

Frequently Asked Questions about Synod 2025 decisions

As a service to the churches and classes of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Office of General Secretary has published a “frequently asked questions” document after synod for the past four years. The questions in this document come from synodical delegates, churches, and our interactions with CRCNA members and leaders.

As has been the case in the past few years, Synod 2025 dealt with issues arising out of the 2022 decisions on human sexuality. This year those issues included what it means to “fully agree” to the confessions “without reservation,” how often the Covenant for Officebearers should be affirmed, our future relationship with the Reformed Church in America, and what Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary require of their faculty and board members. In addition, Synod 2025 made changes to the mandate of *The Banner*, the official publication of the Christian Reformed Church.

Synod 2025 also addressed a host of forward-looking, ministry, and mission-related topics, including virtual churches, the future of church planting, how to respond to medically assisted suicide, and our unity as a binational denomination. We give thanks to God for the honesty and respect that characterized the proceedings of Synod 2025, which were also immersed in prayer. As synod concluded this year, its president challenged the delegates and all others in attendance to open their own and others’ eyes to Christ and what he is doing.

In compiling this FAQ document, we acknowledge that the concerns of many leaders and members of our churches may run deeper than we are able to reach here, despite our good-faith efforts to answer questions based on the facts as we understand them. It is also likely that, based on feedback that we receive, some of the responses here may be updated and new questions and responses may be added.

If you have questions and would like to reach out to us, please contact us at communications@crcna.org. More information will be forthcoming as we publish the *Acts of Synod 2025* and provide summaries to the classes.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13).

Yours in Christ,

Zachary King
General Secretary

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The Banner

1. What did synod do with *The Banner*'s mandate? What does this mean?

Synod recognized that there is a tension between *The Banner* being the “official publication of the CRCNA” and its publication of diverse viewpoints on ethical and moral issues that are sometimes at odds with the positions of the CRCNA. It felt that publication of these diverse perspectives, especially when individual articles could be shared and found online out of context of other parts of the magazine, could confuse people about the CRC’s theological and ethical positions. As a result, it made some changes to *The Banner*’s mandate to better clarify how the magazine should represent the positions of the denomination.

Synod affirmed that *The Banner* is a publication of the CRCNA rather than an independent magazine. It should therefore function in a manner responsive to its synodical mandate. Synod 2025 removed phrases that asked the magazine to “lead a responsible discussion on issues” as well as “permit people to voice their views and reactions.” In addition, it added a new piece to the mandate, requiring *The Banner* to “represent the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective . . . representing the CRCNA as its official position.”

The Banner staff retains freedom to share “trends in the church and society,” but it has to locate those in the larger convictions of the denomination (i.e., “stimulating critical thinking . . . in line with our confessional heritage”). It also has the freedom to “inform its readers and subscribers about what is occurring in the church (including relevant problems, needs, and concerns), even though some persons, congregations, or agencies may prefer that such information not be disseminated”—but this editorial freedom now includes a specific desire for “proper acknowledgment and respect for the official positions of the CRCNA and within the confines of our confessional covenant commitments.” The full mandate of *The Banner* can be found [here](#).

2. I heard that the editor-in-chief resigned. Did synod force him out?

No. Synod's only actions were with regard to the mandate of *The Banner*, not the effectiveness or faithfulness of its editor or other staff.

Covenant for Officebearers

3. Did synod modify Church Order Supplement, Article 5 about needing to sign the Covenant for Officebearers “without reservation”? What do the modifications to this supplement mean?

Synod did not change the requirement for officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers “without reservation.” However, it acknowledged that many congregations and officebearers are struggling with aspects of our doctrinal standards while also wanting to uphold their calling to lead with integrity, humility, and submission to the Word of God.

Synod clarified that there is a difference between a confessional difficulty and the wrestling, doubts, and concerns that officebearers often have in the course of ministry. All officebearers continue to learn and grow in their understanding of and commitment to the confessions.

Synod amended the Church Order Supplement, Article 5-a to clarify that an officebearer is not required to have an exhaustive knowledge of Scripture or of confessional Reformed theology in order to serve. Instead, what is required is that, to the best of their knowledge, they do not have either a “persistent serious doubt or settled conviction” contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions.

Synod emphasized that honoring the church's confessional standards is not at odds with grace and patience. Rather, the current processes and provisions already offer flexibility and pastoral space for growth. Councils are entrusted with original authority, and the Church Order gives them responsibility for evaluating gravamina and determining a suitable path forward. At the same time, synod and classis retain delegated authority to promote the church's confessional unity.

4. What did synod decide about how often and in what way the Covenant for Officebearers must be affirmed?

Synod instructed all classes to require all of their delegates to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers at each classis meeting. While Synod 2024 had required that all classes re-sign

the Covenant for Officebearers annually, Synod 2025 adjusted this requirement and left the form of affirmation to the discretion of the classis. First-time delegates to classis are to sign. Other delegates may stand, raise their hands, or affirm in another way that is determined by classis. Synod 2025 also stated that the practice of affirmation at the gathering of the classical assembly is to be a celebration of that which unites us and can be observed as an act of worship.

5. Did synod discipline Classis Toronto for not adhering to the instructions of Synod 2024 regarding seating delegates from churches under limited suspension and those who would not sign the Covenant for officebearers?

Synod sustained an appeal from five churches in Classis Toronto, holding that classis' actions were a knowing and intentional violation of the rulings of synod. Noting that the Church Order declares decisions of the assemblies "settled and binding," it instructed Classis Toronto to ensure full and immediate compliance with the decisions of Synod 2024. It did not adopt any further measures to discipline Classis Toronto. Instead, it noted the pastoral concerns raised and acknowledged the engagement of both the appellants and respondents with the questions of synod's committee.

COD and Other Boards

6. What changes have been made to the Council of Delegates exceptions policy?

In the past year the Council of Delegates (COD), which governs the CRCNA when synod is not in session, replaced its exceptions policy. In the past this exceptions policy formerly allowed delegates to register exceptions to any item in the COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA. Today the COD has new nomination and reservations procedures. Taken together, these procedures now require that COD members not begin their service with a reservation to a confessional matter. They also require that COD members not persist with a reservation (if they develop it subsequently) for longer than one three-year term. Synod affirmed the COD's work as demonstrating robust confessional alignment with the teachings of the CRCNA.

7. What changes have been made to the Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary policies for board members and faculty?

In response to Synod 2024's request, Calvin University's board submitted a report to Synod 2025 that indicated their desire to align their framework for confessional subscription and

differences with that of the CRCNA while still respecting the distinct spheres and roles of the church and the university. Reaffirming that the denomination's confessional standards and interpretations are the standards and interpretations of the university, Calvin University's board noted that its policies and practices require trustees and employees to align personal and professional conduct with those standards and interpretations. The university also implemented a new developmental framework for confessional subscription for faculty. That framework aligns more closely with the Church Order, supports new faculty in embracing a robust understanding of the Reformed tradition, respects important differences between the university and the church, and strengthens the university's Reformed Christian witness. Synod largely affirmed this work, commending Calvin University in their ongoing efforts to live into a robustly Reformed set of standards for board, faculty, and administration as servant leaders in the CRCNA.

The Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) Board of Trustees noted its faculty's commitment to the Covenant for Officebearers and reported that the institution has not had gravamina policies or a process of noting "exceptions" since its institutional separation from Calvin College (now Calvin University) in 1991. Synod expressed its gratitude for CTS's work and its commitment to uphold the fullness of God's Word and wholeheartedly support and fully defend without exception the creeds and confessions for the benefit of the church. It also requested that the CTS board provide further information about the adherence of instructional personnel beyond regular faculty to the CRC's teaching.

8. Did synod change how people can be nominated to future board positions for the CRCNA and its ministries?

Synod recognized the importance of maintaining theological, ethical, and professional alignment among nominees to synodically appointed boards, committees, and agencies. It directed the Office of General Secretary to request that such bodies provide rubrics listing the qualifications and giftedness expected of board and committee nominees, such as relevant education and professional experience, spiritual maturity and moral integrity, and a stated commitment to Jesus Christ and to the confessional standards of the CRCNA. This directive was to build on existing nomination processes, acknowledging that procedures may vary across organizations. The intent is not to replace those processes but to establish shared baseline expectations for all synodically appointed bodies.

Ecumenical Relationships

9. What did synod decide about the CRCNA's relationship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches?

The Alliance of Reformed Churches ("Alliance") is a relatively new body of Reformed congregations that was created when several churches left the Reformed Church in America. Synod 2025 approved the Alliance as a "church in communion," pending a positive response to

the CRCNA's invitation. The designation of "church in communion" is the closest of the CRCNA's ecumenical relationships. Churches that are so designated 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 and each other's pastors into the pulpit, and generally encourage each other in ministry and faithfulness. Learn more [here](#).

10. What did synod decide about the CRCNA's relationship with the Reformed Church in America?

Synod instructed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) to conduct a five-year review of the CRCNA's ecumenical relationship with the RCA, assessing the benefits and drawbacks of the current "in communion" relationship. The designation of "church in communion" is the closest of the CRCNA's ecumenical relationships.

This five-year review would consider ministry partnerships, CRC/RCA agency partnerships, "union churches," exchange of ministers, and other joint ventures (such as the Reformed Benefits Association). The EIRC will give annual updates to synod and will submit a final report and any recommendations to Synod 2030.

Synod acknowledged that the CRC has benefited from RCA pastors serving its churches and from a long history of partnership. Synod asked its ecumenical delegates from the RCA to "communicate the CRC's love and concern for the RCA, its integrity, witness, and faithfulness in all matters." It also acknowledged that ensuring theological alignment via the Covenant for Officebearers is important for our future, so it stressed the importance of dialogue with the RCA regarding its commitment in faith and practice specifically as it relates to the forbidding of unchastity, which encompasses homosexual sex.

11. Do RCA pastors serving in the CRC need to sign the Covenant for Officebearers?

Church Order already requires that RCA pastors serving in the CRC have a "knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church," and that the mandatory provisions of CRC polity apply to RCA pastors' service in the CRC (Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, D, 5-6). However, synod added language to the Church Order Supplement, Article 8, to make explicit the expectation that RCA officebearers serving in the CRC would sign the Covenant for Officebearers on the occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations.

Being a Binational Church

12. Synod received an overture about separating the CRCNA into a CRC of Canada and a CRC of the United States. How did synod respond?

While synod recognized the important matters presented in the overture from Meadowlands Fellowship CRC and understood that these issues need to be considered as the CRCNA moves forward, it asserted that separating the denomination along national lines was not the answer. Synod recognized the challenges and pressures that exist for the CRCNA as a binational denomination. It also noted the considerable progress that has happened in the past few years regarding the organizational relationship between the Canadian and U.S. ministry offices of the CRCNA, and the steps that have taken place to secure direction and control for each country office to pursue ministry in their own contexts. Synod further observed that Church Order provides an ecclesiastical avenue to address many of the concerns the overture raises. It encouraged the Canadian portion of the CRCNA in its ministry initiatives, and synod pledged its support as uniquely Canadian ministry opportunities are realized. This response received an overwhelming endorsement of the full synod, indicating nearly unanimous support for this direction from both Canadian and U.S. delegates.

Church Planting

13. Does Resonate Global Mission still support church planting?

Church planting is still a foundational priority in Resonate's mission and overall work. For years Resonate and other CRCNA ministries have been deeply committed to partnering with church planters by offering various forms of support. This commitment remains strong today. However, over the past several decades Resonate has seen a decline in financial support that has led to the need for a comprehensive review and changes in programming to ensure a balanced budget for long-term sustainability. In the past few months a decision has been made that overall funding for church plants will be reduced by approximately \$1.3 million (USD) in the coming year. In addition, there will continue to be funding for contextualized ministry support for church planters. Resonate laments that this change will make a significant impact on local church plants; however, Resonate's leadership also emphasizes that the agency's focus has always been on the professional development and ministry support of church planters. The shift in budget priorities will build deeper, more sustainable partnerships with church planters and emphasize holistic planter assessments, coaching, training, leadership development, and community engagement. It is expected that operational support for church plants will continue to come from classes and supporting churches.

14. What did synod decide to do as next steps for church planting?

Synod encouraged all churches to take an extra step to connect with Resonate in order to build support for church planting, and to confirm that church planters in each church and classis are adequately supported. Further, the Office of General Secretary was instructed to coordinate with agencies and classes to develop a detailed vision, plan, strategy, and financial proposal for church planting for the CRCNA for the next decade. More information about the process for developing this plan will be coming to churches and classes in fall 2025. Classes are additionally encouraged to develop a church planting strategy or to strengthen their current strategy in partnership with Resonate. Contact your [Resonate Regional Leader](#) for more information and for support in developing this strategy.

15. I have thoughts/best practices/suggestions for church planting in the CRCNA in the future. How can I contribute to the strategic plan?

Church planting is something that the entire CRCNA should support and see as part of our shared church renewal. If you have suggestions for how this can be done better, please contact your [Resonate Regional Leader](#).

Virtual Churches

16. What are some of the highlights of the Virtual Church Task Force report, and what did synod do with it?

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the creation of more online and digital forms of ministry, Synod 2023 instructed “the Office of General Secretary to oversee the creation of a report that gives thought to and a theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church: a church which, by design, meets only online.” [That report](#) came to Synod 2025 and sparked robust conversation.

In the end, synod affirmed that there should be room for intentional and ongoing experimentation within the CRCNA for digital ministry. It also encouraged those engaged in an exclusively digital ministry to seek the support of mother churches and classes in their ministry. It also encouraged them, when applicable, to seek to move those they are serving toward hybrid or in-person gatherings.

Synod noted that it would be premature to declare strictly digital or virtual online ministries to be churches, yet also premature to categorically declare virtual churches to be theologically impermissible. Instead synod encouraged networking for shared learning and discernment,

including continued study about the legitimacy of virtual churches, especially regarding how they might fulfill the marks of the true church in their context.

Assisted Suicide

17. What are some of the highlights of the Assisted Suicide Task Force report? What did synod do with it?

Synod 2023 requested “a definitive and comprehensive report on the practice of assisted suicide in all its forms” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 981). A task force was created to study this question and report back to Synod 2025. This group understood that the main question posed to them was as follows: “Given the growing availability and endorsement of medically assisted suicide, how should Christians think about this matter biblically, within the medical context, and in support of practical Christian living?”

The task force provided synod with [this report](#). Synod 2025 approved the recommendations within this report and commended it to churches as helpful information and guidance. Synod affirmed the “value of human life as a gift from God, intrinsic and enduring, recognizing that, as Christians, we are to honor and care for all lives—our own and others—especially in suffering and despair.” It deplored “the legalization and practice of medically assisted suicide as well as efforts to expand it to minors.” And it reminded CRC members, churches, and classes to “pastorally respond to suffering, disability, and death, including encouraging palliative care at the end of life.”

Synod also encouraged CRC members to give generously of their time, treasure, and talents to work that supports people who are vulnerable and suffering, and to support the work of civil government to provide compassionate care so that persons who are suffering and vulnerable do not feel pressured to end their lives. Synod urged CRC members to recommit to engagement with public policy makers in advocating for hospice and palliative care that is readily available for every person in their jurisdiction.

Synodical Pronouncements

18. What are the different types of synodical decisions?

In 2021, Classis Chatham (now Classis Ontario Southwest) overtured synod to “clarify the distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice and the extent to which they bind the churches” (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 350-51). Due to COVID-19 pandemic delays and a lack of time at Synods 2022 and 2023, action on this overture was deferred until Synod 2024 (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 401-2). Synod 2024 then assigned a small group to clarify these categories and report back to Synod 2025. Their report can be found [here](#).

While acknowledging the diversity of the types of statements that may be adopted, even at times within a given set of decisions or in response to a particular report, Synod 2025 adopted the report's recommendations, including three broad categories of synodical decisions (items 2-4 below) and an additional fourth category (item 1 below):

- 1) Confessional interpretations are official statements or declarations that clarify doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church. By definition, confessional interpretations require officebearers to affirm that the doctrines fully agree with the Word of God, or to submit to the gravamen process (Church Order Art. 5).
- 2) Doctrinal affirmations (sometimes called pronouncements, positions, decisions, or deliverances) expresses decisions on matters of doctrine, ethics, church policy, or other important issues. Doctrinal affirmations are authoritative and are meant to guide the beliefs and practices of the church community.
- 3) Adjudicatory decisions arise from particular disputes coming from the churches in response to appeals or protests or when the Judicial Code is invoked. Synod may decide that an adjudicatory decision has a universal and binding application.
- 4) Doctrinal applications (including what synod has called guidelines for further study, contemporary testimonies, or pastoral advice) apply Scripture and the confessions to contemporary contexts or situations. Doctrinal applications are ways of further expressing the faith of the church but are not considered additions to the confessions. They are settled and binding but allow for discernment in the way they are applied in local contexts.

Commissioned Pastors

19. Did synod change the requirements for commissioned pastors?

The Candidacy Committee has been conducting a review of the current standards for the office of commissioned pastor, articulated in Articles 23 and 24 of the Church Order. Given the growth in use and in complexity in the commissioned pastor office over the past decade, and especially the growing use of the office for a “bridge ordination” to the office of minister of the Word or for the ordination of solo or lead pastors in organized congregations, Synod 2025 adopted changes to the Church Order Supplements to Articles 23 and 24 to provide more consistent standards for the qualifications of the persons serving in these roles across the denomination. The goal is to ensure that commissioned pastors serving in these solo roles have the training and support they need.

Commissioned pastors who accept a call to serve in solo or lead role will now be required to take some steps to move toward ordination as ministers of the Word by means of the “bridge ordination” process. Further, synod adopted changes to the Church Order supplement to require

the concurrence of synodical deputies in the examination of a commissioned pastor serving in a solo or lead position, not just in the approval of the position itself.

20. Do these requirements apply to existing commissioned pastors as well?

In response to questions and concerns about the potential impact on those already ordained as commissioned pastors in solo or lead roles, synod clarified that the requirement to begin the process of Article 24-b “bridge ordination” is intended to apply only to commissioned pastors entering new Article 24 calls, not to those who are already serving in solo/lead roles in an organized church.

Pastoral Spouses

21. What did synod decide about how better to care for pastoral spouses?

Synod encouraged each of the churches and classes to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses by providing at least \$500 per year for resources for the spiritual care of the pastoral spouses in their church, and to create funds to help local churches who cannot afford such resources for the care of pastoral spouses. Regional pastors and church visitors were directed to inquire about the health of pastoral spouses in their contacts with pastors and churches, and the denominational office was requested to curate further resources for how churches and classes can support the spiritual care of pastoral spouses.