and other such resources are made available on the denomination's website (crena.org) under "Synod Resources."~~
- ~~— Synodical guidelines pertaining to the **adaptation of liturgical forms** are found in the *Acts of Synod 1994*, pages 493-94, and in the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*.~~
- ~~— Materials on the **principles of, elements of, and guidelines for worship and music** are found in the "Introduction to the Psalms, Bible Songs, and Hymns" contained in the latest edition (currently 1987) of the denomination's *Psalter Hymnal*, pages 11-13; in the *Acts of Synod 1997*, pages 664-68; and in the 1997 Committee to Study Worship Report available on the denomination's website (crena.org) under "Synod Resources."~~
- C. "Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments" (Canons of Dort, Point 5, 14).
- D. "The music of the church should be appropriate for worship — that is, it should be liturgical and have aesthetic integrity. The music of worship should serve the dialogue between God and his people. It must be true to the full message of the Scriptures and reflective of biblical Christian experience. Along with the biblical motif, the music of worship should give expression to the other motifs of liturgy: the catholic, the confessional, and the pastoral. The music of worship should satisfy the aesthetic laws that are conditions of good art, such as imaginative craftsmanship and seriousness of expression. It should reflect the church at worship today and throughout the ages in ways that are relevant, enduring, festive, and dignified" (*Psalter Hymnal*, Statement of Principal, revised from the 1959 edition and adopted by Synod 1979. For more details, see the full "Introduction to the Psalms, Bible Songs, and Hymns" in the *Psalter Hymnal*, pp. 11-15).
- E. "The celebration of the sacraments shall be done in accord with the confessions of the CRC and include at least the following elements:
  - a. For baptism — the scriptural words of institution, the baptismal covenant (including God's promises and our promises), and the act of baptism with water and in the name of the Trinity.

- b. For the Lord's Supper—the scriptural words of institution (with actions of breaking and pouring), the thanksgiving and consecration, and the communion with bread and cup (approved by Synod 1994).

Supplement, Article 52-c

Ordinary Elements of Public Worship

These are the recurring elements found consistently in biblical, early church, and Reformed worship patterns:

God speaks to his people

- Call to worship, God's greeting and blessings
- Declaration of God's commands, promises, and grace
- Reading and proclamation (preaching) of his Word

The people respond

- Congregational singing (psalms and hymns drawn from Scripture)
- Confession of sin
- Prayer (including thanksgiving, intercession, supplication)
- Confession of faith
- Offerings for the ministry of the church and care of the needy

God and his people act together

- Administration of the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper)

God sends his people

- Pronouncement of God's blessing (benediction)
- God's people respond with songs of glory (doxology)

Sources: 1968 report of the Liturgical Committee (*Acts of Synod 1968*, pp. 134-98)  
1997 Committee to Study Worship Report (*Acts of Synod 1997*, pp. 93-144)

*Grounds:*

1. Article 52, as it is currently written, indicates that "the consistory shall regulate the worship services" but inadequately describes how to do so. Since corporate worship is the principle task and activity of the church, as indicated by Article 51, the Church Order ought to clearly, yet succinctly, communicate our rich, Reformed theology of worship for pedagogical and regulative purposes.
2. The current Article 52-b and its supplement reference "liturgical forms" and "synodical guidelines" that are difficult to utilize. For example, the "synodical guidelines pertaining to the adaptation of liturgical forms are found in the *Acts of Synod 1994*, pages 493-94, and in the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*." These *Acts of Synod* must be accessed either in a printed version, or through Calvin's Hekman Library online synod portal, which only offers access to a scanned copy of the entire

- 578-page *Acts of Synod* combined with the *Agenda* for that year (and the PDF page numbers do not correspond to the printed page numbers). The “1997 Committee to Study Worship Report” is one of dozens of reports that must be located on the “Synod Resources” page. It weighs in at over fifty pages of difficult-to-read scanned documents. Since this is critical knowledge for worship planners, the primary points of these documents should be included in the Church Order article and its supplement.
3. The latest synodically approved *Psalter Hymnal* was published in 1987, nearly four decades ago. Since then, excellent song books like *Lift Up Your Hearts* (produced by Faith Alive), the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (produced as a joint effort between the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), *SING!* (produced by the Gettys through Crossway) and many others have been published. While the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* continues to serve the church well, most congregations now supplement it with additional resources that are published far faster than synod can approve them. Consistories need a more robust Church Order article and supplement to evaluate songs sung in their services. The current Article 52 and its supplement do little to emphasize Psalm singing, which historically has always been, and ought to be, a robust part of our repertoire.
  4. All of the principles contained in the proposed Article 52 and supplement are sourced directly from our confessions and synodically approved reports, documents, and decisions. Everything proposed reflects guidelines that are already currently normative in the CRCNA. No new prescriptions or restrictions on how local congregations exercise corporate worship are proposed in them.
  5. The proposed Article 52 and supplement do not mandate a uniform style, order, cultural, or musical expression. The proposed material only clarifies the theological boundaries within which contextualization takes place.
  6. The proposed Article 52 and supplement, while longer than the current version, succinctly summarize the biblical, confessional, and historical principles of worship the CRCNA holds to and adequately convey these principles to consistories, pastors, worship committees, and planners. They provide a solid guideline and criteria for the ongoing development of curricula and training materials.

Classis Minnkota  
Ryan A.K. VanderWees, stated clerk

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**OVERTURE 24****Establish Ecclesiastical Relations with the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico****Overture**

Classis Muskegon overtures synod to instruct the Office of General Secretary and the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to work toward establishing a formal ecclesiastical relationship with the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico (*La Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México AR* or INPM), with the ultimate goal of welcoming them as a church in communion.

*Grounds:*

1. The INPM is a historic Reformed denomination that is committed to Reformed theology, adheres to the Forms of Unity and the Westminster standards, and is a member together with us of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
2. The denomination's seminary is well regarded and is committed to Reformed theology.
3. We have a long history of collaboration, with INPM pastors serving CRCNA churches and ministries and CRCNA pastors and missionaries serving INPM churches and ministries.
4. CRCNA classes have collaborated with the INPM on church-planting projects on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.
5. As our denomination continues to grow among immigrant and ethnic-minority communities in North America, it will benefit us to have more and stronger relationships with the Reformed communion throughout Latin America for mutual learning, encouragement, resourcing, and support.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

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**OVERTURE 25****Affirming the Traditional Reformed Understanding of Church and State****I. Preamble**

We submit this overture in joyful gratitude for the Reformed tradition entrusted to the Christian Reformed Church and with a desire to preserve its theological integrity for future generations. Our purpose is not to introduce new doctrinal requirements or to pursue ideological objectives but to reaffirm the traditional Reformed distinction between the spiritual authority of the church and the civil authority of the state.

We recognize that many faithful officebearers seek to honor Christ's lordship in every sphere of life and may articulate that desire in diverse ways.

In response to the growing influence of Christian nationalism among some Christian leaders, we seek to remember and reaffirm the teaching of the church's confessions and doctrinal standards, which call officebearers to teach and live in faithful submission to them. Our Church Order impresses on officebearers to subscribe to our confessions and previous synodical decisions and to teach and live in a manner that is consistent with them.

## **II. Background**

The ideology commonly described as Christian nationalism has gained increased visibility in recent years not only in North American culture but even in various Christian communities, including within the Christian Reformed Church. Surveys show that 32 percent of all Americans, including 54 percent of those who attend religious services weekly or more, adhere to or sympathize with Christian nationalism, a percentage that must be considered as we work toward being faithful witnesses of our Lord. We believe that the increasing prevalence of these dynamics reveals a pressing discipleship need calling the Christian Reformed Church to teach clearly the Reformed distinction between the kingdom of Christ and the political nations of this world.

A number of officebearers within the Christian Reformed Church have publicly self-identified as Christian nationalists, although those self-labeled definitions vary. We intentionally avoid naming specific officebearers or particular circumstances because our concern is not with particular persons but with providing pastoral clarity for the church as it seeks to form disciples whose ultimate allegiance is to Christ and his kingdom.

The definitions for Christian nationalism vary, but for the purposes of this overture we define Christian nationalism as an ideology that seeks to merge Christian identity with national identity, asserting that a modern state has a special and divinely ordained status and that its political identity is meant to be a particular version of Christianity in which loyalty to Christ is closely bound to loyalty to a nation. We use this definition because it focuses on ideologies that seek to ground civil authority in Christian law while distinguishing them from the broad range of political views that are sometimes imprecisely labeled "Christian nationalism." We also recognize the reality that, historically and at present, this ideology is frequently intertwined with racialized conceptions of national identity, especially forms of white supremacy that privilege one racial group as uniquely representative of Christian civilization.

The Christian Reformed Church has historically confessed a careful distinction between the spiritual authority of the church and the civil authority of the state. This distinction is grounded in Scripture and is articulated in the Reformed confessions, particularly the Belgic Confession (Art. 36), as inter-

preted and revised by the CRCNA in 1958. Throughout its history, the Reformed tradition has sought to affirm Christ’s lordship over all of life while resisting attempts to identify the kingdom of God too closely with any earthly political order.

Concerns regarding Christian nationalism are not unique to the CRCNA but are being addressed across the broader Reformed and Presbyterian landscape. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has established a study committee to examine Christian nationalism and its implications for officebearers. Our overture participates in a broader ecclesial effort to clarify the Reformed understanding of church and state. The members of the PCA’s committee were selected by Rev. Dr. Kevin DeYoung, who recently published a widely circulated article on the theological problems with Christian nationalism.

### III. Key Terms for Clarity

To prevent confusion with healthy patriotism, civic responsibility, or appropriate public engagement, we offer the following key distinctions:

Term	What It Means	Healthy Example	Distortion to Avoid
Patriotism	Gratitude for your country and desire to see it flourish	Celebrating national holidays, serving community, honoring those who serve	Treating a nation as having a unique and divinely ordained national identity
Civic engagement	Participating in public life for the common good	Voting, volunteering, advocating for just laws, promoting social order	Believing politics is tied to the ultimate hope for salvation
Christian nationalism	Assigning a religious identity or divine mandate to a modern nation; attributing to civil authority responsibilities belonging properly to the church, such that allegiance to Christ becomes entangled with allegiance to a nation or political order	<i>(None — this is what we reject.)</i>	Equating being a “true citizen” with being a Christian; identifying Christian faith with national belonging or subordinating the church’s identity and mission to political power

Christian nationalism conflicts with the CRCNA understanding of Government as stated in Belgic Confession Article 36 and previous CRCNA synodical decisions, which contend that civil authorities are ordained by God “not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also to protect the sacred ministry” (*Acts of Synod 1938*, p. 17).

This holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain people. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, though still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith. (Belgic Confession, Art. 27)

And regarding the role of civil authority, the Belgic Confession reminds us:

[Civil authorities] should... [remove every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel] while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them.

(Belgic Confession, Art. 36)

In addition, the "Report of the Committee with Respect to Article 36," submitted to Synod 1910, states,

"... both State and Church as institutions of God and Christ have mutual rights and duties appointed them from on high, and therefore have a very sacred reciprocal obligation to meet, through the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. They should not, however, encroach upon each other's domain. The Church as well as the State has the right of sovereignty in its own sphere."

(*Acts of Synod 1910*, p. 105)

Synod 1958 adopted a revision of Belgic Confession Article 36 to provide "a clear expression of the Reformed witness regarding the relation of Church and State" and declared that the previous version could not "be judged to express in a fully satisfactory and unequivocal way the Reformed witness to the relation of Church and State" (*Acts of Synod 1958*, p. 29). The grounds for the confessional revision included this statement: "This formulation expresses the Scriptural teaching that the two realms of Church and State must be distinguished as to their spheres of operation and as to the nature of the means that are entrusted to them" (*Acts of Synod 1958*, p. 30; directing readers to the *Acts of Synod 1946*, p. 416, for Scripture passages).

We desire to see the CRCNA reaffirm its position of the church and state relationship. We desire to see the Christian Reformed Church embrace and embody the biblical vision of the church described in Revelation 7:9, of a redeemed people from every tongue, tribe, people, and language, united not by nationality but by the blood of the Lamb. Christian nationalism stands as a significant obstacle to this gospel vision. Therefore, we must faithfully reject any movement that uses Christianity as a tool for political dominance or cultural supremacy.

The CRCNA is called to bear faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom in a divided and polarized world. Faithfulness to Belgic Confession Article 36 and to the synodical decisions of the CRCNA requires the church to resist ideologies that rival Christ's lordship or confuse his kingdom with earthly power. It blurs the distinct callings of church and state, distorting the church's witness and the magistrate's authority, and thus harms both spheres of God's ordained order.

#### **IV. Overture**

A. That synod adopt the following definition of Christian nationalism for doctrinal clarification and ecclesial discernment: an ideology that seeks to

merge Christian identity with national identity, asserting that a modern state has a special and divinely ordained status and that its political identity is meant to be a particular version of Christianity in which loyalty to Christ is closely bound to loyalty to a nation.

B. That synod reaffirm that the Christian Reformed Church's confessional teaching on church and state, as articulated in Belgic Confession Article 36 and its synodical interpretations in 1910, 1938, and 1958, rejects theological frameworks that conflate ecclesial identity with national identity or assign to civil authority responsibilities properly belonging to the church.

C. That synod declare and clarify that Christian nationalism is theologically incompatible with Belgic Confession Article 36 and the CRCNA synodical interpretations because it localizes Christ's reign, instrumentalizes the state for kingdom purposes, and treats civil authority as a proxy for Christ's kingdom, all of which contradict the doctrines contained in the three forms of unity and especially the interpretive revision of Belgic Confession Article 36.

*Grounds:*

1. Christian nationalism confuses the kingdom of God with earthly political power and undermines the catholicity of the church.
2. Christian nationalism contradicts the confession that Jesus Christ alone is "the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church" (Belgic Confession, Art. 31).
3. Christian nationalism is a distortion that leads people to view their nation or political preferences as essential to the advancement of the kingdom of God. Allegiance to country or ideology can begin to replace devotion to God's kingdom in our hearts, becoming a form of idolatry. This confuses the mission of the church with political goals and undermines the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom (John 18:36).
4. The CRCNA revision of Belgic Confession Article 36 (1958) was based on the conclusion that "a teaching in the confessional documents [was] not the teaching of God's Word" (quoted from the Covenant for Officebearers). Thus, all subsequent republications of the Belgic Confession with this revision repeatedly demonstrate that this has been the church's authoritative interpretation of the doctrine(s) confessed in that article. Views that correspond to the removed wording of Article 36, including Christian nationalism as defined above, are outside the bounds of confessional subscription in our denomination.
5. Christian nationalism denies the catholicity and unity of the church. The Belgic Confession teaches that the church is "spread and dispersed throughout the entire world" and "not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain people" (Art. 27). By privileging one nation, cultural, or racial identity as uniquely Christian, Christian nationalism fractures the unity of the body of Christ and marginalizes believers both within its own nation and across other nations and cultures. Historically and in the present, Christian nationalism has often been intertwined

with racial ideologies that elevate whiteness as normative or divinely favored. While such racial hierarchies are themselves contrary to the biblical teaching that all people are created in the image of God, their entanglement with Christian nationalism further reveals the theological danger of identifying the kingdom of God with any particular nation, ethnicity, or culture. This stands in direct opposition to the biblical vision of the church described in Revelation 7:9—a people from every nation, tribe, people, and language—a reality the church is called to anticipate and embody even now as we live in the hope of Christ’s coming kingdom. Therefore, Christian nationalism must be rejected as incompatible with the gospel and with the Reformed confessional understanding of the church’s unity and catholicity.

6. Christian nationalism conflicts with the Reformed understanding of government. The Belgic Confession teaches that civil authorities are ordained by God to promote justice and restrain evil, not to establish or advance the kingdom of Christ. Synod 1958 did not adopt a commentary alongside the three forms of unity. It altered the received text of one of the three forms. Therefore, Article 36 is the confessional teaching of the CRCNA on church and state relations. Christian nationalism collapses this distinction by treating political power as a primary means of advancing God’s kingdom, thereby exceeding the confessional mandate given to government and misdirecting the church’s witness.

Classis Grand Rapids East  
Robert Arbogast, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 26

### **Do Not Adopt Biennial Synod Proposal**

Classis Heartland overtures Synod 2026 to continue with annual in-person synods and not to adopt the proposal from the Council of Delegates to hold biennial synods.

*Grounds:*

1. Christ himself has chosen to provide for, nourish, shepherd, feed, and rule over his people through the officebearers he has called and ordained into office. Synod is the broadest assembly of the church in which Christ himself is guiding us by his Word and Spirit through his officebearers. This is the most important assembly we have as a denomination, and it is of the highest value to our well-being, flourishing, and obedience.
2. The church is guided by the assemblies and offices of the church that Christ has instituted, not by committees, agencies, staff, or volunteers to whom those assemblies assign specific tasks. To move to less frequent

- synods will inevitably mean that more and more of the work of the denomination is done by committee, agency, and staff and that less and less is done by its officebearers gathering under the Word to guide the church as Christ instituted.
3. Since the church is guided by the officebearers appointed by Christ in her various assemblies, these are of first and primary importance in planning, budgeting, purpose, and mission. A representative gathering of all the churches is the first thing we did when we became a denomination and is the heart of our ongoing denominational identity and covenant.
  4. Synod, as a major assembly, guides and supervises all other denominational work and ministry. It should therefore be of first importance in planning and budgeting.

Classis Heartland  
Pete Van Velzen, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 27

### **Do Not Adopt Recommendation to Have Biennial Synods**

#### **I. Introduction**

On September 4, 2025, the Council of Delegates (COD) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) met in a special meeting to consider the draft report and recommendations of a COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs. In a letter from the general secretary, Rev. Zachary King, sent by email to classis clerks on September 9, 2025, it was relayed that the COD adopted the following recommendation for Synod 2026:

That synod meet every other year beginning in 2027, and that synod direct the COD to provide specific recommendations to Synod 2027 about the changes to the candidacy process, process for approving key denominational leadership, and other matters which are currently handled by synod annually. During the “off” years, other gatherings of CRC people such as regional, agency, or inter-classis events would be encouraged.

The COD task force report (now posted at [crcna.org/synodresources](http://crcna.org/synodresources)) also notes that adopting this recommendation would necessitate change to Church Order Article 46-a, which currently stipulates that synod shall meet annually. The grounds offered to support this recommendation are as follows:

1. This change would result in significant cost savings.
2. This change would allow for additional time to work on assigned tasks and for churches/classes to absorb/process synodical decisions.

3. The work of synod will still need to be processed. The specifics of how to do that are beyond the scope of the present task force and can be best addressed by the COD.

## II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2026 not to adopt the Council of Delegates recommendation that synod meet every other year beginning in 2027.

### *Grounds:*

1. The grounds offered to support the recommendation are insufficient to support such a significant and impactful change. Two of the grounds offered by the task force and adopted by the COD do not have to do at all with cost savings. The second ground makes vague and unsupported references to additional time to process synodical decisions, a matter surely not pressing enough to support such dramatic action. The third ground only speaks to the need to explore further how to deal with the upheaval that following the recommendation would cause.
2. The COD task force ground number one, regarding “significant cost savings,” is worthy of scrutiny.
  - a. The COD task force reports that moving to biennial synods would reduce costs by approximately \$500,000 USD. This is not true, because approximately half of this figure is staff time. Since staff would not be reduced, the cost for staff time would not be a reduction or a savings, just a shift. A closer approximation of savings is the \$250,000 associated with travel, lodging, rental space, and meals, etc., noted in the report.
  - b. A potential savings of \$250,000 represents only about 7.8 percent of the annual \$3.2 million in governance costs overall as estimated by the COD task force. This potential savings does not justify the significant potential impact of reducing synodical governance by half.
  - c. Some of the potential \$250,000 cost savings may never be realized.
    - 1) Some of the cost would potentially shift to the COD, as the COD task force report notes that the COD will need to take on additional work previously done by synod. It is unlikely that the COD doing more work would not result in greater costs.
    - 2) Some of the cost would potentially shift to a longer biennial synod gathering, as the COD task force report acknowledges that synodical agendas would contain more material if moved to biennial meetings. It is unlikely that a biennial synod could tackle a significantly longer agenda in the same amount of time as a current annual synod. Longer synods would cost more money, thus eating up some of the potential cost savings.
    - 3) Some of the cost would potentially shift to other gatherings in “off years,” as the recommendation encourages other gatherings such as regional, agency, or inter-classis events. It is unlikely that

these meetings (particularly any agency meetings) would not be drawing from either the denominational budget or further drawing on church and/or classical budgets.

3. The COD task force indicates that “the agendas for biennial synods would likely be more weighty and challenging to manage.” This would almost assuredly require longer synods. Not only would that reduce potential cost savings as noted above, but it would also have the effect of incrementally making the filling of synodical delegate spots more challenging. Currently it can be quite challenging to find synodical delegates, particularly for the deacon-delegate spots. Deacon delegates often tend to be younger, less financially flexible, more tied to young families, less apt to have significant vacation time, and less likely to be established in business to be able to afford the commitment to go to synod. Making synod longer would exacerbate this challenge.
4. The imbalance that the COD proposes between itself and synod is not commensurate with the relative importance, authority, and accountability of the respective bodies. The COD derives its existence, authority, and mandate from synod, and yet it proposes an outsized role for itself in the governance of the CRCNA. Under the recommendation of the COD, the work of synod would decrease while it would assume for itself greater work. The imbalance in frequency of meeting and ability to respond to denominational matters in a timely fashion would be stark: six or more meetings biennially for the COD with only one meeting for synod biennially. Currently the COD meets three times per year, and the report from the COD task force suggests that the COD will likely have to assume some work that synod now does if synod moves to biennial meetings. This would likely mean that the COD has to continue at least three meetings per year, resulting in at least a 6:1 ratio of meeting for the lesser body to the greater body. This ratio is not a ratio that would build trust in the CRCNA, in particular as the COD is a less transparent and less accountable body in comparison to synod, in at least the following ways:
  - a. Synodical deliberations are broadcast, liveblogged, and attended by many observers. Additionally, *Banner* reporting on synod is much more robust than reporting on COD meetings.
  - b. Synodical delegates must be officebearers, while COD members currently need not be officebearers.
  - c. Synodical representation is broader than that of the COD (by a factor of about four) in the size of the body.
5. At this time in the life of the CRCNA, with recent significant and impactful decisions leading to disaffiliating churches, exiting pastors, and potential classical realignment, it would be unwise to reduce our frequency of meeting in our broadest assembly. Not only would this keep our churches and classes more separated during a time in which unity

and relationship strengthening are paramount, but it would also inhibit the ability of the CRCNA to respond in a timely manner to various questions, overtures, and situations that arise in our corporate church life that impact the CRCNA broadly.

6. Recently the CRCNA engaged in a series of ten gatherings across the denomination under the Gather initiative. The Gather initiative aimed to “bring together CRC leaders.” At a time when connection and gathering are a particular point of emphasis in the CRCNA, it seems contradictory and counterproductive to cut in half the opportunities for CRC leaders to gather for mutual encouragement and corporate discernment.
7. Synod and the functions of church governance more broadly are core functions of the CRCNA as an ecclesiastical body. There are other areas across the ministry and budget of the CRCNA that are less pivotal to the core function of the CRCNA and her churches that can and should receive deeper cuts before cost-saving measures of this drastic nature to core governance functions are considered. At \$3.2 million the total governance costs of the CRCNA represent only about 6 percent of the total CRCNA budget (approx. \$53 million, with ReFrame included). The potential cost savings of moving to biennial synods would represent about 0.5 percent of that broader budget. There are offices and costs within the CRCNA that provide less tangible benefit to the average CRC congregation than the core governance function of annual synods. There is certainly room for increased fiscal scrutiny in these areas before considering cutting synodical gatherings in half.
8. The COD task force report contains the following quote:

It should also be recognized that our governance expenses are not simply “overhead” but are part of the *ministry* we share as a denomination. Matters such as mutual accountability and support are part of our theological commitment to one another as Reformed Christians. We do our “business” as a church through councils (Belgic Confession, Art. 30), and we hold our minor assemblies accountable to one another through major assemblies. Thus there will inherently be a financial cost associated with being part of a church body that shares such commitments—and there will be relational and theological costs connected with any proposals that reduce the financial obligations of those commitments.

The relational and theological costs recognized by the COD task force as inherent to their proposal are too great to justify the potential cost savings.

Classis Minnkota  
Ryan A.K. VanderWees, stated clerk

## **Do Not Adopt Recommendation for Biennial Synod**

### **I. Background**

At the September 4, 2025, special meeting of the Council of Delegates (COD), a recommendation from the COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs was adopted by the COD to propose “that synod meet on a biennial basis (every two years) beginning in 2027 and that synod direct the Council of Delegates to provide specific recommendations to Synod 2027 about the changes to the candidacy process, the process for approving key denominational leadership, and other matters that are currently handled by synod annually.” As stated in a letter to classis clerks from Rev. Zachary King, general secretary, “during the ‘off’ years, other gatherings of CRC people such as regional, agency, or inter-classis events would be encouraged.”

### **II. Overture**

Classis Holland overtures Synod 2026 not to adopt the COD recommendation proposing that “synod meet on a biennial basis.”

*Grounds:*

1. In a time of particular turmoil and change, our denomination needs to come together regularly to rebuild trust and unity. Recent disaffiliations coupled with other significant challenges necessitate the church’s gathering. A biennial synod would provide less opportunity for input and connection for the churches of the CRCNA, further widening the gap between congregation and denomination.
2. While other gatherings are encouraged during the years synod does not meet, those are not ecclesiastical gatherings. Only a duly delegated synod can provide a forum for open discussion and deliberation on the matters facing the CRCNA.
3. Over the course of two years, the proposal would have the COD meeting six times (or more with the potential added workload) as compared to one meeting of synod. This imbalance would not be reflective of the ecclesiastical importance of each body and would limit deliberation on important annual matters.
4. This proposal was adopted as a way to “reduce governance costs . . . and use time wisely,” according to the task force report posted at [crcna.org/synodresources](http://crcna.org/synodresources). In the report, an additional proposal would shift some of the costs of synod to the classes. While the CRCNA is wrestling with continuing decreases in ministry-share support, the gathering of the church at synod annually is a worthwhile and needed cost.

Classis Holland  
Jen Rozema, stated clerk

## **Reject Proposal that Synod Meet Biennially**

### **I. Background**

At the Fall 2025 meeting of Classis Georgetown, the delegates heard a presentation from our COD representative and the president of the COD (who is also a pastor in Classis Georgetown) in which a report with several recommendations for synod came to our attention. We all applauded the desire to save money in governance costs for the CRC, as declared initially in the report from a COD task force that studied this matter. However, the first recommendation and the most consequential in that report is also the most concerning to us—and that is the proposal that synod would meet every other year rather than every year. The rationale offered is that there would be significant cost savings. However, despite the figures given in the report, it remains unclear exactly how much money would be saved and whether the savings would be sufficient to avoid a financial crisis that is likely to come as the result of declining ministry shares. Furthermore, the downgrade of synod from an annual to a biennial assembly brings with it several likely costs, which are only hinted at in the COD report but which we believe to be worthy of consideration.

1. Moving to a biennial synod means that fewer officebearers will have the opportunity to serve in governance at the denominational level. For example, ten years with an annual synod gives each classis the opportunity to involve forty officebearers, while a biennial synod reduces that potential to twenty.
  - a. This especially impedes young ministers and transfers from other denominations as they seek more involvement in the binational church.
  - b. To the extent that there is any competition to go to synod, reducing the number of opportunities over the years increases that competition.
2. The COD, which stands to receive more power and responsibilities if this proposal is adopted, is a less desirable stand-in for synod.
  - a. The composition of the COD is not representative of the denomination's membership because there are at-large delegates (6 of the 55).
  - b. The COD already exerts considerable influence in the CRCNA.
3. While it is true that other Reformed fellowships work with biennial and triennial synods, the CRCNA is in a time of many consequential reports, challenges, and proposals (such as this one from the COD). If the CRCNA has a biennial synod, there is a great likelihood that the work for those synods will be greatly increased and may reach a point where a longer synod is called or more work remains undone.

## II. Overture

Classis Georgetown asks synod to reject the COD proposal that synod meet biennially.

*Ground:* Moving to a biennial synod would offer unknown and likely insufficient cost savings and at the same time bring risks of less efficient and more contentious governance.

Classis Georgetown  
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

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### OVERTURE 30

## Improve Financial Transparency and Clarity for Ministry-Share Funding Priorities

### I. Background

Synod 2026 is being asked to consider holding biennial synods due to financial constraints being faced by the denomination. Along with this situation, ministry shares have been steadily decreasing over the past decade. This has sparked many conversations about the financial health of the denomination and what the priorities should be for funding via ministry shares. If the churches and classes of the CRCNA are being asked to consider such a drastic measure as no longer having a yearly synod, it is reasonable and essential for the churches of the CRCNA to have the most complete financial picture possible.

Currently, very few people are able to access the detailed financials of the denomination. Most of the public information is confined to the total amounts for each ministry area reported in the CRCNA *Church Administration and Finance Guide* or in the Agenda Supplement, released a few weeks before synod ([crcna.org/sites/default/files/Church%20Administration%20%26%20Finance%20Guide%20-%202025%20-%20US.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/Church%20Administration%20%26%20Finance%20Guide%20-%202025%20-%20US.pdf)).

Local councils have no way of knowing further details about how the money is being spent, and attempts to gain more information have led to more questions than answers; furthermore, even the finance subcommittee of synod is only given partial information on budget line items. While there is no doubt a desire for privacy as it pertains to staff salaries and some program costs, the value of transparency when being asked to make significant financial decisions should be—at the very least—an equally strong consideration.

In contrast to the current CRCNA system, due to a desire for transparency, many local churches publish their full budget with line items, including salary figures. This is not considered a controversial idea, since many public-service employees also have their compensation packages published each year. One of the reasons is simple: the community pays their salaries, so they have a right to know what those employees are making.

Connected to the need for transparency is the funding mechanism for the various entities that receive ministry shares. The most recent information from the denomination in the *Acts of Synod 2025* (p. 567) shows the following breakdown in the current fiscal year budget for ministry-share percentages (combined U.S. and Canada):

Office of General Secretary	\$3,512,000	24.5%
CRC Ministry Boards	\$3,117,000	21.8%
Thrive (Congregational Ministries)	\$3,560,000	24.8%
ReFrame	\$890,000	6.2%
Resonate Global Missions	\$1,883,000	13.1%
Calvin University	\$550,000*	3.8%
Calvin Theological Seminary	\$818,000	5.7%

\* No Canadian ministry-share dollars are allocated to Calvin University.

This breakdown of support shows 71.1 percent of ministry shares going to administration, governance, advocacy, and Thrive. Shares for missions, ReFrame, and Resonate are at 19.3 percent. This has not always been the case. In prior decades, most of the denominational ministry shares went to the support of missions. See figures below from the years 1966, 1981, and 2001 with regard to ministry-share allotments:

From *Acts of Synod 1966* (p. 568)

<i>Denominational Quotas</i>	<i>Per Family for 1967</i>	<i>Percent of Min. Shares (to nearest 0.1)</i>
1. Back to God Radio Hour	\$ 9.25	9.1%
2. Calvin College and Seminary	\$23.00*	22.7%
3. Committee on Education	\$.75	0.7%
4. Denominational Building Addition	\$1.00	1.0%
5. Foreign Missions	\$17.50	17.3%
6. Fund for Needy Churches	\$5.25	5.2%
7. Home Missions (includes Indian missions)	\$33.50	33.1%
8. Ministers' Pension and Relief Administration	\$10.00	10.0%
9. Synodical Expense Fund	<u>\$1.10</u>	1.0%
Total	\$101.35	

\*In agreement with the decision of Synod 1962, regional or area quotas for Calvin College and Seminary were suggested. This does not change the overall percentages because the difference was intended to be directed to other denominationally affiliated educational institutions.

*Note:* In the approved quotas, missions-orientated funding (Back to God Radio Hour, Foreign Missions, Home Missions) was 59.5 percent of ministry shares. The synodical expense fund and the denominational building fund was 2 percent of ministry shares. Note as well that the minister's pension fund was included in ministry shares (it has been separate since Synod 1997 made the change to direct billing of the churches).

From *Acts of Synod 1981* (p. 635)

*Denominational Quotas*

	<i>Per Family for 1982</i>	<i>Percent of Min. Shares (to nearest 0.1)</i>
Back to God Hour	\$38.00	11.5%
CRC-TV	\$13.00	3.9%
Calvin· College and Seminary	\$52.80*	15.9%
CR World Missions	\$66.00	19.9%
CR Home Missions	\$75.00	22.6%
Board of Publications	\$2.25	0.7%
Chaplain Committee	\$4.80	1.4%
Comm. for Educ. Assist. to Churches Abroad	\$.50	0.2%
Denominational Services	\$14.70**	4.4%
Fund for Needy Churches	\$23.00	6.9%
Ministers' Pension Fund	\$36.00	10.9%
Supplemental Fund	\$.75	0.2%
Synodical Committee on Race Relations	\$2.70	0.8%
Translation and Educ. Assistance Committee	<u>\$2.15</u>	0.6%
Total	\$331.65	

\*Synod approved the 1982 regional or area quotas for Calvin College and Seminary, in agreement with the decision of Synod 1962.

\*\*Includes synodical assembly, committees, offices, and CR denominational building debt and maintenance.

*Note:* In the approved quotas, missions-orientated funding (Back to God Hour, World Missions, Home Missions) was 57.9 percent of ministry shares. The denominational services expense fund was 4.4 percent of ministry shares.

From *Acts of Synod 2001* (p. 539)

*Denominational ministry shares*

	<i>Per professing member</i>	<i>Percent of Min. Shares (to nearest 0.1)</i>
Back to God Hour	\$32.61	11.5%
CRC TV	\$12.35	4.4%
Calvin College*	\$59.70	21.1%
Calvin Theological Seminary	\$24.68	8.7%
Canadian Ministries Board ministries	\$6.27	2.2%
CRC Publications	\$5.96	2.1%
CR Home Missions	\$52.37	18.5%
Fund for Smaller Churches	\$2.50	0.9%
CR World Missions	\$51.23	18.1%
Denominational Services		
Synodical assembly, Board of Trustees, and general administration	\$21.58	7.6%
Ministry programs (Abuse Prevention, Chaplaincy Ministries, Disability Concerns, Pastor-Church Relations, Race Relations, Social Justice and Hunger Action)	<u>\$14.10</u>	5.0%
Total	\$283.35	

\*Synod approved the 2002 regional or area ministry shares for Calvin College, in agreement with the *Acts of Synod 1962, 1984, 1993*, across eight areas at \$59.70, 40.80, 33.30, 7.80, 37.40, 21.00, 11.30, and 5.00, respectively.

*Note:* In the approved ministry shares, missions-orientated funding (Back to God Hour, World Missions, Home Missions) was 52.5 percent of ministry shares. The denominational services expense fund was 7.6 percent of ministry shares.

Using these three years as historical snapshots, it is clear that over the past 25 years a far higher percentage of ministry-share income has been devoted to paying administration, advocacy, and congregational-support programs and employees. Instead of embracing this change, in the current communication from the CRCNA there appears to be a desire to say that missions remain the funding priority. The *Church Administration and Finance Guide 2025*, under the heading “Mission and Ministry Priorities” on page 9, says that 73 percent of the budget is invested in missions; however, this number includes all the different sources of income including gifts and investments, not just ministry shares. What is not stated but can be inferred is that personal donations and investment income for Resonate and ReFrame are being used to subsidize the other components of the denomination. When a church or individual sends funds directly to Resonate or ReFrame, this allows the denomination to give those ministries a smaller share of the ministry-share funds.

One reason this is concerning is because some donors specifically do not want their funds to go to some areas under the CRCNA. This became such a widespread issue in the denomination that on page 7 of the *Church Administration and Finance Guide 2025*, under Option 2, the donor or church is allowed to fund or not fund the different areas of ministry. At least this is what the donor is led to believe. In reality, when pressed, denominational employees admit that the funds are simply shifted around due to the ability to change the ministry-share allotment percentage. Undesignated gifts are assigned in an unproportional way to make up for the designated percentages. Perhaps this model is meant to help the consciences of some donors, but in practice the will of the donor is not fully appreciated.

This current practice isn't denied by current leadership, but a common refrain from denominational leaders has been that people don't get excited about giving to administration and overhead, hence the need for a higher percentage of ministry shares for those areas than in the past. That sentiment may very well be true, but there are different ways to look at this. Consider how in the past the denomination was able to function quite well with far less overhead; furthermore, if something is not supported financially by the local churches, that's a sign it is not seen as an important component of shared ministry. This is a signal it may be time to significantly reduce the size of those departments. We need to ask this question: Why was the denomination able to do good ministry in decades past with significantly less overhead and congregational support programs?

One of the potential retorts will be that over the years different synods have asked that more work be done in various congregational support and advocacy ministries. It is true previous synods have asked the CRCNA to do work in these various areas; however, in the *Acts of Synod* from those years, there are no mandates for the number of employees, their salary, or set budgets for those programs. Right-sizing areas of the CRCNA that are not properly supported by the local congregations of the denomination would seem to reflect the will of the denomination; for example, Synod 2016 adopted the following action:

That synod instruct the BOT to evaluate and prioritize all existing programs and ministries with the goal of reducing the institutional footprint, including the following:

- Produce a detailed chart of all existing ministries that includes the following information: ministry description, date the ministry began, account of synod that established the ministry, and current financial ministry-share allocation. This chart is to be presented to the BOT by February 2017.
- Provide an update on the process to Synod 2017.
- Seek input from the churches and classes in the prioritization and evaluation.
- Bring a final report to Synod 2018 to affirm the prioritized ministries.
- Going forward, all ministries will be evaluated on a regular basis.

*Grounds:*

- a. A smaller institutional footprint allows for churches and classes to better support their local ministries.
- b. This process will create greater ownership of denominational programs and ministries within the local congregations.

*(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 858)*

This action taken by Synod 2016 does not appear to have led to a reduced institutional footprint when looking at the current ministry-share percentages. Nor do current practices indicate the sense of urgency apparent ten years ago when this was adopted. For all ministries to be evaluated on a regular basis, some changes are in order. Budget and ministry-share transparency and simplicity will demonstrate to churches that the denomination *is* doing the ministry the churches have called it to do in a stewardly fashion. There are many examples of good ministry work happening in the CRCNA today, and this overture is intended as a step toward rebuilding trust and confidence in the ministry-share system to ensure the good work continues.

## **II. Overture**

Due to the need for better financial transparency and clarity with ministry-share percentages, Classis Georgetown overtures Synod 2026 to do the following:

A. Provide detailed current and proposed budget line items in the yearly *Agenda for Synod* (not the supplement). This information will include the compensation numbers for each full-time employee position; additionally, detailed financial reports and budgets will be made available to any church council that requests them starting with the 2026-27 fiscal year.

*Grounds:*

1. In order for local councils to make the best decisions on yearly pledges, they need more complete information as they practice good stewardship of resources. Faithful stewardship strengthens our shared trust and witness.
2. The current system has created mistrust due to secrecy. For denominational unity to increase, trust and transparency with finances is paramount. Tithes and offerings from local CRC congregations pay the salaries and fund the programs of the CRCNA, and it is reasonable to know where the money is being allocated.

B. Starting in fiscal year 2027-28, 50 percent of ministry-share funding will be devoted to missions. ReFrame Ministries will receive 15 percent, and Resonate will receive 35 percent of all ministry-share gifts. The remaining 50 percent of ministry-share funding will be allocated by denominational staff and the COD to the other areas as deemed fit. We ask the CRCNA to honor the intent of these percentages, in both spirit and practice, by ensuring that budgeting, cost-sharing, and administrative decisions do not reduce the practical amount that reaches mission work in any way.

*Grounds:*

1. Returning the ministry-share percentage to 50 percent for missions is in line with what the denomination did for many years and shows a renewed focus on expanding the vision and mission of the denomination. If the CRCNA expects to make disciples and see the gospel advance across the world, the funding percentages from ministry shares for missions ought to reflect this desire.
2. Set ministry-share percentages will allow senior staff to better plan and execute the vision for their ministry programs as it pertains to budgeting.
3. Additional monetary gifts to ReFrame and Resonate beyond ministry shares should have no bearing on the budget process for other ministry-share funding priorities.
4. This overture allows denominational staff and the COD one year to align the next fiscal-year budget with the ministry-share allotments.

Classis Georgetown  
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

## **Develop Resources to Facilitate Classis Mergers**

### **I. Background**

Recently the COD has been exploring ways to reduce governance costs. In the report of the COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs, one of the suggestions is classis consolidation: “That the COD recommend that synod establish a one-year task force, working in close coordination with the classes, to review the current classis structure and make recommendations to Synod 2027 for classis consolidations and/or overall restructuring.”

Classis Yellowstone and Classis Columbia have been aware of the COD’s work and have already begun discussions about a potential merger. Our preliminary discussions about Montana’s churches’ past membership in Classis Columbia and our two classes’ rural and urban contexts led us to believe that we could be a good fit. Classis Columbia voted to create an exploratory merger committee at its September 2025 meeting. Classis Yellowstone recently approved moving forward with a merger at its February 2026 classis meeting. We are currently discussing what the next steps would be.

### **II. Overture**

That synod immediately direct the Office of General Secretary to work with classes and develop resources to facilitate mergers.

*Grounds:*

1. The COD recommends that the study committee report to Synod 2027. While we appreciate the ambition of this timeline, we believe the committee may need more time to complete a task of this size.
2. Our two classes are in active merger discussions and could use these resources now. It is possible that other smaller classes may benefit from them as well.

Classis Columbia,  
Brad Vos, stated clerk

## **Revise Ministry-Share Program to a Two-Tier System with Flexible Giving Options**

### **I. Background**

The ministry-share program continues to be discussed both at the local church level and at the denominational level as both parties work toward a solution for funding CRCNA ministry.

The most recent change was adopted by Synod 2019 and is referred to as “Ministry Shares Reimagined” (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 110-18). This new system removed the “per professing member over 18” ministry-share assessment with an annual pledge that can be calculated using whatever method the church decides to use (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 789-90).

While it was hoped that this new system would bring new energy and additional funds into the ministry-share program, that has not happened. Some will blame the “system.” Perhaps it’s time to truly “reimagine” ministry shares.

What led to “Ministry Shares Reimagined” was a report to the Board of Trustees (BOT; now Council of Delegates [COD]) from the Task Force on Financial Sustainability (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 723-33, 857-59). That report contains some history of ministry shares (quotas).

This is not the first task force assembled to review the financial support provided to the ministries of the denomination. Synod 1990 adopted the recommendation of an advisory committee “to engage in a comprehensive address of denominational ministry funding, with particular attention to the quota [now ministry share] system” (*Agenda for Synod 1990*, pp. 96-98). The following is an excerpt from the report of that committee to Synod 1992, which also provides a good summary of the history of the ministry-share system (*Agenda for Synod 1992*, pp. 386-87):

Concern about financing denominational ministry is not new to CRC congregations and synod. Already in the earliest records of synodical gatherings (Classis Grand Rapids), references to financial matters indicate a church struggling with numerical growth and with obligations to both local ministry and ministry shared with other CRC congregations. The early concerns and causes are remarkably similar to present-day quota causes: support for both active and emeritus ministers, for widows of ministers, for student ministers, for publication of periodicals, for Bible distribution, for travel and meeting expenses for synodical gatherings, etc. In these early years (1860-1880) the churches were asked to contribute specific dollar amounts (based on congregation size) and to hold freewill offerings to fund the causes which were mutually agreed to.

The early years were difficult years for many congregations. They struggled to sustain life in an untamed wilderness, to establish a Reformed identity, and to resist being dominated by the "Americanizing" environment. There was a strong sense of mutual support. Congregations stood together and sensed a responsibility to and for each other in spite of strong clashes of will and vision. As the church grew, a sense of joint financial responsibility also developed. Adjustments were made as ministry expanded.

Prior to 1939, the denomination financed its ministries through two methods: assessments and quotas. Assessments funded Calvin College and Seminary, the Emeritus Ministers Fund (the early Ministers' Pension Funds), and Synodical Expenses (now identified as Denominational Services). These were considered "family" expenses. They involved "huge investments" and put the congregations of the denomination under obligation. The "security" of these causes required assessments to which the churches were specifically bound (*Acts of Synod 1939*, p. 71). Churches could be held financially responsible for any arrears in paying assessments. Quotas, on the other hand, were means to fund spontaneous special-interest programs, e.g., missions.

In 1939, synod concluded that the distinction between assessments and quotas was artificial and that quotas and assessments were both equally binding on the churches. Synod decided to use only the term *quota* and to define it as the amount per family which should be contributed by each congregation to apply "to all the work in God's Kingdom for which we as a Christian Reformed Church are jointly responsible" (*Acts of Synod 1939*, p. 72). The quota amount would be determined annually by synod. "Consistories [were] reminded of the urgent necessity to keep before their congregations not only the privilege but also the sacred duty to contribute liberally toward the work of the Lord . . ." (*Acts of Synod 1939*, p. 72).

In the years since Synod 1939, synod has frequently been overtured to revise or change the quota system in some way. The synods of 1949, 1954, 1962, 1965, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1987, and 1990 were all asked to investigate, amend, freeze, alter the formula, correct inequities, etc., of the quota system.

Synod and our committee are convinced that a new kind of pressure is challenging the funding of denominational ministry. A new and more thorough response is necessary.

## **II. Continued downward trend and changing patterns**

Much has changed since the early days of the CRCNA; indeed, much has changed since 2019 and "Ministry Shares Reimagined." Those changes, and other factors, have contributed to the continued downward trend of ministry shares given to the CRCNA.

- Worship attendance has declined in many churches, so churches are trying to keep budgets as flat as possible.
- The costs of everything (utilities, maintenance, salaries) is higher, so to keep the budget flat, something has to give. Ministry shares is an easy place to cut without the church feeling any pain.
- There is a lack of direction on how much to pledge. Even though there are suggested methods (e.g., percent of budget, increase from prior year), none are required, thus enabling ministry-share giving to remain flat or to decrease as church budgets need to be balanced.
- There have been frustrations with some denominational agencies and institutions.
- There is no accountability for churches that do not participate in the ministry-share program.

Furthermore, there are behavior and thought patterns toward ministry shares that have changed over the years and will likely not change moving forward:

- There is less of a felt need for denominations and denominational services. Newer denominational/network models (e.g., Kingdom Network, Alliance of Reformed Churches, ECO) as well as longer-established denominations (e.g., PCA) are operating on “askings” that are considerably lower than CRCNA ministry shares and yet are experiencing growth in the areas of church growth and missions. Can the CRCNA learn from this?
- There is a greater focus on local ministry. A few generations ago, when CRCNA churches were mostly populated by immigrants trying to get settled and struggling for resources, the idea of pooling resources to do missions and ministry worked. Today, churches are opting to fund local ministries where their members can be part of the ministries and interact with those directly involved in the ministries.
- Today’s givers prefer to give to a “cause.” They want to “make a difference” and see the difference that their giving is making.

The ministry-share system remains the most efficient way to raise money for the work of our denomination; however, it is time to truly reimagine ministry shares and better position the CRCNA based on current and future financial realities.

### **III. Proposed ministry-share program**

The Ministry-Share Program will be a two-tier program with ministry share giving tied to a percent of annual giving or annual budget. Ministry shares to the CRCNA should not exceed 9 percent of giving or budget (churches always have the option to give “above ministry shares”).

#### *A. Tier 1: CRCNA governance giving*

Tier 1 will fund essential denominational functions such as the Office of General Secretary (which includes expenses related to synod) and the U.S. and Canada ministry offices.

An amount will be determined based on average attendance at the main weekly worship event (in the case of multiple services, the attendance should be combined). That amount will change from year to year as denominational governance expenses change. A minimal amount will be assessed to emerging churches without factoring in attendance.

If a church does not fulfill its Tier 1 giving, that church will not be seated at classis. If a classis does not fulfill its total Tier 1 giving, that classis will not be seated at synod.

#### *B. Tier 2: CRCNA agency/institution giving*

Tier 2 will fund denominational ministries that are part of our agencies and educational institutions. Congregations will have three options on how to allocate their Tier 2 ministry shares.

- Using the current ministry-share allocation as approved by the Council of Delegates (COD).
- Wherever the funds are most needed (allows denominational staff to allocate the funds based on current needs and/or anticipated short-falls).
- Self-allocate. Churches will have the option to allocate their ministry shares to the agencies/institutions of their choice or at their own amounts.

If churches do not participate in Tier 2 giving, denominational services through the agencies will be provided on a “fee for service” basis (except for emerging churches).

See Appendix for a sample worksheet for churches to fill out and submit to the Office of General Secretary.

### **IV. Overture**

Classis Muskegon overtures synod to do the following:

- A. Endorse the proposed two-tier ministry-share program.
- B. Convene a working committee that includes denominational staff, pastors, and lay leaders (e.g., treasurers) to fine-tune the details and develop an implementation plan. The committee will report to the Council of Delegates in February 2027 and, in turn, to the next synod.

#### *Grounds:*

1. A new system is needed to enable the CRCNA to perform essential functions and to engage in ministry in North America and around the world.
2. The two-tier system requires all churches to participate as part of the CRCNA.

3. Churches can give, knowing where their ministry shares are going. Perhaps this will refocus some of the advancement work by the agencies.
4. Tying giving to a percentage of congregational budget or giving enables ministry-share giving to increase as those amounts increase.

Classis Muskegon  
Drew Sweetman, stated clerk

**APPENDIX**

**CRCNA Ministry Shares Pledge Form 2026-2027**

Church Name   
 Classis

Annual giving or Annual budget:   
 9% of the above:

**1. CRCNA GOVERNANCE GIVING (Tier 1)**

Average AM (total all services) attendance

- Emerging
- 1-50
- 51-100
- 101-150
- 151-200
- 201-300
- 301-400
- 400+

**2. CRCNA MINISTRIES GIVING (Tier 2)**

Please allocate my Tier 2 pledge amount based on the current approved allocation.

Please allocate my Tier 2 pledge where it's most needed.

Please allocate my Tier 2 pledge as indicated below.

Calvin Seminary	<input style="width: 90%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Calvin University	<input style="width: 90%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Thrive	<input style="width: 90%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
ReFrame Ministries	<input style="width: 90%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Resonate Global Mission	<input style="width: 90%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

Total

**TOTAL CRCNA MINISTRY SHARE PLEDGE**

## Appoint a Study Committee on Reformed Ecclesiology

### I. Background

In 1857 the CRCNA was established by Dutch immigrants who desired to start a new denomination in North America that could be a faithful expression of a Reformed church. While we no longer share exactly all their practical convictions about the church (e.g., singing the Psalms only instead of hymns), they were nevertheless motivated by a deeply theological vision of the church. Central to that vision was a sense that the foundation of the church is established by God's gracious election and that the church in history is gathered and preserved through his Word and Spirit. For over 150 years the CRCNA has uniquely embodied a holistic Reformed ecclesiology that has contributed broadly to the theological and spiritual well-being of North American Christianity. However, along with most other traditional Protestant denominations in North America, the CRCNA finds itself in a situation of terminal decline. Denominational membership peaked in 1992 with 316,415 members. As of 2025 our total membership sits at 175,000.

Reflecting our American pragmatic context, we have tended to approach the problem of decline functionally rather than theologically. Our instincts are to start with our doing and the search for practical solutions as reflected in an overture to Synod 2023 to "Develop a Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Membership Decline and Require Annual Reporting of Progress" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 973). In all the attention given to practical strategies for church growth and renewal, we have not stepped back to consider the nature of the churches we are seeking to renew and grow. There seems to be an unstated assumption that we already know what the church is and that our problem is a failure of right practice and therefore not a theological matter. So instead of seeking ecclesial renewal in the light of a theological vision of the church for our changing ministry contexts, our tendency has been "clutching for any and every programmatic solution and structural reorganization in the desperate hope that survival is just another project or organizational chart away." We have lost sight of the fact that within the biblical economy of salvation the church's fruitful doing always presupposes a theological vision of its faithful being. We cannot answer the question of what the church is called to do without first answering the question of what the church is called to be.

When appeals are made to Reformed ecclesiology, we seem unable to think beyond a narrow account of the three marks of the church from the Belgic Confession, Article 29 (the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline). These three marks are an essential dimension of Reformed ecclesiology, but they are functional tests of the church that communicate little positive vision about the nature of the church. However, behind and beneath these marks within the Reformed

tradition stands a theologically rich and multifaceted vision of the church that needs to be freshly articulated for our own day.

Since the year 2022, synod has commissioned several task forces and committees related to the diverse practical necessities in the life of the church:

- an Assisted Suicide Task Force to report on the practice of assisted suicide and give guidance and pastoral advice on end-of-life matters
- a Church Order Review Task Force to conduct a comprehensive review of Church Order Articles 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and their supplements
- an *In Loco* Committee to address confessional covenant breaking on the part of one particular congregation
- an Appeals Process Task Force to design/clarify an appeals process for church members under discipline (especially general discipline)
- a Virtual Church Task Force to determine if churches may be entirely virtual
- a Multisite Church Task Force to research multisite models and give advice about which models are appropriate in the light of Reformed ecclesiology
- a Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers (including disaffiliation initiated by a major assembly)
- a Team to Clarify Distinctions in Synodical Pronouncements, Decisions, Reports, Positions, and Advice
- a Task Force to Define Membership to provide theological reflection and advice on the historical, biblical, and theological aspects of church membership

Each of these task forces or committees has been appointed to address a demonstrable lack of clarity in how churches are supposed to operate as bodies. They seek to address practical matters, but each assumes deeper theological questions. What is the nature of a church that operates in multiple sites? Is a virtual church a real church? How are churches supposed to relate to each other within our denomination when they disagree on matters of discipline? What is the meaning of church membership in the light of confessional subscription?

While addressing particular ecclesiastical matters, these committees have functioned independently, and each with a different frame of reference. They have addressed a specific practical or operational need rather than fundamental theological realities. There is a pressing need to synthesize the work of these committees, to clarify guiding principles, and to affirm an ecclesiology grounded explicitly in Reformed doctrine.

This need for clarity and theological grounding is intensified in our present context. Synod 2025 declared “that church planting is a key strategy in building the health and vitality of our denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 709) and instructed the Office of General Secretary “to coordinate with agencies and the classes to develop a vision, plan, strategy, and financial

proposal for church planting for the CRCNA for the next decade.” Church planting should be a priority for our classes and congregations. However, this prioritization of church planting within our denomination will require an increase in ecclesiastical clarity flowing from a clear theological center, because understanding the essence of the church is fundamental to its fruitful multiplication and growth.

Christian history shows that periods of renewal in the life of the church flow from a renewal of theological vision. As the Christian Reformed Church pursues renewal and growth in mission in North America, the time is right to deepen our unity around a shared vision for the church rooted in the biblical witness and classical Reformed sources. The task forces and committees highlighted above reveal the need for the kind of theological reflection that can provide strategic guidance based on our deepest convictions and beliefs as Reformed Christians.

## **II. Overture**

Classis Wisconsin overtures synod to do the following:

- A. Appoint a study committee on Reformed ecclesiology that will articulate and explain the necessary theological center of Christian Reformed congregations as understood in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the confessional Reformed tradition.
- B. Explain and show how this theological vision of the church is still relevant today and applicable to ministry in a North American context and can lead to fruitful homiletical, missional, communal, and liturgical life within our congregations.
- C. Evaluate and synthesize the work of the above-named task forces and committees in the light of this ecclesiological center.
- D. Offer clear commentary about the nature of the churches our denomination is called to plant.

*Grounds:*

1. Synod 2025 expressed the need for a deeper theological study of the nature of the church in relationship to the work of the Virtual Church Task Force, stating that it “is premature for synod to declare strictly digital or virtual online ministries to be churches, yet also premature to categorically declare virtual churches to be theologically impermissible. Further study is needed, including biblical and confessional study on the nature of a true church” (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 699).
2. The lack of clarity in ecclesiastical functioning from a congregational to denominational level merits being addressed with the full weight of a study committee. The work of individual task forces over the past half decade should be synthesized and explicitly grounded theologically.
3. Only a theological vision for the Christian Reformed Church can sustain a flourishing diversity in the church ethnically, regionally, and mission-

- ally. Unity does not mean uniformity but requires clarity about what it means to be the one body of Christ with many members (1 Cor. 12).
4. The fruitful work of church planting to which the denomination is being called depends upon having theological clarity on the nature of the church.

Classis Wisconsin  
Jason Ruis, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 34

### **Ensure Task Force Recommendations Do Not Conflict with Federal, Provincial, or State Laws**

#### **I. Background**

In its report (section V, para. 6), the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers briefly discusses Articles of Incorporation, noting that some congregations have such articles committing them to advance denominational purposes. There are legal questions about whether a major church assembly can restrict a minor assembly's rights, such as choosing delegates or removing officebearers, but the task force considers these to be legal questions rather than ecclesiastical questions and therefore outside the report's scope. The report emphasizes that Articles of Incorporation should not override more authoritative church documents, which are prioritized as Scripture, creeds and confessions, Church Order, synodical statements, and, lastly, Articles of Incorporation.

It is therefore evident that the report is written primarily from an ecclesiastical perspective and does not adequately take into account applicable Canadian and United States law.

It should be noted that most Canadian (and possibly U.S.) Christian Reformed Churches are incorporated and are therefore subject to applicable federal, provincial, and state corporate and tax laws. The 2021 Structure and Leadership Task Force (SALT) report to synod includes the following text (*Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*, p. 297):

In Reformed polity the local church council holds original authority, which in turn is delegated to classis, which delegates its authority to synod (Church Order Art. 27). Synod is the broadest assembly of the churches covenanting together on ecclesiastical matters. Synod therefore exercises direction and control of ecclesiastical matters and holds the ecclesiastical vision for the CRCNA. Current corporations exist within the CRCNA (most churches and classes are incorporated) because churches, through synod (Church Order Art. 32), have asked for collaborative and nationally contextualized ministry. Synod, however, is not a corporation.

Unlike ecclesiastical assemblies (classis and synod) that have delegated authority over lower assemblies (classes over councils and synod over classes), CRCNA corporations are legal entities whose boards do not function with ecclesiastical authority. They simply lack ecclesiastical standing, for they are legal entities whose purposes are to implement synod's denominational Ministry Plan in all of its complexity and specificity. Therefore, CRCNA corporations do not have authority over other corporations in the CRCNA, including churches and classes that are incorporated.

In Canada (and possibly the U.S.), the elected elders and deacons in incorporated churches generally have two intertwined roles: one role being an elder or deacon, and the other role being a director of the corporation that runs the church's operations. The first role is governed by ecclesiastical law (Church Order), while the second role is governed by the applicable laws (secular laws) of the jurisdiction in which the church is incorporated. Under secular law, it is generally the membership of the corporation that has the authority to elect and remove members of the board of directors.

As recommendations D and E of the report deal with the removal of elders and deacons, and thus the removal of members of the board of directors of incorporated churches, there is an apparent conflict between ecclesiastical law and secular law.

Furthermore, in Canada, in order to issue charitable receipts to donors, churches must be registered charitable organizations as legislated under the federal *Income Tax Act*. It is currently unclear what the impact on the charitable status of a Canadian Christian Reformed Church would be if another body has the power to remove the members of the board of directors of a registered charity. Possibly complicating things further, if the decision to remove members of the board of directors is made by synod, there may be questions whether Canadian Christian Reformed churches are indirectly controlled by a foreign entity (as the majority of the synod membership is made up of U.S. delegates).

## **II. Overture**

We, Classis Eastern Canada, respectfully overture synod to do the following:

- A. Do not adopt the report of the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers.
- B. Expand the mandate of the task force to address legal issues arising from recommendations D and E.
- C. Undertake a legal analysis by legal professionals with extensive experience in corporate and income tax law, ensuring this analysis covers both applicable Canadian and U.S. laws. This analysis should also include, where appropriate, obtaining input from the Charity Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency and/or the Income Tax Rulings Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency to determine whether the proposed changes to the Church

Order in any way impact the charitable status of the churches. A similar request may need to be made to U.S. authorities such as the Internal Revenue Service.

D. Upon receipt of legal advice, require the task force to revise its report to incorporate that advice and, where appropriate, develop recommendations that comply with applicable laws.

*Grounds:*

1. Incorporated local churches and classes are bound by secular law and must act according to those laws. Ecclesiastical law, generally, does not override secular law where there is a conflict between the two.
2. Where there is a potential conflict between proposed ecclesiastical and enacted secular law, the Christian Reformed Church in North America itself, as the body making the changes to the Church Order, is responsible to address/resolve those potential conflicts. This should not be left to classes or individual churches.
3. Expanding the report to include a legal analysis of the recommended changes and to provide recommendations that are in compliance with applicable secular laws provides clarity and certainty to churches, classes, and synod.

Classis Eastern Canada  
Greta Luimes, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 35

### **Defer Consideration of the Task Force Report on Procedures to Discipline Officebearers**

#### **I. Introduction**

While we appreciate the time, energy, and effort that the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers has devoted to producing its report, and while we agree with the need to clarify the relationship between major and minor assemblies when it comes to the discipline of officebearers, it is our opinion that this report is not of sufficient quality to be endorsed or acted upon by Synod 2026. Accordingly, we request that formal consideration of the task force report and its recommendations be deferred until Synod 2027 so that the task force can revise its important work.<sup>1</sup> There are two main reasons for our request, which we will briefly articulate.

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<sup>1</sup> Given this, we do not think, in its current form, the task force's report should be recommended "to the churches as a helpful guide in the application of discipline by the major assemblies" (see Recommendation B at the end of the task force report).

## II. Overture

We, Classis Holland, overture Synod 2026 to defer formal consideration of the report and recommendations of the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers until Synod 2027 so that the task force can revise its important work as indicated below.

*Grounds:*

1. First, while the report includes a significant amount of helpful material, it is not always easy to track and evaluate the main argument; nor do we think the report is as clear<sup>2</sup> or as thorough<sup>3</sup> as it needs to be if it is to be of maximum value for the denomination going forward. Focusing here on the report's main argument, it seems the task force has two main reasons for concluding with the recommendations it does—(1) councils have covenanted together, and officebearers are thus accountable to the local council *and* to broader assemblies; and (2) there are historical precedents suggesting that the discipline of an officebearer by a major assembly fits within our theological and ecclesiastical tradition. These two reasons could well be enough to support the task force's recommendations. That said, one has to read almost nine pages before coming across the first mention of "councils *covenant[ing]* to work together on the basis of a Church Order" (III, A). Given the "confusion" over this topic and the fact that "in CRC history we have not always seen eye to eye on these matters" (I, A, 1), we think it would be more helpful to find the

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of the report's clarity, we noticed several instances where precision was lacking, and we cite the following two as representative examples. First, in section II, C of the report, the task force discusses a major assembly's deposition of a council and writes, "Perhaps the clearest explanation of the relation of the assemblies is given by Henry Beets: the denomination is a 'federation of free Reformed churches.'" Perhaps so—or perhaps, at least, that was the basis for the situation under consideration. In any case, in section III, B of its report, the task force indicates that whether the CRC is a "federation" of churches has been a matter of historical debate. It seems, then, that the Beets reference needs to be nuanced to reflect the historical debate over this topic. Second, in section III, B, the task force notes that "when circumstances required it, the CRC granted broader assemblies a wide range of powers." Using "CRC" in this way, however, suggests that our denomination has held a consistent perspective on the question at hand, something the report emphasizes is not true (as above, see also section I, A). Accordingly, in this statement in section II, B, it would be better to substitute "various synods" for "CRC."

<sup>3</sup> In terms of the report's thoroughness, our main concern is that while the report is right, we think, to highlight the covenantal nature of our relationships within the denomination (e.g., sections III, A; IV, A, 3, d), it is not evident that the report adequately demonstrates from Scripture that a major assembly has the authority to discipline a member of a council. Put differently, while section II, A offers enough to demonstrate the need for accountability and discipline within the Christian community, what has been written in that section does not adequately address the main question the task force is trying to answer. Specifically, while it is understandable to refer to Acts 15:1-29, the task force's discussion of this passage mainly supports the general legitimacy of our major assemblies but fails to make the case for how this passage supports a major assembly disciplining an officebearer of a local church. On this latter topic, perhaps a discussion of Galatians or the topic of apostolic authority would help make the case, but the task force did not include discussion of such a letter or topic.

task force’s main position(s)/argument stated up front—in discussion with the history of this debate within our tradition<sup>4</sup>—and then supported by Scripture, the Reformed tradition, our Church Order, and historical precedent.<sup>5</sup>

2. The second main reason we think formal consideration of the task force’s report should be deferred until Synod 2027 is because we think the recommended changes to the Church Order are not as clear or as helpful as the task force presumes them to be in Recommendations D and E. First, regarding Recommendation D, we have two concerns regarding the first paragraph of the proposed addition to the Supplement to Church Order Article 27-b:
  - While we can envision the potential need for a major assembly to “guide procedures of discipline at the levels of local councils and classes . . . even if not requested by the minor assembly,”<sup>6</sup> we find the absence of any indication regarding *who* would initiate such a process and *how* it would be implemented to be a problem, since a lack of clarity could result in a lack of consistency in the implementation of the proposed process.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Related to this point, while the task force helpfully points to Henry De Moor’s scholarship on the relationship between major and minor assemblies on the matter of disciplining officebearers, it is not evident that the task force adequately summarizes or evaluates De Moor’s conclusions on this matter. Doing so, we think, would strengthen the report and be of great assistance to the CRCNA at this time.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to this comment related to the report’s main argument, we think a general note is in order about the need to substantiate key points because, at times, key claims are more stated than argued. Section II, B alone includes the following examples: “Though delegated by minor assemblies, the authority of major assemblies does not come from local councils but from Christ”; “. . . major assemblies are the ruling agency of the minor assemblies”; “. . . when the welfare of a congregation is at stake, a major assembly, as the ruling agency of minor assemblies, has the authority to discipline a minor assembly.” Now, in fairness, these three quotes come from the section summarizing “theological foundations and principles for the exercise of church discipline,” and, moreover, each of the three quotes above ends with a footnote citing references upon which the statements are based. That said, given that “in CRC history we have not always seen eye to eye on” the appropriateness of a major assembly disciplining an officebearer (section I, A), the report—we think—would be strengthened by a more thorough discussion in which the claims quoted above are clearly substantiated. Perhaps to validate our perspective, the footnote following the conclusion of the third example quoted above cites “Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 591.” However, nowhere on p. 591 (or anywhere on pp. 590-92) can one find language specific to “when the welfare of a congregation is at stake.” This is not to say that the task force’s claim or conclusion is unwarranted; rather, it is simply to point out that for its claim or conclusion to be widely accepted, it needs to be discussed more thoroughly while citing references that support its claim/conclusion more specifically.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Classis Holland submitted an overture to Synod 2021 in which it requested intervention after Neland Avenue CRC ordained a deacon in a same-sex marriage, so in principle we agree with this.

<sup>7</sup> In section IV, B, 3, b of its report the task force writes, “Councils and classes must have the right to overture synod to deal with councils and classes that openly break covenant.” We

- Stating that “major assemblies are expected to hold councils and classes within their constituency accountable to the ecclesiastical covenant implied in denominational membership” is understandable and valid, but it is possible to read this in a broader sense than the task force intends. The “ecclesiastical covenant” could include many things, after all—e.g., ministry shares—but we suspect the task force does not intend for this sentence to be read that broadly. Perhaps qualifying the sentence in question would make it less susceptible to overapplication.

Further, with regard to Recommendation D, we also have two concerns with the third proposed paragraph to be added to the Supplement to Church Order Article 27-b:

- Whereas the main focus of the report is on a major assembly disciplining *officebearers*, this paragraph jumps to the possibility of a major assembly declaring *a church* to have, de facto, disaffiliated. We think such an addition is problematic. Since the report emphasizes disciplining *officebearers*, we would understand why the task force might highlight in this paragraph the possibility of deposing *a council*, but to declare *a church* to have, de facto, disaffiliated from the denomination seems to be more an act of disciplining an entire congregation—a topic that seems to us to be outside the scope of the task force’s mandate.
- Relatedly, pointing to Supplement, Article 38-f to guide a process in which a major assembly declares that a church has, de facto, disaffiliated from the denomination seems ill-advised since it is one thing for a council/congregation to *decide* to disaffiliate and quite another thing for a church to *be told* that it has, de facto, disaffiliated. Because the two situations are so different, it is not evident that Supplement, Article 38-f would offer much guidance for the latter.

Next, regarding Recommendation E, we do not think the task force has provided enough clarity within the proposed changes to Church Order Article 83 and to Supplement, Articles 82-84 to warrant Synod 2026 adopting them. Here we offer four considerations:

- Concerning what would become Article 83-b, as with Recommendation D, the absence of guidelines regarding *how* the process for a major assembly disciplining an officebearer is to be initiated invites, we think, the possibility for inconsistency in the application of this proposed addition and, thus, for appeals in the event it is implemented.
- Regarding the amendments proposed for Supplement, Articles 82-84, it is not obvious to us that the change suggested for subsection *a*

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think this is probably the right avenue to consider for initiating the discipline of an officebearer by a major assembly, but we also think including this in the proposed addition to the Church Order would be beneficial.

would be palatable for councils and congregations if *a major assembly* placed one of their officebearers on *paid* administrative leave.

- It seems that subsection *e*, 1), for example, implicitly suggests that a *council* would need to concur with the judgment of a *classis* if the latter were to suspend or depose an officebearer.<sup>8</sup> We do not think the task force thinks that would need to happen, but without further alteration to the language in this provision, the Church Order would be left ambiguous on this point.
- We will simply point out that the task force quotes what appears to be Church Order 2024 regarding Supplement, Articles 82-84, subsection *i*, since Church Order 2025 has new language (adopted by Synod 2025) for this subsection. The language should thus be updated to reflect the current Church Order wording.

#### IV. Closing Comments

In closing, we once again wish to convey our appreciation to the task force for the work it did to produce this report. It has amassed and conveyed a significant amount of information related to this necessary and important conversation, and we think where the task force is pointing us has merit and could prove to be quite helpful. Nevertheless, for the reasons provided above, we reiterate that it is our opinion that Synod 2026 should not formally consider the task force's report and recommendations but should instead defer formal consideration until Synod 2027 so that the task force has the opportunity to revise its report and fine-tune its proposed changes to our Church Order. Thank you for considering our perspective.

Classis Holland  
Jen Rozema, stated clerk

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## OVERTURE 36

### **Do Not Adopt Recommendations D and E of the Report on Procedures to Discipline Officebearers**

#### **I. Introduction**

The Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers submitted its recommendations to Synod 2026 in its report, and councils and classes have been invited to share their opinions on how synod should respond to this report. Classis British Columbia South-East has reviewed the report and offers the following opinions with an accompanying overture.

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<sup>8</sup> Similar revisions should also be considered, we think, for subsection *f*, 1) and subsection *g* of Supplement, Articles 82-84.

## II. Background

We can appreciate the motivation and impetus toward developing Church Order procedures for discipline, especially since this area has given rise to confusion and disagreement over the nature of the authority of broader assemblies.

There is significant value in honoring the bond of the Spirit in a covenant of churches that can offer support and accountability. This spiritual bond is clearly articulated throughout Scripture—for example, in texts like Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 11:16; 16:1-4; and 2 Corinthians 11:28.

However, there is also significant value in equipping and guiding local officebearers in taking up their proper responsibilities as appointed and ordained by Christ in texts such as Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-3.

In interacting with these two principles, the report rightly, and importantly, begins from the biblical starting point that Christ is Lord and head of the church (section II, B). While we believe that the Church Order may benefit from dealing with situations where councils do not follow the decisions of major assemblies, we disagree that the recommended changes to Articles 27 and 83 of the Church Order are the best way to deal with this challenge for the following reasons:

The report makes the mistaken assumption that there are only two options in our church polity: hierarchy and congregationalism. Based on this assumption, the report finds an ambiguity and tension between these two extremes. Within this framework, delegated authority becomes accumulated authority.

Delegated authority in the Church Order, however, is not accumulated authority. In fact, Article 28-b limits the domain of broader assemblies by stipulating that “a major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern the churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.”

The domain and jurisdiction of major assemblies is not as abstract or undefined as the report claims. The Church Order sets out several matters that belong to the first category, “churches in common”:

- creeds and confessions (Art. 5)
- theological training and candidacy for ministry (Art. 6-7)
- eligibility for call and ordination of ministers (Art. 9-10)
- release of a pastor (Art. 17)
- maintaining a theological seminary (Art. 19)
- financial assistance to aspiring ministers (Art. 21)
- adoption of creeds and Church Order (Art. 47)

The current Church Order also sets out regulations for including broader assemblies in discipline processes:

- appeal of a decision of a minor assembly (Art. 30)
- church visitors (Art. 42-b)

- synodical deputies (Art. 48-c)
- excluding a person from membership only after approval of classis (Supplement, Art. 78-81)
- suspension or deposition of an officebearer done after presenting its case to classis (Supplement, Art. 82-84)

Each of these provisions is in keeping with the Reformed principle that matters of discipline should begin at the local consistory or council. This is consistent with the second aspect of the domain of major assemblies being matters “which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.” Other matters that cannot be finished in a minor assembly include appeals and matters that require advice from a broader assembly.

Based on these considerations, delegated authority is not “transferred,” “combined,” or “cumulative,” as the report describes it. Rather, councils delegate the authority that is needed in order to finish the matters that are properly before the major assemblies. When broader assemblies make decisions on matters that are properly before them, we understand that these decisions are settled and binding and ought to be followed by local councils.

Adopting the task force’s recommendations as set out in the report along with its rationale risks altering our understanding of the basic principles of our Reformed church polity by creating a tension between hierarchical and congregationalist models. In the task force’s appeal to a hierarchical model, the recommended changes create further tension between minor and major assemblies in place of the cooperation that is currently possible by minding the jurisdiction, nature, and domain of the authority of each assembly. The result of these recommendations will be less clarity in the application of discipline and less support for local councils.

It is our opinion that clarifying the Church Order in the articles which currently deal with major assemblies would be more helpful than the additions to Articles 27 and 83 as recommended by the task force. This approach would keep us within the principles of original and delegated authority already present in the Church Order. It would also further strengthen the covenantal bond as churches work together as much as possible to equip and support each other in carrying out the responsibilities placed on them by Christ.

### **III. Overture**

Classis British Columbia South-East overtures Synod 2026 not to adopt the additions to Articles 27 and 83 of the Church Order as recommended in the report of the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers, and instead to instruct the task force to develop procedures consistent with the current nature and domain of major assemblies.

*Grounds:*

1. The Church Order throughout requires and assumes that matters of discipline begin at the minor assembly.

2. The principle of beginning discipline at the minor assembly is consistent with the responsibilities of officebearers given in Scripture (for example, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).
3. The authority of major assemblies is not “full authority,” nor is it transferred or combined, as the report suggests, but, rather, is delegated to finish the matters properly before the major assemblies. The Church Order already defines which matters are properly before the major assemblies and already provides procedures with which major assemblies can guide processes of discipline.

Classis B.C. South-East  
Kaitlyn Hofsink, stated clerk

# COMMUNICATION

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## COMMUNICATION 1

### Classis North Cascades

Classis North Cascades spent time discussing the report of the COD Task Force to Review Governance Costs at our fall 2025 meeting. We would like to express the following points considering the proposals which are being presented to Synod 2026.

We believe that holding synod every other year will adversely impact the deliberative nature of synod and place more decisions into the hands of denominational administrative staff instead of holding to our Reformed polity of having the churches consider the questions and concerns of the denomination. We see this as a negative and are not in favor. Furthermore, by going to synods every other year, we believe the agendas will become too unwieldy as was shown when synod did not meet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is our understanding that classical assessments are not being recommended by COD at this time; however, we would prefer to “pay to play” than to meet less frequently as a synod—though we feel that the “pay to play” model would unfairly burden classes that span large geographic distances, such as Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain, and others.

We are in favor of reducing the number of delegates to three but would not agree with having any fewer delegates.

On reducing the number of classes in the denomination, we are not in favor of trying to equalize classis size. We have found great benefit in being a smaller classis after having been created out of one of the largest classes in the denomination. This smaller size has enabled more lay participation in meetings while creating a significant time savings for our churches in comparison to our previous experience.

If synod decides that reducing the number of classes is the best thing to do, we ask that it consider very carefully how this restructuring would be done, and that synod invite at least three classes in a geographic area to consider how those churches might be able to redraw their lines into two classes so that the structural adjustments are placed into the hands of the people most affected by it. For example, synod could ask Classis North Cascades, Classis Pacific Northwest, and Classis Columbia to consider how the three classes might be able to merge into two classes. Or synod could consider including Classes B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East in the conversation with these other three classes and ask them to discuss how the five classes might be able to adjust boundaries to create three or four classes.

Classis North Cascades  
J. Scott Roberts, stated clerk