

# STANDING COMMITTEES



# Candidacy Committee

## I. Introduction

Because the denomination has such a vital interest in the formation of ministers of the Word, synod in 2004 established the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee (now called the “Candidacy Committee”) to retain, direct, and enhance the denomination’s role in the process of equipping and forming its future leaders. Through this committee, the denomination is able to oversee the nurture and training of those preparing for ordained ministry through Church Order Articles 6, 7, and 8. The Candidacy Committee, on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), is synod’s designated discernment partner in the communal work of preparing candidates and assessing their readiness for ministry. This work is done in conversation with other discernment partners, including mentors, classis leaders, and Calvin Theological Seminary faculty. Synod 2006 also mandated the committee with the task of encouraging and equipping classes in connection with the ordination of commissioned pastors through Church Order Article 23 (*Acts of Synod 2004*, pp. 616-17; *Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 662).

The committee mandate is available in a document titled *Journey Toward Ordination*, accessible on the Candidacy Committee website ([crcna.org/candidacy](http://crcna.org/candidacy)). The mandate instructs the committee to perform the following functions:

- to foster the development of pastoral leadership
- to maintain consistent, clear, just standards
- to advise, resource, and maintain regular contact with Classis Ministerial Leadership Teams
- to grant candidacy applicants denominational licensure to exhort
- to support classes in maintaining consistent processes for examination and ordination
- to recommend candidates to synod

## II. Committee membership

The members of the Candidacy Committee meet three times per year. As with other synodical standing committees, Candidacy Committee members serve a potential of two three-year terms.

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Andrew Beunk (2027/2), Caleb Dickson (2027/2), Moon Kim (2026/2), Henry Kranenburg (2028/2), Andy Sytsma (2028/2), Mark Bennink (2028/1), Mike Koetje (2028/1), Shaun Jung (2028/1), Susan LaClear (staff), Jul Medenblik (ex officio, as the Calvin Theological Seminary representative), and Zachary King (ex officio, as general secretary).

We would like to express our thanks to Rev. Lora Copley for her faithful service to the Candidacy Committee. Rev. Copley resigned from her role in November 2025 upon being appointed as interim editor of *The Banner*.

The EPMC Facilitation Team, a subcommittee of the Candidacy Committee, is tasked with walking alongside participants in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) to advise, resource, and support them. The team members also oversee and implement the strategies of the program. The EPMC Facilitation Team currently includes the following members:

Rev. Shawn Brix, staff adviser, Calvin Theological Seminary; Canadian church relations liaison for the seminary  
Victor Chen, general member, Classis B.C. Northwest  
Rev. James Hollendonner, general member, Classis Illiana  
Rev. Timothy Joo, general member, Classis Hackensack  
Rev. Timothy Kooiman, general member, Classis Wisconsin  
Rev. Michael Koot, general member, Classis B.C. Southeast  
Rev. Aleah Marsden, general member, Classis Central California  
Rev. Daniel Mouw, general member, Classis Grandville  
Rev. Benjamin Oliveira, general member, Classis Muskegon  
Rev. Marg Rekman, general member, Classis Ontario Southwest  
Rev. Jack Van de Hoef, general member, Classis Eastern Canada  
Rev. Josephine Wong, Classis B.C. Northwest  
Rev. Daniel Unterkofler, Classis California South  
Rev. Patrick Lin, Classis Central California  
Rev. Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy

The Candidacy Committee is deeply appreciative of the valuable contributions of the following members who are completing or have completed their terms on the EPMC Facilitation Team: Rev. Charles Dillender and Rev. Lora Copley. We also appreciate the work of Dr. Geoff VanderMolen in supporting the vocational formation process of EPMC participants throughout his tenure at Calvin Theological Seminary.

### **III. Celebrating the value of well-formed, theologically trained church leaders**

Over the past several decades, North America has experienced a rise of independent Christian churches. Their lack of denominational grounding has resulted in inconsistent levels of accountability and the lack of a standard baseline in theological training and spiritual formation for pastors. Within these models, pastors are ordained by local congregations that have no precedent or established process for vetting a pastor's qualifications or discerning their spiritual maturity and character. All of these factors have opened the door to a great deal of harmful doctrinal confusion, spiritual abuse, and personality cults within the church, resulting in harm to congregants and a loss of credibility and trust within the culture.

Against this background, the Christian Reformed Church in North America stands out with much to offer in terms of stability, accountability, and solid theology to people in search of a community they can trust. By the grace of God, we have worked to uphold our historical commitment to ensuring

that congregations are served by well-formed, theologically educated, well-vetted pastors. In contrast to the decrease of accountability in our culture in recent decades, the CRCNA has actively increased our attention to accountability by requiring psychological evaluations and abuse-of-power training as requirements for ministry preparation, and by implementing a Code of Conduct for all leaders. The Candidacy Committee and Calvin Theological Seminary have also strengthened their focus on spiritual formation as a vital part of theological training in order to support emerging leaders in developing practices for balanced, healthy ministry.

The Candidacy Committee has seen many leaders from independent churches seek out Calvin Seminary and the Christian Reformed Church in pursuit of spiritual grounding in a trusted, accountable community. These leaders often express delight in our rich history and declare appreciation for our thoughtful articulations of Reformed theology. When seasoned CRC pastors invest themselves in mentoring these newcomers and as classis leaders come alongside to support them in their training, they are often motivated through such hospitality and care to put down roots in our spiritual communities. The Candidacy Committee has the joy of hearing such stories as we come alongside leaders in their ministry-training journey.

The Candidacy Committee also works to support classes in handling cases in which individuals are hired to serve as lead pastors but they have not been trained and vetted within our system. Such cases seem to occur most often in the following situations:

- when a congregation initiates their search for a pastor without the help of a classis-assigned counselor and without utilizing the resources that Thrive, the Candidacy Committee, and their local classis provide to assist in finding a qualified pastor
- when a congregation has worked through all the regular channels to find an eligible pastor but has been unable to find a suitable candidate

Because such cases are usually very complicated for the church, the classis, and the prospective minister, the Candidacy Committee urges churches to use all of the resources provided by their classis and the denomination (classis-assigned counselor, pastor-search portal, candidate list, etc.) to do a sustained and diligent search for an eligible candidate before pursuing candidates who are not eligible to serve in lead roles in established CRC churches. When the need to call someone who is not currently eligible is jointly discerned, the Candidacy Committee works alongside all parties to support, as much as possible, a healthy, unrushed process toward providing the leader with the training and orientation that will enable them to serve effectively. In this way, we have sought to offer hospitality and flexibility in regard to the timing of training and formation without sacrificing the quality or standard of training for CRC ministers.

## **IV. Increased support of Classis Ministerial Leadership Teams**

### *A. Renewed energy and support for leadership development*

Leadership development is essential to the health and growth of churches, so it has been deeply encouraging to observe a renewed energy for, and commitment to, the support of Classis Ministerial Leadership Teams (CMLTs) across the denomination. The Candidacy Committee believes that CMLTs are uniquely positioned to strengthen and guide this work. Historically, these teams have reliably supported and guided emerging leaders through the candidacy process, attending to financial support for seminary students as well. However, their suggested mandate also includes the key functions of serving as a “consultation and advisory resource to . . . classis . . . regarding matters related to ministerial candidacy in the CRC” and serving to “encourage the member congregations of . . . classis to be proactive in identifying possible candidates for ministry” (see *Agenda for Synod 2006*, pp. 326-27; the full mandate can be found in the Journey Toward Ordination document).

Over the past four years the director of Candidacy has been working to provide opportunities for CMLT members to receive regular support through online “Candidacy/CMLT Connect Meetings” twice a year. These times of conversation, updates, and resource-sharing have been very helpful, and they will continue to be offered.

### *B. In-person gathering in February 2026*

In 2025, plans were also laid to host an in-person gathering for CMLT members to provide an opportunity for them to engage in deeper, more prolonged conversations about leadership development with key partners in the Candidacy Committee and at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS). Together with the CTS director of Empower and Lifelong Learning, the Candidacy director hosted a “CMLT Gathering” Feb. 3-5 at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Paradise Valley, Arizona. This event was made possible through the generous contribution of financial support provided by the seminary, for which the Candidacy Committee is deeply grateful. The goal of the event was to encourage and equip these leaders to become catalysts of leadership development within their classes—serving to cast vision, to resource, and to strategize with classis leaders about how to create a clear pathway of training and support for lay leaders, people seeking a license to exhort, and commissioned pastors.

Twenty classes sent CMLT representatives to this event. The attendees were energized and eager to engage in this work. The gathering gave them an opportunity to talk together about leadership needs within their classes and to share strategies they have used to try to address those needs. Some of the encouraging stories that were shared included a report from Classis Hackensack that fifteen lay leaders from immigrant congregations were enrolled in a preaching course organized and taught by local leaders. Classis Arizona shared how they catalyzed leadership development through providing internship grants and offering church-planting residencies. Classis

Southeast U.S. shared about the fruit of their efforts to train individuals for licensure to exhort and to become commissioned pastors; using the Empower program in their training effort even allowed some of their students to continue receiving accredited training at CTS by stacking their certificate level credits into a master of arts or a master of divinity degree. A CMLT member from Classis Lake Superior spoke of the importance of presenting leadership training as a valuable gift to emerging leaders, and of avoiding unhelpful references to “jumping through hoops” that have become an unfortunate part of some leaders’ vocabulary in the CRCNA. A general observation made by CMLT leaders was that a strong focus on discipleship and the training of lay leaders is foundational to developing more commissioned pastors and ministers of the Word.

After hearing from CMLTs about their needs and hopes for developing leaders, staff from the CRCNA and CTS shared information about resources and programs that support their various needs. Aaron Einfeld, Justin DenOuden, and Wendy Fisher shared about Calvin Seminary programs like the Empower program, the Commissioned Pastor Certificate program, Spanish-language programming, and options for continued learning such as the Adaptive Leadership cohort and the Lifelong Learning resources. Dave Den Haan shared about resources from Thrive, including Thriving Essentials and elder and deacon training resources that are being developed. Rick Zomer offered encouragement and insight for engaging young adults in conversation and inviting them into greater investment in the life of the church. Tim Sheridan shared resources used by Resonate, such as the Timothy Leadership program, and encouraged CMLTs with his shared vision for ensuring that church planters receive thorough Reformed theological training along with all the other needed components of equipping for their challenging work.

It was clear throughout this event that God is at work within the CMLTs of the CRCNA. Participants were attentive to how God might be leading their classes and equipping his people for works of ministry (see Eph. 4:12). Candidacy Committee member Andy Sytsma and prayer shepherd Jon Hoekema encouraged CMLT members to ask God regularly to send laborers into the harvest, and they invited everyone to join a weekly prayer meeting with CRC staff and CTS faculty.

#### **V. Commissioned Pastor Study Team report**

The Commissioned Pastor Study Team (a subcommittee appointed by the Candidacy Committee) consists of Rev. Shawn Brix, Rev. Lora Copley, Rev. Dan De Graff, Pastor Caleb Dickson, Pastor Rod Huguen, Rev. Petr Kornilov, Pastor Elly Boersma Sarkany, Rev. Joel Sheeres, Rev. Andy Sytsma, and the director of Candidacy, Rev. Susan LaClear.

The Candidacy Committee tasked this group to review the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor, research the effectiveness of the current commissioned pastor ordination pathways, and make any

needed recommendations for clarifying Church Order Articles 23 and 24. In 2025 the team conducted a survey of commissioned pastors and took note of their feedback. They also worked to address challenges that had arisen in the practice of ordaining commissioned pastors to serve in solo and lead roles in established churches, making recommendations for modifications to the Church Order Supplement, Article 24 that were adopted by Synod 2025. Since that time, the team’s focus has been on the following:

- Review the development of the office of commissioned pastor.
- Further develop the theological framework of this office.
- Recommend some clarifications to Church Order Article 23 that could serve to strengthen the CRCNA’s understanding of this office and guide our practices for training commissioned pastors.

The Commissioned Pastor Study Team presents the results of their study and discussion in the appendix to this report.

## **VI. Recommendations**

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy, and to an additional member of the Candidacy Committee, if one is present, when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.

B. That synod encourage all classes to work in consultation with their Classis Ministerial Leadership Teams to develop clear pathways for lay leader and pastoral leader training.

C. That synod affirm the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor as articulated in the report of the Commissioned Pastor Study Team (Appendix).

D. That synod affirm the Commissioned Pastor Study Team’s clarifications to Church Order Article 23 regarding categories and training guidelines for the office of commissioned pastor (Appendix).

E. That synod recommend the proposed changes to Church Order Article 23 and its supplement as presented in the Appendix to this report (see Addendum) for adoption by a future synod.

Candidacy Committee  
Susan LaClear, director

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Brief Overview of the Development of the Commissioned Pastor Office**

#### **I. Background**

For decades the CRC has been actively addressing the office known today as “commissioned pastor.” Back in the 1970s special attention was being paid to the status of “layworkers in evangelism,” which was not an office but a description that applied mainly to nonseminary-educated individuals

who were involved in founding new congregations. A study committee report to Synod 1973 laid out a biblical analysis of the historical development of the concepts of office and ordination (Report 44). The study committee noted: "It is evident that current understandings and practices with regard to office and ordination cannot be supported by Scripture in every detail" (*Agenda for Synod 1973*, p. 673). What is meant here is that, although we find Greek words that can be translated as "pastors," "elders," and "deacons" in the Bible, Scripture doesn't necessarily give a clearly defined blueprint structure of church offices that can be easily applied today. The CRCNA partially owes its structure to historical customs and tradition.

Synod 1978 created a fourth office, that of "evangelist," and the persons ordained to this office were viewed as elders. This was a substantial change in CRC polity. A more recent study committee reflected that the addition of this fourth office "abandoned a long-held assumption that there were just three kinds of offices, each representing one aspect of the threefold office of Christ: prophet (ministers), priest (deacons), and king (elders)" (*Agenda for Synod 2001*, p. 267). In 1994 the fourth office was expanded for use with staff ministry (*Acts of Synod 1994*, pp. 488-91), and it was assumed that there would be a relationship between the individual in that office and a minister of the Word.

The office of evangelist continued to evolve in the 1990s, and a new study committee was tasked with looking at ordination and "official acts of ministry." That committee reported to Synod 2001. Looking back at the 1973 report and synod-approved guidelines, the 2001 committee said:

The emphasis [of those decisions] is on function, and the terminology. . . is consistently the terminology of good order rather than spiritual endowment or consecration. . . .

We believe that it is better to approach ordination and office in a different way—relationally rather than functionally. . . .

We will suggest that church leadership (ordained church leadership in particular) is characterized in the first place by certain relationships of trust and responsibility. Leaders are entrusted by Christ with responsibility for and to the community. They re-present Christ to the community. In addition, leaders are entrusted by the community to bring its cares, concerns, joys, desires, gifts, and ministries to Christ. They re-present the community to Christ. . . .

Ordained leaders are set aside for the Lord's use. Ordination requires the giving of oneself for the Lord and the church; it sets over the leader the sign of the cross. (*Agenda for Synod 2001*, pp. 275-76)

The 2001 committee's report also highlighted three elements crucial to their understanding of ordination that continue to be referenced today: "calling," "role," and "excellencies for ministry" (*Agenda for Synod 2001*, pp. 282-84).

These understandings helped to steer the denomination toward our current concept of the office of commissioned pastor. In 2003 that title—“commissioned pastor”—was considered, but synod decided to rename the office of “evangelist” as “ministry associate.” A decade later, the Candidacy Committee (previously known as the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee, or SMCC), in consultation with ministry associates, re-proposed the title “commissioned pastor” for this office, with the following rationale:

Over the past few years, the number of persons serving in the CRC as ordained ministry associates has been growing significantly. This is an expected result of the strategy adopted by Synod 2007 to make more use of, offer more support to, and give greater value to the office of ministry associate (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 299). This strategy was closely tied to returning to the historical usage of Church Order Article 7, limiting the number of persons entering the ordained office of the minister of the Word without the prescribed theological training (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 298). . . .

The former term *evangelist* was recognized as being inappropriate for the many uses and job descriptions that were being approved relative to the office, and was particularly awkward for some serving in institutional chaplaincy. . . .

The current title of *ministry associate* is discouraging to many currently ordained in the office, making them feel marginalized or disrespected. Those who would formerly have been ordained to the office of minister of the Word under Church Order Article 7 often question whether the church sees them as a “minister” or as a mere “associate.” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 211, 213)

The title *commissioned pastor* identifies those in the office as a pastor while recognizing a difference from those ordained as a minister of the Word. Synod 2012 adopted this term—*commissioned pastor*—and Synod 2013 decided to distinguish this fourth office as separate from the office of elder.

The Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2012 summarizes well the spirit that continues in our denomination to the present:

The denominational commitment to maintain a tradition of theologically educated clergy can be maintained and developed, even as there is more use, support, and value given to the office of ministry associate. Toward this end, if ministers of the Word are actively committed and encouraged to continue to learn throughout their careers, the task of encouraging ministry associates to continue to learn will have greater credibility. The current trend of making more use of “non-theologically educated pastors” does not have to signal a change in commitment to theological education. Instead, it can simply signal a change in the *sequence* in which theological education is experienced (i.e., during a life of ministry rather than exclusively

before a life of ministry). Classes are well within their area of responsibility as they encourage ministers of the Word, ministry associates, and their sponsoring ministries to attend to the priority of continuing education. Ministry associates serving as solo or lead pastors can be encouraged to make a learning plan that moves them toward eventual ordination as minister of the Word.

*(Agenda for Synod 2012, p. 223)*

The Christian Reformed Church in North America has long valued, and continues to value, well-educated ministers of the Word who have received their education in a seminary. Seminaries equip emerging leaders with the knowledge and skills that are important for pastoral ministry, and in partnership with churches they provide opportunities for acquiring pastoral experience through field education. Calvin Theological Seminary (and some other seminaries) also attend to the spiritual formation and well-being of the emerging pastor. The formative process of the M.Div. degree is integral for discerning an individual's qualifications and readiness for ordained ministry. The candidacy processes for ministers of the Word and for commissioned pastors are designed to include oversight and approval by discernment partners, which may include a seminary, denomination officials, and a classis, in addition to their local congregation.

Since that 2012 report, the Candidacy Committee and the churches of our denomination have sought to maintain the high educational standard for solo or lead pastors while allowing more flexibility in the sequence of training for ministry. Over the past several years, Church Order Article 24-b has been used to allow many to serve as solo commissioned pastors while completing seminary studies (informally described as "bridge ordination"), instead of requiring them to finish their M.Div. coursework before being called to serve in solo leadership. Pursuit of seminary study while engaging in solo pastoral ministry can be extremely challenging, and yet this possibility has been greatly appreciated in many cases.

## **II. Strengthening the theological framework for the office of commissioned pastor**

Throughout the development of the office of commissioned pastor, the Christian Reformed denomination has been attentive to ensuring that proper honor is given to those serving in this important role. Our attempts to honor this office have often involved making practical adjustments to the process, titling, and support of commissioned pastors. But it is also essential to honor the office of commissioned pastor by clearly articulating a clear theological framework that supports and validates its value.

Throughout the past seven decades, various study committees have contributed theological reflections that undergird this office, and these reflections have received affirmation by synod. In the following sections, our study team has drawn together and elaborated upon these insights to articulate clearly how this office is grounded in biblical principles.

A. *A variety of gifts needed to extend the strategic mission of the church*

The apostle Paul makes a special point of noting that a variety of different gifts are needed for the leadership and building up of God's church.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"

(1 Cor. 12:27-30)

The commissioned pastor office and its predecessors (evangelist and ministry associate) have served to extend ordination to people with various pastoral giftings. This office has "the character of pastoral extension" (*Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 506). Although this term has admittedly more practical than theological basis, it could be said that the instances in which the apostle Paul sent ambassadors in his place to deliver messages, pastor churches, and preach the Word (1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 6:21-22; Rom. 16:1-2) were cases of pastoral extension. The ministries of those appointed individuals extended Paul's gospel reach in various ways. In a similar way, the ministries of commissioned pastors serve to extend the ministry of a congregation. Church planters extend the work into broader geographical areas, establishing and pastoring new congregations. Commissioned pastors who serve as youth pastors, worship pastors, children's pastors, chaplains, and more extend a congregation's ministry into areas of specialized focus that are "strategic for the accomplishment of the church's total ministry"; this was the rationale that informed the development of the office of evangelist after years of biblical study and discussion around the topic of the nature of ordination (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 63).

The "Report of the Committee for the Study of the Use of Ordained Men" in 1961 had established that the early church also recognized that changing times required changing ministerial functions.

However, it must be recognized that the situation in which the early church found itself was different than it is today. In the early church God appointed or permitted ordained ministers to perform tasks which were necessary for the welfare of the church *at that time*. There was no need for a secretary of missions, a stated clerk, or an editor of a church paper. In the time of the early church the welfare of the church demanded that minister, possessing certain qualifications and authority as Christ's representative, perform the work of pastor; but also the work of teacher, of evangelist. It was even necessary for the welfare of the church that Paul engage in the collection of funds and tent-making for a time. . .

But today the church lives in another age. The church has grown. The church is presented with new opportunities and challenges. The

church is able to meet these challenges because she has greater and more numerous means whereby she is able to carry out her task. Therefore, the church recognizes the need of a secretary of missions, a stated clerk, an editor of a church paper, a radio minister, and a chaplain in an institution of mercy. . . Does the church err by appointing ordained men to such positions? We think not; if it can be demonstrated that, in doing so, the church and the individual appointed are concerned with the perfecting of the saints and the building up of the body of Christ. *(Agenda for Synod 1961, pp. 248-49)*

The office of commissioned pastor is one in which congregational need and individual giftedness meet. Just as a need arose for deacons to be appointed in Acts 6, modern churches often discern the need for a commissioned pastor to serve a particular pastoral role to address the needs and promote the flourishing of a congregation or community. Ministers of the Word receive broad training in all aspects of ministry with a deep focus on exegeting and preaching the Word. But the church has a continual need for more specialized gifts and expertise in certain aspects of ministry—such as worship leadership, youth ministry, discipleship, evangelism, care, and so on. Leading the church well requires a variety of gifts that a solo or lead pastor does not necessarily possess.

Those with gifts in specialized areas of church ministry need to be trained in ways that are tailored to their specific role rather than through the M.Div. degree, which is designed to provide a broad and comprehensive training for pastoral ministry. Synod 2001's study committee noted that a "principle of proportionality" should guide the level of Reformed training required for commissioned pastors: "The degree of understanding and skill required to apply the confessional tradition is proportional to the level of ministry responsibility assigned. As one's sphere of authorized service extends, so should one's capability for understanding, articulating, and discipling others in the Christian faith and Reformed confessional tradition" *(Agenda for Synod 2001, p. 264)*.

#### *B. The core function of equipping the body*

In Ephesians 4:11, the apostle Paul also recognizes several offices for people with different giftings—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—all of whom share the common thread of serving "to equip [Christ's] people for works of service," helping the body of Christ to mature in the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

In the *Agenda for Synod 1961*, the "Report of the Committee for the Study of the Use of Ordained Men" noted this same biblical foundation for all ministerial roles as the committee wrestled with the question of which types of roles should be considered ministerial. Their conclusion was that a variety of roles and responsibilities could be considered part of a ministerial role, as long as they served the purpose of equipping the saints for the building up of the body of Christ.

“. . . Are there no limitations to the duties which an ordained minister may legitimately perform? Indeed there are. Scripture sets these limitations. . . . [here the report includes quotations from 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Col. 1:24-25] The limitation is this: the ordained minister has been appointed by God to labor for the welfare of the church; he must serve Christ “for the perfecting of the saints,” “unto the building up of the body of Christ,” “for his body’s sake.” It was for the sake of the church, the welfare of Christ’s body, that God appointed ministers to be His servants. (Agenda for Synod 1961, p. 248)

Commissioned pastors are essential to the task of equipping the body of Christ more fully for the works of ministry.

### *C. Pastoral role*

Until 2013, commissioned pastors were to be recognized as elders within their congregations. That year the wording in Church Order Article 23 was changed to say that they should be “acknowledged as such” — that is, acknowledged as commissioned pastors (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 556-57). No theological grounding was provided for this change at the time. However, a desire had clearly surfaced to name a reality that was present—that those serving in specialized roles were being viewed and experienced as pastors within their congregations, and the church desired to honor them as such, recognizing that this was the Spirit’s work among them.

In 2001 the “Committee to Study Ordination and Official Acts of Ministry” recognized that certain distinguishing features set those ordained to office apart. Those distinguishing features included the recognition of certain “excellencies” or spiritual endowments, a call from God, and a role that is “pastoral” and “representative” in nature.

[The] dual relationship of leader to Christ and leader to the people is what above all defines leadership in the church. Leaders are those who have both the call of Christ and the call of the people.

(Agenda for Synod 2001, p. 296)

The role for which the church properly ordains leaders is, as we have insisted, defined by relationship. The defining relationship is that mediatorial, pastoral role that re-presents Christ to the people and presents the people to Christ. This role is symbolized and enacted in the “official acts of ministry.” As a matter of definition, whenever a person is called into a primary pastoral role with a congregation, ordination is proper.

(Agenda for Synod 2001, p. 287)

Essentially the role for which ordination is proper is pastoral and representative. It involves responsibility for the care of souls, for the shepherding of a flock. It involves re-presenting Christ to the people. As such, it involves those pastoral actions traditionally called the “official acts of ministry.”

(Agenda for Synod 2001, pp. 294-95)

To summarize, the office of commissioned pastor is grounded in the following biblical principles:

1. God provides his church with a variety of pastoral gifts to enrich and extend her ministry and mission.
2. Pastors with specialized giftings are vital in the work of equipping the saints for the works of ministry.
3. Pastors with specialized giftings function in a pastoral relationship to the members of the congregation.

The Christian Reformed Church has gradually come to recognize and embrace the commissioned pastor office as a gift to the church, essential to its ministry and mission.

*D. Identified need for additional clarity*

Tension and confusion often arise from the fact that there are a wide variety of commissioned pastor job descriptions lumped together into the same category and treated in the same manner in our Church Order. Some commissioned pastor roles are full-time, and others are part-time. Some roles are very specific, and others broad. Some involve preaching and administration of the sacraments, and others do not. It can be problematic to have one set of expectations and regulations for training, salary, benefits, and supervision when there is such variance in job descriptions. Commissioned pastor learning plans are intentionally tailored to the individual, and this flexibility has been helpful and appreciated. However, this has also led to vast differences in the level of thoroughness of these plans. In an increasing number of cases, individuals are ordained to the office of commissioned pastor after receiving little to no CRC-specific training. The examinations of commissioned pastors can also vary widely from classis to classis. One commissioned pastor recently reported her surprise at not being asked any Bible knowledge or theology questions at her examination. It is possible that misunderstandings of the “principle of proportionality” have led to the assumption that some commissioned pastor roles don’t require any knowledge of the Bible. So it seems important to highlight that biblical knowledge should be a fundamental component of all commissioned pastor learning plans, since commissioned pastors are trusted by congregations to lead ministries that are rooted in an accurate understanding of Scripture.

Commissioned pastor learning plans also currently include the following core subjects (applying a principle of proportionality to determine the level of knowledge necessary for each position): CRC polity, CRC history, Reformed confessions, and Reformed hermeneutics. These subjects appear on a learning plan template provided by the Candidacy Committee. Currently there is no explicit expectation that the training in an individual’s area of ministry specialization (worship, youth ministry, discipleship, etc.) be rooted in a Reformed perspective, but it would be beneficial for classis representatives to consider this when crafting a commissioned pastor learning plan.

The increasing use of commissioned pastors in solo or lead positions seems to have also fostered confusion about the nature of this office. When the

same office is utilized both for part-time staff positions and full-time solo pastor positions, it is understandable that some confusion would arise around the nature and appropriate use of the office of commissioned pastor.

*E. Clarifying categories of commissioned pastors*

In order to bring additional clarity to the office of commissioned pastor described in Church Order Article 23 and to continue working toward providing appropriate and effective training pathways for all commissioned pastors, it is helpful to recognize three general categories that already exist within this office:

- **Specialized congregational ministry:** called to serve in a position whose primary responsibilities are in an area of specialized focus (e.g., youth ministry, children's ministry, discipleship, worship, etc.)
- **Church planting:** called by a congregation to serve as a church planter or solo pastor of an emerging congregation, with primary responsibilities focused on evangelistic preaching, outreach, and community engagement
- **Noncongregational role:** called by a congregation to serve in a non-congregational setting, such as chaplaincy or missions

Commissioned pastors who serve in a solo or senior leadership position in an organized church are not included these three categories; solo/lead arrangements are exceptional, and most involve an understanding that progress will be made toward ordination as a minister of the Word. Specifics for solo/lead arrangements can be found in Church Order Article 24 and its supplement and in the corresponding section of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Defining the three general categories will allow us to contour the training and ordination pathway for each one in a way that is more clear and effective.

- Commissioned pastors serving in **specialized congregational ministry** roles should exhibit gifts and competency in their area of specialized ministry focus, as well as a general understanding of Christian Reformed doctrine, perspective, and practice. So their learning plans should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for all commissioned pastors, as well as training with a Reformed focus in their area of specialty.
- Commissioned pastors serving in **church planting** roles should have evangelistic gifts and experience in leadership, as well as a general understanding of Christian Reformed doctrine, perspective, and practice. So their learning plans should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for all commissioned pastors, as well as church-planting training endorsed by Resonate Global Mission.

- Commissioned pastors serving in **noncongregational roles** should exhibit gifts and competency in their area of specialized ministry focus, as well as a general understanding of Christian Reformed doctrine, perspective, and practice. So their learning plan should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for all commissioned pastors, as well as any training required for endorsement by Thrive’s chaplaincy consultant or by Resonate Global Mission. Commissioned pastors called to noncongregational ministry ought to be called in the regular manner by a local congregation and supervised by the calling council with a plan outlined in a covenant of joint supervision, which they establish before ordination.

To clarify the distinctions above, the Commissioned Pastor Study Team, with the concurrence of the Candidacy Committee, recommends changes to Church Order Article 23 and its supplement, as presented in the following addendum.

## ADDENDUM

### Proposed changes to Church Order Article 23 and its supplement

(with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~)

#### Article 23

- a. The ~~task~~ calling of the commissioned pastor is to equip the church through a specialized pastoral role that is strategic for the church's well-being and witness. A commissioned pastor is commissioned to a specific job description, which is approved by classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, to determine whether or not the position fits synodical guidelines for that particular role ~~bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.~~
- b. *[unchanged]*
- c. ~~Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.~~
- d. *[unchanged, but Art. 23-d becomes Art. 23-c]*

— Cf. Supplement, Article 23-~~d~~c

#### Grounds:

1. This wording better expresses the specialized nature of the office of commissioned pastor and its distinction from the office of minister of the Word.

2. Preaching and administration of the sacraments is sometimes, but not always, included in commissioned pastor job descriptions, so these are removed from the article itself and mentioned within the supplement instead.
3. This highlights the important fact that a commissioned pastor is ordained to a particular job description requiring the approval of synodical deputies, rather than confining this information to the regulations in the Supplement.
4. Article 23-c is redundant and covers no more than what is covered by Article 24-c.

#### Supplement Article 23-a

The office of commissioned pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the following guidelines adopted by Synod-2001:

##### A. General Characteristics

The job description of a commissioned pastor should reflect the following considerations about the nature of this office:

1. Ordination to this office is appropriate when the church has recognized the strategic value of ministry extension in specific ways that enhance the public witness of the church, as well as the gifting of an individual who can serve in that role so that God's people may be built up for service. These officebearers of evangelist[\*] may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension. Evangelists extend the work of pastoral leadership by founding and working in new congregations; and by extending the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism; and by extending ministry into noncongregational settings, such as chaplaincy or missions.
2. ... By the broader application of the office of evangelist, with its existing regulations, to a variety of ministry positions, the church avoids the multiplication of offices and provides a way of recognizing and regulating a variety of pastoral positions in our churches. These positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness such as chaplain, missionary, pastor of education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth.

(Acts of Synod 2001, p. 506)

[\*Note: In 2001 the office was known as *evangelist*. The title was changed to *ministry associate* by Synod 2003 and to *commissioned pastor* by Synod 2012.]

3. These roles should have a primary function of equipping the body of Christ for the work of ministry.

4. The job description should make clear that the role is “pastoral” and “representative” for the congregation, often (but not always) involving pastoral actions traditionally identified as “official acts of ministry.”

## B. General Categories of Commissioned Pastors

There are three general categories of commissioned pastor roles, each of which requires its own unique pathway of preparation.

1. Specialized congregational ministry: A commissioned pastor may be called to serve in a position whose primary responsibilities are in an area of specialized focus (e.g., youth, children, discipleship, worship, etc.). Those called to such roles should exhibit gifts and competency in their area of specialized ministry focus, as well as a general understanding of CRC doctrine, perspective, and practice. Their learning plan should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for commissioned pastors, as well as training with a Reformed focus in their area of specialty.
2. Church planting: A commissioned pastor may be called by a congregation to serve as a church planter or solo pastor of an emerging congregation, with primary responsibilities focused on evangelistic preaching, outreach, and community engagement. Those called to such roles should have evangelistic gifts and experience in leadership, as well as a general understanding of CRC doctrine, perspective, and practice. Their learning plan should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for commissioned pastors, as well as church-planting training endorsed by Resonate Global Mission.
3. Noncongregational role: A commissioned pastor may be called by a congregation to serve in a noncongregational setting, such as chaplaincy or missions. Those called to such roles should exhibit gifts and competency in their area of specialized ministry focus, as well as a general understanding of CRC doctrine, perspective, and practice. They must be called and supervised by a congregation. Their learning plan should include a basic knowledge of the prescribed subjects for commissioned pastors, as well as any training required for endorsement by Thrive’s chaplaincy consultant or Resonate Global Mission. The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define noncongregational ministers ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to commissioned pastors ordained to noncongregational roles under Article 23.

~~All commissioned pastor positions must be approved by classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, to determine whether or not the position fits these guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. All commissioned pastors must demonstrate through an examination their ability to function in the ministry to which they are being called.~~

Examinations for the office of commissioned pastor must follow the guidelines established by synod as described and recorded in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook shall be consulted regularly, as it offers guidelines and regulations approved by synod. These include the protocol for examination, the creation of job descriptions, and the standards and qualifications to be met by those seeking to be ordained as commissioned pastors.

*(Acts of Synod 2019, p. 783)*

~~The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define noncongregational ministers ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to commissioned pastors ordained to noncongregational roles under Article 23. Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Thrive.~~

*(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 613)*

*(Amended Acts of Synod 2025, p. 659)*

*Grounds:*

1. Removing the reference to decisions of Synod 2001 recognizes the ongoing development in the denomination's thinking about the office of commissioned pastor.
2. Separating "general characteristics" of commissioned pastors (which in the current Supplement are largely related to character) from the "general categories" of commissioned pastors provides classes and synodical deputies with greater clarity about what "pastoral extension" means, so that those tasked with approving commissioned pastor job descriptions are aided in their ability to discern whether a job description "meets synodical guidelines."
3. The material related to "general categories" gathers synodical regulations found elsewhere and collects them in a central place for easy reference.

## **Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee**

### **I. Introduction**

There are two distinct and important aspects to our committee's work: *ecumenical* relationships with other Christian denominations and organizations and *interfaith* interactions between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions. According to our Ecumenical Charter, "the CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel."

To guide this effort, regarding the ecumenical directive in bilateral (denomination-to-denomination) relationships, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) uses two synodically approved categories. The category of *churches in communion* includes churches with whom the CRCNA has a particular confessional affinity or history. These denominations may be engaged in joint ventures with the CRC and/or its agencies, exchange delegates at synod, welcome each other's members at the Lord's Supper, recognize each other's pastors in the pulpit, and encourage each other in ministry and faithfulness. The category of *churches in cooperation* recognizes all other varied bilateral relationships the CRC has with Christian denominations. These relationships have emerged through mutual ministry interests, the work of CRC agencies, and sometimes from historic ties. In addition to bilateral relationships, we pursue multilateral relationships that allow numbers of denominations to come together in unity.

As determined by prior synods, interfaith efforts between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions are led by a subcommittee of the EIRC. This subcommittee has continued to monitor and spur this work, particularly as it relates locally between and among Reformed congregations and those whose house of worship may be a synagogue, mosque, or temple.

### **II. Membership and meetings**

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2026, are Jake Bentum (2028/2), Ryan Braam (2027/1), Sheila Holmes (2026/1), Joshua Johnson (2026/1), William Krahnke (2026/1), Marno Retief (2027/1), Shirley Roels (2028/2), Eleanor Boersma Sarkany (2027/1), Chad Steenwyk (2028/1), and William Wilton (2027/1). The general secretary (Zachary King) and the executive director-Canada (Al Postma) serve as ex-officio members of the EIRC. It is noteworthy that five of the ten EIRC members joined the committee during 2025. Each received a structured orientation to the committee that included substantial consideration of the CRC's Ecumenical Charter.

The EIRC met in person in November 2025 and virtually in February 2026. Another virtual meeting is scheduled for April 2026. Between formal meetings, the EIRC has three working subcommittees, two of which are focused on a Synod 2025 assignment. There are subcommittees reviewing the CRCNA's relationship with the Reformed Church in America and with the World Communion of Reformed Churches in response to Synod 2025's di-

rections (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 704-5, 711-12). A third subcommittee is reviewing ecumenical relations with the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken, a new denomination originating from a merger that includes a denomination with which the CRCNA has had *church in communion* status (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 541).

### **III. EIRC membership rubrics and nominations for membership**

As decided at Synod 2025, the EIRC participated in the denomination-wide process to develop and communicate clear rubrics for committee and board member nominees (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 675-76). In fall 2025, in consultation with the EIRC and other denominational groups, a standard rubric was developed, and specific details about knowledge and experience relevant to the EIRC were added. (For additional information, see the Council of Delegates report, section II, D.)

Some members of the EIRC are completing terms and are eligible for reappointment. Committee membership changes and recommendations will be reported to synod in the Agenda Supplement. Additionally, the EIRC has had to address the need to fill the terms of members who departed prematurely for varied reasons. As a result, some members' terms have been adjusted in order to retain the balance of when terms end. The committee recommends that synod take note of this action.

The EIRC also secured the approval of the COD for an exception to the regional balance requirement on the EIRC (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 842), allowing Rev. Dr. Marno Retief (formerly representing Canada West, and now representing Canada East) to complete his first term ending in 2027. The EIRC requests that synod take note of this action as well.

### **IV. Bilateral relationships**

The CRC maintains a relationship of *churches in communion* with 24 denominations and of *churches in cooperation* with 20 denominations/partners. The following continents are represented in the combined total of those relationships: Africa (24), Latin and South America (5), Europe and the Middle East (3), Asia (5), and North America (7). A complete list is available on the "Relationships" page of the EIRC website ([crcna.org/EIRC](http://crcna.org/EIRC)).

One noteworthy addition is the CRC's *church in communion* relationship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches; Synod 2025 approved this new relationship subject to subsequent agreement by the Alliance (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 705). In early fall 2025, the EIRC received notice of full approval by the Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into this relationship with the CRCNA. This *church in communion* relationship is the first of its kind for the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Currently EIRC members are working to forge closer understanding and engagement with *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation*. In addition to participating in synodical exchanges, committee members are responsible for communicating annually with designated denominations to learn about the joys and challenges of Christian ministry in their contexts.

This interaction will create increased opportunities to pray with church leaders and share resources between ecumenical partners as the EIRC supports the CRCNA's ministry priorities (*Our Journey* milestones). By the time Synod 2026 meets, the EIRC will have designated its members for these ecumenical connections and will have completed guidelines for these engagements. These activities will link our members more closely with on-the-ground ministry leaders.

*A. Formal exchanges*

1. Rev. Jose Rayas attended the general synod of the Reformed Church in America in June 2025.
2. Rev. Al Postma represented the CRCNA at the 150th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in June 2025.
3. Rev. Reggie Smith represented the CRCNA at the General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in June 2025.
4. Zachary King met with senior leaders of the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians and of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in September 2025 and in winter 2026 about areas of mutual ministry interest and support.
5. Dan DeKam and Zachary King attended the National Association of Evangelicals board meetings and senior leader gatherings in 2025-2026.
6. Zachary King and Elly Boersma Sarkany attended the 27th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, held in Thailand, on the occasion of the organization's 15th anniversary.
7. Rev. Jeong S. Gho attended the general assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan in October 2025.
8. Rev. Moses Chung attended the 10th General Assembly of the Hapdong Presbyterian Church of Korea in September 2025. While this is not a denomination with which the CRCNA has a formal ecumenical relationship, it is valuable to have such connections in his work as the Asian regional team leader for Resonate Global Mission.

Each of these participants filed a report with the EIRC about their exchanges.

*B. Activities with bilateral partners*

1. Reformed Church in America

The CRCNA continues to have a meaningful ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America. While we have twenty-three other *church in communion* relationships, this is the one Reformed denomination mentioned in the Church Order (Art. 8-b). Synod 2014 and the RCA General Synod 2014 declared that "the principle that guides us, and the intention that motivates us, is to 'act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately'" (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 502-4). Yet Synod 2025 recognized a period of substantial and ongoing change in the RCA. To add clarity to CRC understandings, Synod

2025 approved the addition of a phrase to the regulations of Supplement, Article 8, D, 6 of the CRC Church Order that would improve clarity regarding the expectation that RCA pastors serving CRC churches will sign the CRC Covenant for Officebearers when entering ordained leadership within the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 711).

Further, Synod 2025 commissioned the EIRC to conduct a substantial review of the CRC-RCA relationship over the next five years (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 711-12). This includes a requested review of existing denominational collaborations. The EIRC has begun this review. As a first step, Zachary King and Joel Vande Werken (director of ecclesiastical governance) held a Zoom conversation with RCA pastors serving CRC churches in October 2025 to discuss the expectation for signing the Covenant for Officebearers. Then in November 2025, the EIRC established a designated subcommittee chaired by Rev. Chad Steenwyk to guide the broader review, and the subcommittee established a five-year work plan.

The focus in 2025-2026 is principally on research and analysis to determine the many varied ways in which CRC and RCA ministries are intertwined in local contexts, national connections, and international engagement. Subcommittee members are communicating actively with the following groups regarding current RCA connections and experience: Classis Iakota overture leaders; RCA pastors serving CRC churches; RCA pastors who are now serving congregations in the Alliance of Reformed Churches; CRC pastors serving RCA churches; leaders of union and dually affiliated congregations; CRC denominational agencies and institutions; and Canadian RCA-related congregations. The data and interview results will be summarized for Synod 2026 in the EIRC's supplemental report. Later in 2026 the subcommittee will seek to learn more about revised RCA polity and the role of its middle assemblies as a replacement for both its regional synods and its classes. The EIRC will continue to inform the CRC synod on an annual basis about its learning, evaluation, and recommendations.

## 2. Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)

In 1967 the Netherlands Gereformeerde Kerken and the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (Liberated) became two separate denominations through a painful split. But in May 2023 these two denominations merged to become the second largest Netherlands-based Protestant denomination, adopting the name Netherlands Gereformeerde Kerken and consisting of 320 congregations and about 130,000 members who share the same three Reformed confessions. The Netherlands Gereformeerde Kerken had been a *church in communion* with the CRCNA, but the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt did not have a formal relationship with the CRC. In a Zoom-based January 2026 conversation between an EIRC subcommittee and two NGK denominational leaders in the Netherlands, we learned more about their interests. They have pursued and received permission to translate and publish in the Dutch language *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*. They also seek to consider worship, confessions, church

practices, and categories for ecumenical relationships in our engagement. The NGK hopes to learn from the CRCNA in its experience with multiethnic churches, church planting, and diaconal ministries. Their leaders are also eager to forge connections between denominationally affiliated institutions of higher education and have particular interest in resources provided by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Currently the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken is revising and refining its categories for ecumenical relationships. It is also charting a varied path regarding inclusion of Christians in same-sex relationships. These factors also affect the CRC's relationship with the NGK.

The EIRC reviewed the nature of this ecclesiastical relationship in its February 2026 meeting. After substantial discussion, the EIRC recommends to Synod 2026 that the CRCNA extend and affirm a relationship with the new Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) as a *church in cooperation*.

Further, the EIRC recognizes that if synod approves this recommendation, there are potential implications for ecclesiastical partnerships with other church denominations. During the year ahead, our committee will review the current CRCNA partnership with the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PCN) as a *church in communion*.

### 3. Africa exchanges

During the 2025-2026 ministry year, Zachary King organized a Zoom meeting to provide support for the three Nigerian denominations with whom we have *church in communion* relationships. In December 2025 there were conversations and correspondence with leaders from the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN), the Reformed Church of Christ for Nations (RCCN), and the Universal Reformed Christian Church (NKST) regarding their struggles for basic security from attacks by organized groups of thugs and terrorists. We offered prayers on their behalf and prompted a *CRC News* article ([crcna.org/news-and-events/news/mission-partners-nigeria-request-prayers](https://www.crcna.org/news-and-events/news/mission-partners-nigeria-request-prayers)) to inform CRC members about these struggles. In the CRC's Ministry Plan (*Our Journey*), prayer with and for our global ministry partners is a priority. The EIRC wishes to note that it would be appropriate for synod to offer a prayer for these three historic mission partners as well.

Concerning East Africa, the EIRC has observed that the ambiguous conflict within the Christian Reformed Church of East Africa remains unresolved.

## **V. Multilateral relationships—ecumenical organizations and dialogues**

The CRCNA belongs to a number of ecumenical organizations, including the Canadian Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Global Christian Forum, the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Reformed Fellowship. We also participate in important dialogues among churches and groups of various Christian traditions. The organizations with which we have made specific connections this past year are highlighted in the following:

### *A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)*

The WCRC is divided into nine regions, six of which are represented by regional councils. The CRC is active in one such group, the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAAC). Additionally, when the WCRC held its 27th worldwide General Council in October 2025 on the theme of “Persevere Your Witness” ([wrc.ch/gc2025](http://wrc.ch/gc2025)), Zachary King and Eleanor Boersma Sarkany attended as delegates.

As one of the influential founding denominations of the WCRC, the CRCNA has remained engaged with this organization for many years. Synod 2025 requested that the EIRC complete an analysis of concerns articulated in an overture and report to Synod 2026 regarding approval or disapproval of continued membership in the WCRC (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 704-5).

Since then, the EIRC has taken several steps. The committee received and discussed a written report submitted by our two delegates to the 2025 General Council of the WCRC. Upon request, Zachary King received feedback from Dr. Mary Vandenberg of Calvin Theological Seminary about some theological stances articulated by WCRC leaders. Additionally, the EIRC communicated in writing with Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, the interim general secretary, and Rev. Dr. Phillip Peacock, the incoming General Secretary of the WCRC (effective Feb. 1, 2026) about the CRCNA’s questions and concerns. This led on January 14, 2026, to a virtual session in which both general secretaries and a third WCRC leader, Dr. Hanns Lessing, participated with Zachary King, Shirley Roels, and the EIRC subcommittee tasked with this review. Subsequently, the full EIRC committee considered the report of its subcommittee. The EIRC’s report to Synod 2026 on this matter is included as an appendix to this present report. The WCRC has provided the CRCNA with a channel through which to understand the unity and diversity of the Reformed family of denominations. It has also been a means through which to seek justice and reconciliation across cultures. As a result, the EIRC recommends that synod affirm the continued membership of the CRCNA in the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

### *B. Canadian Council of Churches*

Al Postma, executive director-Canada, and other EIRC members (see section V, D below) routinely participate in gatherings and initiatives of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and represent the CRCNA on the council’s governing board. He and others participated in the CCC’s November 2025 meetings.

### *C. Other multilateral organizations and dialogue*

We benefit from partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), and we participate in the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue. Al Postma attended a denominational leaders’ meeting of the EFC. In December 2025, Zachary King participated in a National Association of Evangelicals retreat for denominational executives.

#### *D. Appointed representatives and observers*

The EIRC appoints representatives and observers to many of the aforementioned ecumenical organizations' meetings and to other ecumenical efforts. Often CRCNA members are asked by these organizations to serve as well.

1. In 2025, Dan DeKam was appointed to serve as the CRCNA's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).
2. Al Postma and Ruth Hofman serve on the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The Christian Reformed Church also has a number of representatives who serve on various standing committees, reference groups, and commissions of the CCC.
3. Al Postma represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).
4. Ronald Feenstra is the ecumenical staff officer representative of the CRCNA to the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue. Two additional representatives include Matthew Lundberg and Clair Mesick.

#### **VI. Interfaith activities**

The Interfaith subcommittee of the EIRC continues its work. Membership includes Melissa Bos, Zachary DeBruyne, Frans van Liere, Tim Rietkerk, Naji Umran, Cory Willson, and the general secretary. The diverse composition of this committee provides opportunities for the EIRC to intersect with both Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University on their research of and engagement with the interfaith landscape. The subcommittee met in September 2025. Another meeting is scheduled for February 2026. The Ecumenical Charter that guides the EIRC states that our "responsibility is expressed locally (between and among neighboring congregations), regionally (among churches in a given geographical area), and denominationally (among churches nationally and internationally)." For interfaith efforts, the EIRC and its Interfaith subcommittee emphasize regional and local engagement. To that end, the EIRC seeks to highlight regional groups that are open to CRC members and to publicize local efforts. The Joint CRC/RCA Interreligious Committee has disbanded at the RCA's request.

#### **VII. Recommendations**

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Shirley Roels, chair, and Zachary J. King (ex officio) when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are discussed.

B. That synod take note of the updated terms of the EIRC members re-balanced according to the interim positions that were vacated, and of the exception granted by the COD to the regional balance requirement, allowing Rev. Dr. Marno Retief (formerly representing Canada West, and now representing Canada East) to complete his first term ending in 2027.

C. That synod reappoint three members to the EIRC to a second term, as found in the list of names presented in the Agenda Supplement.

D. That synod gratefully receive the positive response from the Alliance of Reformed Churches regarding the CRC's invitation to be a *church in communion* with the CRCNA, and offer a prayer and communication of thanksgiving for this decision.

E. That synod extend and affirm a relationship with the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken as a *church in cooperation*.

*Grounds:*

1. There is a strong historic ecumenical connection to approximately one third of the churches (the former Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken; see *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 62) that now are part of this new denomination.
2. The new denomination affirms the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism, as does the CRCNA. This basis supports cooperation in dialogue, relationships, and the shared use/development of ministry resources.
3. The time is not right to extend *church in communion* status, given the direction being charted by this new denomination regarding some matters concerning human sexuality. The new NGK polity allows local congregations to hold varied positions about the full inclusion of Christians in active same-sex relationships.

F. That synod affirm the continued membership of the CRCNA in the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

*Grounds:*

1. The WCRC provides the broadest worldwide level of ecumenical engagement with Reformed denominations, many of whom already are ecumenical partners of the CRCNA.
2. Continued participation in the WCRC allows the CRCNA to offer a distinct confessional voice, influence, and contribution to and among the denominations in the WCRC.
3. The CRCNA has contributed significantly to the membership and worship planning of this ecumenical body.
4. The WCRC provides an important Reformed Christian forum in which to hear and respond to worldwide needs for Christian responsiveness to war, poverty, and other sources of injustice.

G. That synod offer a public prayer for the leaders and congregations of our three historic mission-partner denominations in Nigeria who have experienced upheaval, displacement, and violence over many years, and especially in the past two years.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee  
Shirley Roels, chair  
Zachary King, general secretary (ex officio)

## Comprehensive Review of CRCNA Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee responds here to synod's instruction that our committee "conduct a comprehensive review of the CRCNA's membership in the . . . [World Communion of Reformed Churches] and report back to Synod 2026" (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 704-5). This report includes consideration of the concerns expressed in an overture submitted by Classis Illiana (Overture 24, *Agenda for Synod 2025*, pp. 388-92) but it is not limited to them. The report also includes a recommendation regarding future CRCNA membership in the WCRC.

### I. Preface

The WCRC is the largest Reformed Christian communion in the world. It spans 230 denominations, 108 countries, and 100 million Reformed Christians on six continents. This network has its roots in the Protestant Reformation and, more particularly, in the theological teachings of John Calvin. Discussions about formation of the WCRC began with the CRC's encouragement by Revs. Leonard Hofman, David Engelhard, and Peter Borgdorff in 2000. They sought to consider such a possibility in close consultation with Dr. Richard Van Houten, general secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, which the CRC had been instrumental in founding after World War II.

Synod 2008 formally approved that the EIRC proceed in this uniting work to form one worldwide Reformed communion (*Acts of Synod 2008*, pp. 462-63). In June 2010, a uniting general assembly was held at Calvin College (now University) with delegates from both the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Rev. Peter Borgdorff planned and coordinated that meeting, which gathered Reformed Christians from six continents in a common worldwide witness. This was the occasion on which the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches merged to form the WCRC. Rev. Borgdorff then served for several years on the WCRC's Executive Committee. The next such General Assembly was held in 2017 in Wittenberg, Germany, to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. At that assembly, the CRCNA was represented by Rev. Peter Bordorff as the CRCNA ecumenical officer. He was joined at that assembly by four other CRC lay and ordained leaders. Additionally, Rev. William Koopmans, a former chair of the EIRC, served as an adviser to the WCRC's Executive Committee in 2017 and for subsequent years.

Leadership of the WCRC was provided by Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi as its executive director from 2010 through 2014, followed by Dr. Chris Ferguson, a Canadian pastor, theologian, and social-justice advocate, from 2014 through 2021. During the pandemic years, the WCRC was served jointly by three co-executive leaders along with their board president, Rev. Najla Kassab, an

ordained pastor in the Evangelical Synod of Syria. From 2023 through 2025, Dr. Nyomi returned as an interim executive leader to plan for the WCRC's October 2025 General Assembly and prepare the path for a new executive director. In fall 2025 Dr. Philip Peacock, already a senior leader for the WCRC, was confirmed as the incoming general secretary. He began his service in February 2026.

## **II. Recent CRC engagement with the WCRC**

Upon request, Zachary King received feedback from Dr. Mary Vandenberg of Calvin Theological Seminary about some previous theological statements articulated by WCRC leaders. Prof. Vandenberg reviewed three documents from the WCRC: the "Wittenberg Witness," the "Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women," and the "Joint Declaration on Justification." While Prof. Vandenberg said she appreciates some aspects of the documents (especially the original "Joint Declaration on Justification"), she noted that theological deductions in the "Wittenberg Witness" document and some additions to the "Joint Declaration" (such as a connection of justice-seeking to justification) raised concerns.

Then, from October 14-23, 2025, the WCRC held its most recent general assembly in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The theme of that gathering, "Persevere in Your Witness," was based on Hebrews 12:1. The CRCNA was represented by Rev. Zachary King as executive secretary and by Ellie Sarkany, a Canadian commissioned pastor who also serves on the EIRC. This gathering provided insights into the current WCRC emphasis on both communion and justice. It was also an opportunity to renew the ongoing conversation between the CRCNA and the WCRC.

After that assembly, the EIRC took several additional steps in its comprehensive review. The committee received and discussed a written report by Zachary King and Ellie Sarkany on the 2025 General Council. Additionally, the EIRC communicated in writing with Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, the interim general secretary of the WCRC, and Rev. Dr. Phillip Peacock, the new general secretary (effective Feb. 1, 2026) about its questions and concerns. On January 14, 2026, a virtual discussion occurred in which both general secretaries and a third WCRC leader, Dr. Hanns Lessing, participated with Zachary King, Shirley Roels, and the designated EIRC subcommittee to inquire about specific questions concerning the mission, authority, and stances of the WCRC. Subsequently the full EIRC committee considered the report of its subcommittee.

In the January 2026 virtual meeting, the WCRC leaders noted with gratitude the former CRC denominational leaders who were catalysts for the WCRC's development. They also noted their appreciation for worship-related support provided by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and the CRC's steady presence and guidance over many years. WCRC leaders were asked what membership means in relation to WCRC statements and agreements. According to their ecumenical charter, decisions by the WCRC are

not binding on members. The communion does not have authority over their members.

Overall, the WCRC has adopted a system for how its statements are generated. The highest level of messages is produced by the general council from its meetings every seven years. All member churches discern and then work to confess something together. Every general council has a message that emerges with similar status. The second level is that of the general secretary and the president as the voice of the communion. They may speak on authorized positions, and they base their statements on what the WCRC has said in the past. They also consult with the region of the member churches that are directly affected by an issue. The third message level occurs in a meeting that produces a statement—but such statements belong to the members that are present at the meeting.

None of these levels impose specific requirements on any denomination member, however. Instead, the messages are invitations to discernment, dialogue, and discussion. In addition, the WCRC relates only to the highest-level assembly of a denomination, not to distinct regional bodies within a denomination such as classes. For example, after the WCRC adopted the Accra Confession, the CRC via EIRC assigned a specialized task force to consider that document in the CRC context. That task force report that was submitted to the EIRC noted both agreement with and reservations about the Accra Confession. It described ways in which the CRC was working actively to address substantial challenges in the relationships and resources between developed and majority world nations, but the EIRC did not recommend adoption of the Accra Confession as a theological commitment. That was not required, nor necessarily expected, by the WCRC. The WCRC has authority principally to suggest on the basis of persuasion, collective discernment, and mutual confession, but not in terms of force or coercion. When the organization does advocate, it may request a response from member churches or direct specific communications to governmental or international institutions; part of its purpose in advocacy is for its member churches to discern a response to current signs of the times in which the WCRC perceives God's call for Christians to be engaged. The WCRC focuses on analyzing the context and then allowing members to test and retest any given position.

Another example is found in the WCRC's affirmation of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JDDJ). This document was jointly created and agreed to by the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. It stated that the churches now share "a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ."<sup>1</sup> The statement continues by noting that good works are a genuine response to God's grace, not the

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<sup>1</sup> *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Preamble, 5; see [lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/joint\\_declaration\\_2019\\_en.pdf](http://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf).

cause of it. When the JDDJ was first presented to the WCRC in 2010, the CRC was one of two member denominations that registered doubts. In 2017 the JDDJ was approved by the WCRC in conjunction with the 500th-anniversary celebration of the Reformation in Leipzig, Germany. Still, the WCRC's affirmation is not binding on the CRCNA.

A question was raised about encouragement for women's ordination in all member churches. WCRC leaders explained that when the WCRC was formed, all denominations were invited regardless of whether they ordained women. The WCRC recognized that some did not ordain women for theological and cultural reasons. Yet as part of the #OrdainHer campaign from about eight to ten years ago, a gender review of participating denominations was completed. In the process, the WCRC recognized that a few member of its denominations do not ordain women. Yet the leaders also noted that the WCRC does not have authority within the context of a denomination. Because the CRCNA at its synodical level does allow for the ordination of women, there is no question in this regard about CRCNA membership and variations within the denomination.

### **III. Upcoming WCRC plans**

With a new general secretary in place, the WCRC has begun its current strategic-planning process. In that process they plan to revisit the confessions and reexamine the signs of the times. Leaders noted that the WCRC constitution points to shared Reformed confessions that connect to diverse regional expressions. Looking back, they recall that by 1982 a strong movement to become a confessing communion was growing. In prior years, confessions were important in addressing apartheid in South Africa. More recently, at the 2025 General Council, one of the key themes focused on seeking to live out the Reformed Confessions. When they receive general assembly feedback about a confession, they work to listen carefully. Minority reports are important sources of feedback, and any feedback is passed along to the next general council. Feedback is also given to the program committee for potential inclusion in the definitive version of the general council workbook. Still, they see their path as one of discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being Reformed together. They see that these principles are central to the life of the communion.

Some people have questioned why the WCRC does not focus closely on gospel proclamation and evangelism. WCRC leaders noted that they do hear this critique. In response they noted that many of their member denominations excel in evangelism already. Therefore, they do not need the WCRC to add to work in which they are already engaged. Instead, WCRC leaders observe that there are global situations in which no one member denomination can have sufficient influence to bring needed change, particularly in matters of justice where there may be significant pain and suffering. Thus the WCRC focus on such matters is intentional.

#### IV. CRCNA membership in the WCRC

Based on this history, further research, and the outcome of the January 2026 virtual meeting, EIRC members had follow-up discussions about continuing membership in the WCRC. The concerns noted below were raised by the EIRC subcommittee, which also identified reasons for continuing membership in the WCRC.

##### A. *Concerns about continued membership*

- There appears to be less emphasis within the WCRC on the importance of the Reformed confessions, raising questions about confessional accountability.
- Some concern was expressed about a reduced focus on clear gospel proclamation, emphasizing the saving work of Christ on the cross, received by faith alone through grace alone to the glory of God alone.
- There is a perception that confessional Reformed perspectives may not always have adequate space in certain theological or ethical discussions within the WCRC.
- The justice issues highlighted in WCRC statements were viewed as appearing selective, arbitrary, or shaped by ideological frameworks rather than a consistently articulated Reformed theological rationale.
- The WCRC's participation in and endorsement of certain ecumenical agreements raised questions about potential tensions with the CRCNA's confessional commitments.
- The financial cost of membership was noted as a practical concern.

##### B. *Reasons in favor of continued membership*

- WCRC membership allows the CRCNA to maintain a unified witness in Christ across the global Reformed family.
- The WCRC embodies a broad diversity of worship, spirituality, and theological expression, reflecting the global character of the Reformed tradition.
- The CRCNA benefits from and contributes to the global exchange of worship practices, enriching our understanding of how the church worships across cultures and connects through the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.
- Continued participation enables us to stay in the conversation as Christian Reformed followers of Jesus, offering a distinct confessional voice rather than ceding space to others. Membership allows the CRCNA to be an influence for confessional Reformed theology, bearing witness to the authority of Scripture and the Reformed confessions in a diverse theological environment.
- The WCRC is the broadest Reformed ecumenical body in existence. Membership allows the CRC to engage denominations with whom we have a relationship but may not otherwise encounter due to limited staff time and financial resources.

- Over the past couple of decades, the CRCNA has had a considerable influence in the development of the WCRC. Additionally, the CRCNA played a role in bringing many members into the prior Reformed Ecumenical Council, one of the WCRC's predecessors. Thus, in the Reformed Ecumenical Council merger with the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), we brought many REC members into the WCRC. The CRCNA has a responsibility to be present with these former REC communions. Our continued participation honors and extends that legacy.
- The WCRC provides an international forum where issues of justice are named and addressed. It offers opportunities for engagement, discernment, and critique of global justice challenges from within the Reformed tradition.
- Through the WCRC, the CRCNA can contribute meaningfully to global Christianity, particularly in contexts where theological resources and institutional support are limited.

After weighing these considerations, the EIRC perceives that the benefits of remaining in the WCRC outweigh reasons for withdrawal. While some concerns are real and should not be minimized, the EIRC recommends the CRCNA's continued engagement, faithful presence, and critical participation in this global body. Remaining in the WCRC is an important way to bear witness, exercise influence, and remain accountable within the global Reformed communion.

# Historical Committee

## I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is a standing committee of the Christian Reformed Church established by Synod 1934. Its revised mandate, as approved by Synod 2022, states the following:

The Historical Committee and the [general secretary] of the CRCNA are responsible for the official Archives of the Christian Reformed Church and its agencies, while administrative oversight is provided by the Hekman Library of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. The Historical Committee ordinarily communicates with the Hekman Library through the Hekman Library Archives Advisory Council. The Historical Committee also cultivates within the Christian Reformed Church, the wider church, and the academic world, knowledge of and appreciation for the CRCNA's history, heritage, and legacy by, among other things, identifying and assisting in accumulation of resources. *(Agenda for Synod 2022, p. 81)*

Current elected members of the committee, showing the concluding year and present term of service, are Stanley Jim (2026/1), Jessica Joustra (2028/1), Christian Oh (2026/1), Janet Sheeres, chair (2026/1); Don Sinnema (2027/1); and Rich Sytsma (2028/1).

Current administrative committee members are Jeff Haverdink (ex officio, representing Calvin University), William Katerberg (ex officio, as curator of Heritage Hall, without vote), Zachary King (ex officio, as general secretary of the CRCNA, without vote), and Jul Medenblik (ex officio, as president of Calvin Theological Seminary).

Since its 2025 report to synod, the committee met in person and via Zoom on September 25, 2025; November 6, 2025; and February 19, 2026.

## II. Committee activities and reminders

The Historical Committee has communicated with classical representatives—in virtually all cases the classical stated clerk—to remind churches to submit minutes and other records to Heritage Hall on a timely basis. (Every three to five years is ideal.) Heritage Hall is also in regular contact with administrative assistants of local congregations. The committee is grateful for the role of classical representatives in encouraging compliance by congregations and for the work of congregation administrators in keeping the archives up to date. Heritage Hall's copies of these records serve as backup protection for congregations and contribute to the denominational collection of archival records.

Council minutes are kept restricted for 100 years. They may be accessed only by permission of the church council, provided on the congregation's letterhead. Minutes that are more than 100 years old, most of which are in Dutch, can be accessed by permission of the curator. For more information

on records management for congregations, please see the Heritage Hall website ([library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna](http://library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna)).

Heritage Hall has shifted to keeping church minutes online, as microfilm services have become increasingly expensive and many vendors have shut down. It is most efficient to send minutes to the archives in digital format, since paper copies must be scanned. For the best way to send minutes, contact Heritage Hall's assistant archivist, Jen Vos, at [crcarchives@calvin.edu](mailto:crcarchives@calvin.edu) or [jen.vos@calvin.edu](mailto:jen.vos@calvin.edu). For best practices for organizing and keeping minutes and submitting them to Heritage Hall, please see the Heritage Hall website.

In addition, the committee asks that congregations observing anniversaries send copies of commemorative materials to Heritage Hall (e.g., booklets). Congregations should also send copies of church directories, about once a decade, and news clippings. The committee recommends that congregations also check with Heritage Hall to see if it has copies of their incorporation papers and bylaws—as backups in case the originals might ever be lost or damaged.

Finally, committee member Richard Sytsma published *We Served Side by Side: The Cooperation of the Christian Reformed Church Japan Mission and the Reformed Church in Japan, 1951-2017* (Van Raalte Press, 2025). At the heart of the cooperative work chronicled here was the partnership of missionary couples with Japanese pastors and their wives as they served together in team ministries to begin new churches.

### **III. Report on the activities of Heritage Hall**

#### *A. Archives staff*

Heritage Hall had no staffing changes in the past year. Our staff includes Will Katerberg as curator; Jen Vos as assistant archivist and digital specialist; Alyssa Johansen as archives assistant; and Laurie Haan as archives assistant. We also have one student worker, who will be returning next year. Volunteers remain important to the work of the archives. Phil Erffmeyer works on a variety of projects, processing church council and classis minutes and organizing collections. Clarice Newhof is cataloging our biographical data collection.

Churches can contact archives staff through our general email address ([crcarchives@calvin.edu](mailto:crcarchives@calvin.edu)) or general phone line (616-526-6313). To connect with the curator, email [will.katerberg@calvin.edu](mailto:will.katerberg@calvin.edu). Visit our website for more information ([library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna](http://library.calvin.edu/hh/crcna)). The mailing address is Heritage Hall, Calvin University, 3201 Burton Street SE, Grand Rapids, 49549.

#### *B. Archival activity during 2025*

##### **1. New online catalogs and digital archiving**

Heritage Hall has upgraded its online “finding aid,” which catalogs the university, seminary, and denominational collections and describes and catalogs its manuscript collections (i.e., collections related to Reformed history and Dutch-ethnic history in North America more generally). It was using a

dated Archon platform that grew increasingly hard to support; it is shifting to ArchivesSpace, an industry-standard platform commonly used in the United States.

Shifting to ArchivesSpace will benefit Heritage Hall as it implements the Preservica platform for archiving digital records. The archives will begin to archive digitally born records using Preservica rather than printing and storing them. Digital preservation is the industry-standard practice. It is also a practical matter. Heritage Hall's primary storage areas are at 90 percent capacity. It has some new compact shelving in the basement of the library, but the archives will continue to need more space or will need to invest in compact shelving in its main storage areas.

The archives are 20 years behind in beginning to archive digital records systematically. Heritage Hall has begun doing so with church council and related minutes, but it does not yet have an adequate platform for doing so generally. Preservica will address this need. It is the digital equivalent of "brick and mortar" storage infrastructure for analog material. It meets essential needs such as secure multisite cloud storage; public access controls; catalog integration with ArchivesSpace; and automated processes such as file preservation, indexing, and file-format updates. Preservica will enable efficient management of digital records by Heritage Hall's small staff. It also aligns with institutional priorities by supporting long-term data security and accessibility.

## 2. Collections

In the past year Heritage Hall had the usual variety of small accessions of manuscript material, genealogical and family history records, rare books, photographs, and so on—as well as repository material from the university and the denomination. Examples of accessions in 2025 include material related to Stanley Wiersma; CRC congregations that have closed; CRC missions in Nigeria; Reframe Ministries (Back to God Hour); the Michigan Theological Society; and Neal Plantinga. Heritage Hall will also be archiving some material from the Trinity Christian College special collections.

## 3. Digitization and indexing

Current indexing projects include *Chimes* (the Calvin University student newspaper) and *Spark* (the alumni magazine). In relation to the 150th anniversary of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in 2026, Heritage Hall is digitizing fifty years of *Chimes* with the support of the Calvin University Alumni Association. As resources permit, in the coming year Heritage Hall will also digitize other university and seminary periodicals such as *Prism* (annual photo yearbook) and *Stromata* (a seminary student magazine). The digitized periodicals will become part of Hekman Library's Digital Commons ([digitalcommons.calvin.edu/](https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/)).

## 4. Promotion and outreach

During the past year the archives staff worked with a variety of seminary and university faculty, classes, and students doing presentations about the

archives and research in them. It gave students tours of the collections and rare-books areas and provided them with material from various archival and rare-books collections. In spring 2026 the curator taught a three-week class on the history of the seminary and university for the Calvin Academy of Lifelong Learning and delivered a public lecture on the history of integrating faith and learning at Calvin.

*Origins: Historical Magazine of the Archives* and *Origins Online* ([origins.calvin.edu/](http://origins.calvin.edu/)) continue to reach a variety of audiences. The fall 2025 issue of the magazine included articles on Calvin College and the Seminary in the early twentieth century; Dutch waste haulers in Chicago; a memoir of a family's emigration to the United States after World War II; and more. The spring 2026 issue includes articles on the founding of the *Theologische School* in 1876, the final installment on the World War II letters of Walter and Wilma Lagerwey, and more. Posts on *Origins Online* in the past year included topics such as Calvin College's first baccalaureate degrees, the four campuses of the seminary and university, and the SS *Calvin Victory*, a ship built in 1945 for transporting livestock. The blog website also provides access to back issues of *Origins* magazine—currently through 2024.

Heritage Hall also has a Facebook page, enabling it to reach out to a variety of audiences ([facebook.com/heritagehallarchives](https://facebook.com/heritagehallarchives)). It will continue to assess its social-media presence and find ways to connect with denominational, university, and seminary audiences as well as others interested in the history of Reformed Christianity and Dutch North Americans.

### C. Research

In the past year we have hosted scholars, students, and community members working on a variety of topics. Most common by far have been family histories. Other research topics have included Christian schools; Grundy College; Hendrik de Cock; Christian Reformed missions in New Mexico and Arizona; Dutch American women; Christian schools; local churches; race relations and Grand Rapids area churches; Henry Beets; Vern Ehlers; Diet Eman; Lee Huizinga; history and photographs of Calvin College and Seminary; and *The Witness* and *Religion and Culture*, two magazines associated with the Ralph Janssen controversies of the early 1920s.

A student worker from the seminary did research with the curator during summer 2025 on Korean American congregations in the Grand Rapids area. The goal of the research was to gather some of the congregations' history and to begin to develop relationships between the Heritage Hall archives and those congregations.

In addition to editing and writing in the *Origins* magazine, the curator, William Katerberg, wrote blogposts for *Origins Online*. He is also preparing to deliver a paper at a conference on ethics, history, and archival work at a symposium at Georgetown University. In addition, he is finishing a new history of the seminary and the university, and he is continuing research on

Native American policy as part of his role as a professor in the historical studies department, where he teaches one course a year.

#### **IV. Anniversaries**

The committee is grateful to Heritage Hall staff for compiling the following information on forthcoming ordination and congregational anniversaries. We congratulate ministers and churches on reaching these milestones.

##### *A. Ordained ministers—anniversaries of service*

The names are living clergy with current ordained status in the CRCNA. They are listed according to years of ordained service in the CRCNA.

#### **50 YEARS (1977-2027)**

Bekker, Gary J.  
Boukamp, Ronald L.  
Bouwman, Roger A.  
De Jonge, Bernard H.  
De Young, Roger  
De Young, Wayne R.  
Hartwell, Jr., Richard M.  
Kamps, Gilbert J.  
Kamstra, Douglas A.  
Keizer, John G.  
Klimp, Ronald A.  
Kuipers, Jake  
Lammers, Warren H.  
Martin, Gregg Vincent  
Niehof, Thomas  
Slofstra, Peter  
Steehoek, Donald J.  
Stel, Philip  
Tenyenhuis, John  
Veenstra, William C.  
Vreeman, Gerrit (Jerry) H.

#### **55 YEARS (1972-2027)**

Bierma, Merle H.  
Bierman, Harry J.  
Boot, Joel R.  
Cooper, Dale J.  
Davies, Mark A.  
Erffmeyer, Gerald R.  
Flikkema, Melvin J.  
Fyneweaver, Ronald L.  
Holwerda, Peter J.  
Kortenhoven, Paul

Lagerwey, Donald W.  
Lamsma, John H.  
Lindemulder, Al  
Palsrok, Russell  
Postema, Gerald D.  
Postuma, John  
Remeur, James F.  
Roels, Edwin D.  
Tigchelaar, David J.  
Van Daalen, Siebren A.  
Van Schepen, John  
Van Wyk, Kenneth E.  
Vanden Bosch, William  
Vanden Heuvel, Jack  
Vander Plate, Jack C.  
Visser, John

#### **60 YEARS (1967-2027)**

Blankespoor, Edward J.  
Brouwer, Peter  
De Vries, Ecko  
Grevengoed, Richard O.  
Koops, Ralph  
Lunshof, Henry  
Mans, Peter J.  
Pool, Melle  
Pruim, Jay R.  
Rietema, Fred D.  
Tinklenberg, Duane E.  
Uken, Charles D.  
Van Tol, William  
Wagenveld, Louis W.  
Warners, Douglas A.  
Witvliet, John L.

**65 YEARS (1962-2027)**

Bierling, William A.  
 Hofland, Gary G.  
 Vos, Jack B.

**70 YEARS (1957-2027)**

Los, Eugene W.  
 Stulp, Jack

*B. Church anniversaries — at 25-year intervals*

**25 YEARS (2002-2027)**

Chicago, Illinois – Grace and Peace  
 New Lenox, Illinois – New Life

**50 YEARS (1977 -2027)**

Abbotsford, British Columbia – Trinity  
 Alto, Michigan – Lakeside Community  
 Beaver Dam, Wisconsin – Faith Community  
 Goderich, Ontario – Trinity  
 Lake Odessa, Michigan – Harvest Community  
 Tillsonburg, Ontario – Crosspoint Community  
 Woodstock, Ontario – Covenant

**75 YEARS (1952-2027)**

Allendale, Michigan – Second  
 Blenheim, Ontario – Blenheim  
 Brooks, Alberta – Brooks  
 Burnaby, British Columbia – New Westminster  
 Calgary, Alberta – River Park (First)  
 Chilliwack, British Columbia – Cornerstone (First)  
 Denver, Colorado – Hope Fellowship (Third)  
 Duncan, British Columbia – Duncan  
 Edmonton, Alberta – Inglewood (Third)  
 Grand Rapids, Michigan – Alger Park  
 Grand Rapids, Michigan – Cascade Fellowship  
 High River, Alberta – High River  
 Kalamazoo, Michigan – Westwood (Northwest)  
 Lindsay, Ontario – Jennings Creek  
 Lucknow, Ontario – Lucknow Community  
 Mount Hope, Ontario – Mount Hope Community  
 Niagara Falls, Ontario – Faith Fellowship  
 Pembroke, Ontario – Zion  
 Peterborough, Ontario – Cephas  
 Sarnia, Ontario – Living Hope (Second)  
 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan – Bethel  
 Smithers, British Columbia – Smithers  
 St. Thomas, Ontario – The Junction (First)  
 Telkwa, British Columbia – Telkwa Community  
 Terrace, British Columbia – Terrace  
 Victoria, British Columbia – Victoria  
 Wellandport, Ontario – Riverside

Williamsburg, Ontario – Williamsburg  
Wyoming, Ontario – Wyoming

**100 YEARS (1927-2027)**

Bellflower, California – First  
Grangeville, Idaho – Grangeville

**125 YEARS (1902-2027)**

Byron Center, Michigan – First  
Edgerton, Minnesota – First  
Holland, Michigan – Fourteenth Street  
Hudsonville, Michigan – Bauer  
Hudsonville, Michigan – First  
Oak Harbor, Washington – Oak Harbor  
Tracy, Iowa – Tracy

**150 YEARS (1877-2027)**

Penfield, New York – Rochester

**V. Nominations**

The committee assembled a slate of nominees for three appointments to the Historical Committee for three-year terms, to replace Stanley Jim, Christian Oh, and Janet Sheeres after they complete their terms on the committee this year. The list of nominees will be included in the Agenda Supplement.

**VI. Recommendations**

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to committee members Janet Sheeres, chair, and Jul Medenblik (seminary president) when matters pertaining to the Historical Committee come before synod.
- B. That synod appoint three members to the Historical Committee, each to a first term of three years, from the slate of names in the Agenda Supplement.
- C. That synod take note of the activities on which the committee has embarked and encourage leaders and churches to offer the committee suggestions and information related to them.
- D. That synod recognize with appreciation the service of retiring members Stanley Jim, Christian Oh, and Janet Sheeres, and of curator William Katerberg and the Heritage Hall staff, student worker, and volunteers.

Historical Committee  
Janet Sheeres, chair  
Rich Systma, secretary  
Jeff Haverdink  
Jessica Joustra  
William Katerberg  
Zachary J. King  
Jul Medenblik  
Donald Sinnema

## Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee (JCC) was established as a standing committee of synod with the mandate to process hearings of Judicial Code matters referred to it by synod (*Acts of Synod 1983*, p. 658). When called upon to provide recommendations to synod about a particular case, the committee also functions as an advisory committee of synod. In keeping with the instructions of synod regarding committee composition (see Supplement, Church Order Art. 30-c, Section 8, b), the following members are currently serving:

- Randy Engle, U.S., minister of the Word, 2028/1
- Jill Friend, U.S., nonordained person with no legal training, 2028/1
- Robert Drenten, U.S., minister of the Word, 2028/2
- Sarita Vandernaalt, Canada, nonordained person with no legal training, 2028/2
- Justin Snyder, U.S., nonordained person with no legal training, 2028/1
- Leah Nieuwstraten, Canada, person trained in law, 2028/1
- Heidi de Vries, Canada, person trained in law, 2026/1
- Gerritt Wieringa, U.S., person trained in law, 2026/1
- Deloris Carter, U.S., nonordained person with no legal training, 2026/2
- Bomsu Kim, U.S., minister of the Word, 2026/2
- Richard Bodini, Canada, minister of the Word, 2027/2
- Vacant, person trained in law, 2027/1
- Zachary King, ex officio
- Joel Vande Werken, staff support

In addition, the Office of General Secretary maintains a roster of volunteers willing to provide assistance to complainants and respondents with respect to prehearing procedures (Judicial Code, section 4, b). This roster is provided to any complainant or respondent upon request.

The Judicial Code Committee held its annual meeting on November 11, 2025. At that meeting the JCC reviewed its mandate, assessed the place of the committee as defined by synodical regulations, and took note of work being done to align two versions of the Judicial Code (one in the Church Order Supplement and one in the Rules for Synodical Procedure). The committee also reviewed its standards for committee membership in keeping with the instructions of synod (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 675-76) and presented that information to the Office of General Secretary, as requested.

Standing committees of synod ordinarily present to synod nominations of persons to fill the vacancies created by committee members whose terms have expired. Because the Judicial Code Committee meets only at the request of synod, however, synod has assigned the responsibility for nominating JCC members to the Council of Delegates (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p. 633).

During the past several years the JCC has had a light agenda. Those who have been assisted by the JCC testify that the experience has been a good

one and has proved helpful. Members of the denomination are asked to note this avenue for settling certain differences that may arise in the life of the church, and churches are reminded that the full text of the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures can be found in the Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c. The committee stands ready to serve synod and church members should any requests arise.

Judicial Code Committee  
Gerritt Wieringa (chair)  
Joel Vande Werken (staff support)