

## Frequently Asked Questions about Synod 2024 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 three years. The questions in this document draw from synodical delegates, churches, and our interactions with CRCNA members and leaders.

As has been the case in the past few years, Synod 2024 dealt with weighty issues arising out of the 2022 decisions on human sexuality. This year those issues included gravamina, protests about confessional positions, and discipline matters. Synod 2024 also addressed a host of forward-looking, ministry, and mission-related topics, including the CRCNA’s global vision, its support of bivocational pastors, its Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders, and multisite congregations. We give thanks to God for the honesty and respect that characterized the proceedings of Synod 2024, which were also immersed in deep prayer. As synod concluded this year, its president challenged the delegates and all others in attendance with the apostle Paul’s instruction to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2).

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](mailto:communications@crcna.org). More information will be forthcoming as we publish the *Acts of Synod 2024* 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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# Gravamina

## 1. What are gravamina, and why do they exist?

*Gravamen* is an English term that comes from the Latin verb *gravare*, meaning "to burden," and from the Latin adjective *gravis*, meaning "heavy." This term is most often used to refer to part of a grievance or complaint that has weight or substance. In Christian Reformed Church polity, the gravamen process provides guidance for how officebearers can have discussions about beliefs that are based on Scripture and described in the Reformed confessions, and of which they may have questions or doubts.

The CRC has two types of *gravamina* (the plural of *gravamen*). A *confessional-difficulty* gravamen is used by an officebearer to provide formal notice to their council about their difficulty with some aspect of the confessions. The process around gravamina then provides a way for officebearers to seek clarification. If this process does not lead to resolution, the officebearer may choose to submit a *confessional-revision* gravamen, which begins the process of asking for a review and potentially a change to the confessions. A confessional-revision gravamen would be processed by a local council and then, if the council agreed, would be forwarded to the classis and to synod for deliberation and decision.

## 2. What changes did synod make to the confessional-difficulty gravamen process?

Prior to the decisions of Synod 2022, the use of gravamina was somewhat rare. The information about them within CRC Church Order was also deemed by some to be unclear. As such, it was possible to have two understandings of how confessional-difficulty gravamina could be used: either as an exception to some aspect of the confessions, or as the start of a process for clarification as someone wrestled with a particular doctrine.

Synod 2024 clarified expectations by revising the guidelines for gravamina in the Supplement to Church Order Article 5 and by articulating that confessional difficulty gravamina are not meant, nor should they be used, as an exception to the confessions. Instead they are intended to begin a process of learning whether or not the officebearer's understanding is aligned with the doctrines of our confessions and with what synod has given confessional status. If not, the gravamen process can help the officebearer pursue a path toward alignment – enlisting the help of the classis and synod if necessary. This process is intended to be completed within three years.

### 3. What is the process for councils when they are presented with a confessional difficulty by an officebearer?

Upon receiving a confessional-difficulty gravamen, the council begins a process of discipleship and discernment toward the officebearer's full alignment with the confessions and with what synod has given confessional status. The council is responsible for providing time, encouragement, and counsel so that all parties can work to resolve the confessional difficulty in a spirit of love, humility, and fellowship.

As part of this process, the council shall do the following:

- a) Examine and judge the nature and extent of the difficulty in question and discern whether an officebearer has a sincere difficulty or a settled conviction contrary to the confessions that may better be served by filing a confessional-revision gravamen.
- b) Develop a concrete course of action to resolve the confessional difficulty. The course of action will include counsel and discipleship for the officebearer, providing them the information and/or clarification being sought.
- c) Set a reasonable timeline for the resolution of the confessional difficulty. The total timeline shall not exceed three years from the time the difficulty is received by a council.

The matter will be considered resolved when the officebearer affirms without reservation the confessions and anything that synod has declared to have confessional status, submits a confessional-revision gravamen, or resigns from office.

At any point, the council may seek help from church visitors to assist in this process.

### 4. What are the limitations and responsibilities of officebearers while they are in the gravamen process?

After submitting a confessional-difficulty gravamen, the officebearer must refrain from teaching that is contrary to or disparaging of the church's confessions or what synod has declared to have confessional status when they instruct, disciple, care for, and counsel others. They must also recuse themselves from being delegated to broader assemblies while their confessional difficulty remains unresolved, and they must work in good faith toward full alignment with the confessions and with what synod has given confessional status.

5. What effect do Synod 2024's decisions about gravamina have on members who might be contemplating becoming an officebearer in the CRCNA?

Synod 2024 stipulated that members who become officebearers in the CRCNA may not enter service with a confessional difficulty or a settled conviction against a confessional teaching. Synod amended Church Order Supplement, Article 5 (A, 1) to read, "The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church as being doctrines taught in the Word of God. 'Without reservation' means that an officebearer does not have a difficulty or hold a settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions. This includes what synod has declared to have confessional status."

6. Do you have any advice for a council that is struggling because a number of members have declined to serve as elders or deacons due to their difficulties with synod's interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108?

There may be a number of reasons why a council would struggle to find a sufficient number of nominees for the offices of elder and deacon, including the situation in which a number of individuals in the CRC have expressed difficulty with synod's decisions regarding human sexuality. Synod's advisory committee expressed its confidence that the local council would provide the "best context for trust, encouragement, and support" for any potential officebearers to work through difficulties with the confessions. Some councils may find it necessary to put forward a reduced slate of elder and deacon nominees in the next year or two while potential officebearers work through the process of understanding their alignment with the CRC's positions. Church visitors from classis may also help councils navigate this process with prayer, grace, and truth.

# Human Sexuality

1. What did Synod 2024 decide when asked whether same-sex marriage is a heretical belief (Overture 28) and whether the sins synod identified as pertaining to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 (addressing the seventh commandment) are salvation issues (Overture 29)?

Synod did not accede to these two overtures. Synod 2024 noted that Overture 28 did not “meet the high standards of definition and articulation needed for declaring a heresy as outlined in the *Acts of Synod 2022* (pp. 843-44).” In its grounds for rejecting Overture 29, Synod 2024 recognized the imprecision of the term “salvation issue” when applied to a particular sin. Further, synod stated that “Scripture is already clear that all sin, including unrepented sin, is a ‘salvation issue’ (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21) as is reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 87.” Synod 2024 also determined that the decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023 about human sexuality already clarify the denomination’s stance on this issue. As such, an additional statement related to this specific sin was deemed not necessary.

2. Can a member of the CRC who is not an officebearer disagree with an aspect of the CRCNA’s confessions? What is expected of members before they make profession of faith, present a child for baptism, or serve in various nonordained leadership roles?

While the CRC has different expectations for officebearers than for individual members, our process for profession of faith does ask church members to indicate their “commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church” (Church Order Art. 59) by agreeing that “the confessions of this church faithfully reflect [the] revelation” that “the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption” (Form for the Public Profession of Faith [2016]). Synod 2024 received several questions asking for further clarity about this topic but primarily focused on expectations for officebearers. It tasked the Office of General Secretary with providing theological reflection and advice on the historical, biblical, and theological aspects of membership and to report back to Synod 2026. In the meantime, synod encouraged councils to work out situations within their context and in submission to our creeds and confessions.

# Church Order Matters

## 1. What changes did Synod 2024 make to the CRC Church Order (Art. 14, 15, and 23) to support bivocational pastors (ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors)?

Synod 2024 adopted changes to Church Order Articles 14, 15, and 23 that were proposed by Synod 2023. These articles and their changes provide clarity that the “proper support” expected for ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors includes adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items. In bivocational arrangements, these resources can be provided by all the streams of compensation (and not just the calling church of the minister or commissioned pastor). Further, the council and classis must take responsibility for assuring that this “proper support” is (and remains) in place. Finally, in the case of commissioned pastors, Synod 2024 added the phrase “as appropriate” to support offered by the calling church, recognizing that this amendment “takes into consideration the vastness of the potential ministries that a commissioned pastor may be called to.”

## 2. For many years the CRC has been talking about a Code of Conduct. What changes to the Church Order did Synod 2024 make with regard to the Code of Conduct?

Synod 2024 adopted changes to the Church Order that were proposed by Synod 2023 regarding the Code of Conduct. This included mandating that “all officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders” (Art. 5; see also Supplement, Art. 5). The changes also included mention of the Code of Conduct in Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c (Regulation c), as follows: “The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister’s commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one’s signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.”

## 3. What did Synod 2024 decide about matters pertaining to commissioned pastors?

Synod recognized the need for greater leadership development in our denomination. It encouraged councils and classes to identify potential leaders and create multiple



pathways for training. It also encouraged support for ongoing learning for commissioned pastors to provide them with a bridge toward ordination as ministers of the Word.

Synod also added clarity to the process for the reordination of commissioned pastors who were released from ministry. It stipulated that such individuals must receive the approval of the classis in which they earlier served in order to be reexamined for commissioned-pastor ordination by the classis of the church that has called them to serve in another ministry.

#### 4. This year's synod received a report from a task force reviewing Church Order Articles 12-17. What is the impact of this report?

Synod 2022 appointed a task force to review the Church Order articles related to the supervision of pastors in noncongregational positions, as well as to the release of pastors from a congregation or from ordination in the denomination. The report offers a number of principles for churches and pastors seeking guidance in these kinds of scenarios, with the intention that such guidance will be made available on the Thrive website.

With regard to pastors serving in noncongregational settings, synod proposed Church Order changes for adoption by Synod 2025 that are designed to provide consistency in the calling process and in joint supervision situations.

In addition, synod highlighted a number of principles and resources for churches and pastors navigating the process of a release from ministry. It also proposed for adoption by Synod 2025 changes to the Church Order regulations guiding the release of ministers from a particular call or from ordination in the denomination, and included in particular a mandate to use a separation agreement in all situations of release from a particular call. These Church Order changes are listed in the Church Order Review Task Force report (see *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 63-166) and are being proposed to Synod 2025 for adoption, and related resources are being made available [through Thrive](#).

## Protests of Synodical Decisions

#### 1. Are churches and classes allowed to protest synodical decisions, and what is the appropriate way to do so?

Synod 1975 clarified that there many different kinds of synodical decisions; however, all synodical decisions are considered "settled and binding" on churches and classes

unless they can be proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order, according to Church Order Article 29. Synod 2024 approved the creation of a “team to clarify distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions and advice.” This team will report to Synod 2025.

Expressions of concern and even protest regarding most synodical decisions can appropriately be shared with synod or other assemblies. A protest is a legitimate form of communication. But synod did make clear that one cannot exist or remain indefinitely in the status of one in protest. Even in our protests we continue to “promise to submit to the church’s judgment and authority” (Covenant for Officebearers).

Confessional matters (including the interpretations of confessions), however, may not be protested, except through the process of a confessional-revision gravamen. Officebearers may not contradict confessional matters in their teaching, preaching, writing, or public discourse except as provided by the procedures of confessional-revision gravamina in ecclesiastical assemblies.

Synod 2023 addressed numerous overtures and confessional-revision gravamina related to the confessional status of the CRCNA’s position regarding same-sex sex. Synod 2024 chose not to receive any new overtures on this subject because they did not present sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration of a synodical decision and were considered repetitious.

## 2. What is “ecclesiastical intent,” and why is that a factor in determining whether a protest to synod is appropriate or not?

Synod 2024 received a number of communications from individuals and congregations protesting various decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023. While these communications included some similarities, not all of the protests were the same; nor were they necessarily written with the same intent with regard to the wider church. While a communication that intends to express and work through a difficulty could be redirected to the confessional-difficulty gravamen process as clarified by synod this year, CRC polity does not allow communications that are intended to express to the whole church a settled “protest” or reservation with the confessions. While an individual or council can express their protest of a decision, they may not “have declared themselves to be in the status of one in protest with ecclesiastical intent.” Synod made a clear distinction between protests that were legitimate and those that attempted to create a new category of membership with “‘metaphorical asterisks’ by their names.” Though synod did not specifically define “ecclesiastical intent,” those communications that spoke of a settled conviction against the declarations of synod with a refusal to comply were understood to have communicated intent to the broader church.

In fairness with regard to the variety of letters of protest, classes are encouraged to pastorally communicate with each individual church so that protests may be addressed through the proper ecclesiastical channels, including the disciplinary processes established by Synod 2024, in ways that recognize the intent of the communication's author(s).

### 3. What happens to churches who have, by virtue of their protest letters, declared themselves to have “the status of a church in protest”?

Synod recognized that the protest letters received by synod this year stem from difficulties that some churches have had with the decisions of recent years regarding human sexuality that were declared to have confessional status. At the same time, synod reminded such churches of their obligations to the covenant commitments we have as a denomination, and that these covenant commitments are undermined by consistent and public opposition to denominational positions.

Synod declared that churches which have declared themselves to be “in the status of one in protest with ecclesiastical intent” regarding synod's decisions shall be entered into a one-year process of discipline requiring repentance and a move toward restoration with CRCNA positions, or toward disaffiliation. During the one-year process, those congregations will be unable to send delegates as voting members to classis or synod or to serve on denominational boards or agencies. See discussion under “Discipline.”

## Relationship with the RCA

### 1. Did Synod 2024 make any changes to the relationship between the RCA and the CRC?

No. Synod 2024 did not reverse previous decisions or change the status of the CRCNA's relationship with the RCA.

More than 160 years ago a handful of Dutch immigrant congregations in West Michigan refused to join the Reformed Church in America over disagreements about the use of hymns in worship, catechetical instruction for youth, educational practices, open communion and host of other theological and cultural issues. These churches were the beginning of a new denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America. In more recent decades, these two denominations have moved closer together, pledging in 2014 to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction

compel them to act separately” (per the Lund Principle; see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 265; *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504). That commitment continues.

## 2. What did Synod 2024 ask regarding the RCA? What are the next steps?

Synod 2024 asked the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) of the CRCNA to communicate with the RCA to seek clarity regarding their commitment to “our shared confessional heritage, doctrine, and practice” as well as to clarify their “ongoing commitment in faith and practice to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A’s 108 and 109, specifically in relation to the forbidding of unchastity,” which Synod 2022 of the CRC declared to encompass homosexual sex. Synod also asked to receive “clarification on whether RCA clergy have been, or are being, permitted to solemnize same-sex marriages, or to themselves remain in same-sex marriages or romantic partnerships, while remaining ministers in good standing.” In addition, synod asked the EIRC to make a recommendation to Synod 2025 about whether the RCA should remain a “church in communion” with the CRCNA on the basis of these findings.

## Discipline

### 1. Many overtures received by Synod 2024 proposed processes of discipline for CRC congregations that have publicly opposed the synodical decisions concerning unchastity. What did synod decide about this matter?

Synod was particularly concerned about churches that have publicly defied our covenant commitments agreed to in the Covenant for Officebearers and have refused “to submit to the church’s judgment and authority” (Covenant for Officebearers). Synod instructed “churches who have made public statements, by their actions or in any form of media, that directly contradict synod’s decision regarding unchastity to repent and to honor their covenant commitments to the CRCNA.”

All officebearers from churches in noncompliance with synod’s decisions would, at the conclusion of Synod 2024, be placed in a limited suspension that would include, in particular, “a loss of ability to be delegated to classis, synod, the COD, or CRCNA agencies. Officebearers under limited suspension may attend classis with the privilege of the floor but not as a seated delegate.”

## 2. What actions did synod require as demonstrations of repentance?

Synod stated that actions demonstrating repentance would include the following:

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

## 3. Does this mean that CRC officebearers are not allowed to serve or otherwise participate in an organization with a policy in conflict with the CRCNA's understanding of same-sex sexual relationships?

Synod was very specific with its declaration. CRCNA officebearers should not "serve in any organization designed to specifically advocate against the teachings and confessions of the CRCNA." The emphasis is on the purpose of the group: is it designed primarily to advocate against the teachings and confessions of the CRCNA? This applies to both secular and ecclesiastical organizations.

The decisions of synod are not designed to prevent CRCNA officebearers from participating with organizations such as hospitals, food pantries, educational institutions, or other groups whose policies on same-sex sexual relationships may conflict with the CRCNA's understanding of unchastity. As long as a group is not designed primarily for the purpose of advocacy that would undermine CRCNA positions, or the officebearer's main purpose in the group is not to advocate for an understanding of unchastity at odds with the CRCNA's position, officebearers may continue their involvement.

## 4. What is “limited suspension”?

Synod’s only specific statements on the consequences of “limited suspension” are related to a church’s ability to have its officebearers serve as delegates at classis or synod or on denominational boards. Synod even allowed such officebearers to attend classis meetings and have privilege of the floor but not to be given a vote. Limited suspension means a limit on representation in classical and denominational meetings and ministries. This limits their ministry to the local congregation.

Churches under limited suspension enter a one-year process of conversation and discernment toward either restoration and alignment with CRCNA positions on chastity, or toward disaffiliation from the denomination. This process may be extended by classis for an additional year if necessary.

Thus there are three possible outcomes of this limited suspension process at the end of one or two years: repentance and restoration to full fellowship, disaffiliation by the congregation, or (if the church refuses to engage in the process or prevents the process from moving forward in a timely fashion) the initiation of special discipline by the classis, which would mean the dissolution of the council, the reversion of the congregation to unorganized status, and the placement of the congregation under the care of a neighboring council (see Church Order Art. 78-84).

## 5. What is expected of a classis that contains congregations under discipline or limited suspension?

Classes are expected to honor the limited suspension and discipline of these congregations. They should allow delegates from these churches to attend meetings but not give them voting privileges. They should also make space for follow-up conversations. Synod established several “benchmarks” of repentance, which would include a statement to classis indicating repentance, a removal of public statements contradicting the CRCNA’s position, and a commitment not to continue any of the declarations or acts that triggered the disciplinary action in the first place.

A church under limited suspension enters into a one-year process with its classis, leading either to full restoration or toward disaffiliation from the CRCNA. This process may be extended by the classis for up to one year if further time is needed. If the church refuses to engage in this process, or if the process is not completed within the two-year time frame, the classis is to remove the council and revert the church to an emerging status, placing the church under the authority of a neighboring council.

6. If an officebearer is under limited suspension, may they still serve communion? If a pastor is under limited suspension, may they administer sacraments and/or speak at other churches?

Synod's only specific statements on the consequences of limited suspension are related to a church's ability to have its officebearers serve as delegates at classis or synod or on denominational boards. As such, synod did not restrict any other types of service that these officebearers may engage in, particularly within the context of their local congregation.

7. If I am a member of a church that is under limited suspension and I have a role on a committee in my classis, on a synodical committee, or as a synodical deputy, may I continue to serve in this role while my church navigates the process of restoration with my classis?

Though synod addressed its instructions primarily to officebearers, it also imposed restrictions on a suspended church's ability to send delegates "to . . . the COD, or CRCNA agencies." Representatives of churches under limited suspension are allowed the privilege of the floor at classis meetings but not as seated delegates. Though synod did not specifically address participation in classis committees or service roles, the classis should determine the appropriate implications of limited suspension in its own context according to the implications of synod. While the parameters of service should be largely consistent with the instructions synod has given for delegation to major assemblies or service on denominational committees, we also trust the wisdom of local leaders to determine the appropriate boundaries on the service of those whose churches are wrestling with synod's decisions.

# Disaffiliation

## 1. Did synod decide to disaffiliate churches? Can synod decide to do that?

No. No churches were disaffiliated by synod. Disaffiliation is a decision to be made by individual congregations, in keeping with the procedures set forth in the Church Order (Art. 38-f). Synod 2024 did not initiate a disaffiliation process for any congregation but merely identified the parameters of the decisions that churches will need to make to either repent and begin the process toward full restoration, or to disaffiliate. If a congregation doesn't make this decision on their own, Synod 2024 said that classis will remove the congregation's status as an "organized" church and revert it to an "emerging church." This would place the congregation under the leadership and mentorship of another congregation, with the continued goal of bringing that church into alignment with the confessions and beliefs of the CRCNA. Recognizing that the Church Order currently only contains provisions for special discipline, reversion to emerging status, or disaffiliation when such actions are initiated by a local council, synod also appointed a task force to develop procedures for applying such church disciplinary processes when they are initiated by a broader assembly.

## 2. What resources are available for congregations considering potential disaffiliation from the CRCNA?

Several overtures asked for assistance for churches considering disaffiliation from the CRCNA. The Supplement to Church Order Article 38-f gives extensive instructions for the process of disaffiliation. This includes required meetings of the council and congregation with classis representatives, who will attempt to dissuade them from leaving the denomination. It also requires at least two congregational votes. The first vote shall be held not less than one month and not more than 12 months after the first vote. If the congregation's second vote favors disaffiliation, and the council follows through on its decision to disaffiliate, the separation will be complete when classis declares that it acquiesces in the decision of the congregation to disaffiliate from the denomination. Congregations should also examine their own incorporation documents and legal by-laws to establish additional requirements for such a process and votes. See [the Church Disaffiliation Outline document](#) or contact Thrive (Thrive@crcna.org) for further information and assistance.



### 3. If a congregation disaffiliates from the CRCNA, what would happen to its “noncongregational ministers” (missionaries, chaplains, denominational staff members, and other ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors) who serve outside of the congregation?

Church Order Articles 12, 13, and 24 regulate the service of ministers and commissioned pastors who are called to serve in ministry beyond a local congregation. In this scenario, sometimes referred to as “joint supervision,” the calling church has primary responsibility for overseeing the doctrine and life of its ministers or commissioned pastors while the employing organization has primary responsibility for supervision of their work. The two are required to regularly coordinate in the supervision of their ministers or commissioned pastors. In order for “noncongregational ministers” to maintain their status as ordained pastors in the CRCNA, their calling church (the church that holds their ministerial/pastoral credentials) must remain in the CRCNA. If a congregation is considering disaffiliation, it would be wise to have a conversation with its “noncongregational ministers” to inform them of the possibilities. It is assumed that time would be provided for “noncongregational ministers” to find a new supervising congregation in the CRCNA if indeed their current congregation disaffiliates.

## Covenant for Officebearers

### There were a number of overtures about the Covenant for Officebearers. What did synod decide about those overtures?

Synod 2024 did not make any changes to the text of the [Covenant for Officebearers](#), but it did make two related changes. First, Synod 2024 instructed classes to require their delegates to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers annually. Second, Synod 2024 made changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 5, A, 1, which explains the historical practice of affirming the Covenant for Officebearers *without reservation*. See the explanation below and in Question 2.

It is important to note that since Synod 1976, officebearers have been asked to indicate their agreement (called “subscription” until Synod 2012, and “affirmation” thereafter) “without reservation” to all of the doctrines contained in the confessions (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 68). Synod 2024 provided clarity regarding this requirement.

Until 2024, Church Order Supplement, Article 5, A, 1 stated, “The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the

standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God” (with underline indicating what will be changed). Synod 2024 revised the Church Order Supplement to read, “The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church as being doctrines taught in the Word of God.” They also added, “‘Without reservation’ means that an officebearer does not have a difficulty or hold a settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions. This includes what synod has declared to have confessional status” (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 876).

## In light of Synod 2024’s changes to the confessional-difficulty gravamen process in Church Order Article 5, what does it mean to affirm the Covenant for Officebearers *without reservation*?

To affirm the Covenant for Officebearers *without reservation* means that officebearers promise to be “formed and governed” by the CRC’s creeds and confessions and to believe, promote, and defend their doctrines faithfully in “preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5). This also includes “what synod has declared to be confessional.”

Those who have weighty doubts/concerns about the creeds and confessions (i.e., those who have filed a confessional difficulty gravamen requiring resolution) or settled convictions against a doctrine taught in them (i.e., those who have filed a confessional-revision gravamen requiring adjudication by the assemblies) cannot affirm the Covenant for Officebearers, according to synod.

Affirming the Covenant for Officebearers *without reservation* does not mean that officebearers cannot have wonderings or questions. For example, Church Order Article 5, A, 2 states that “the signatory does not by affirming the confessions declare that these doctrines are all stated in the best possible manner” or that the confessions contain every teaching of the Scriptures on the matter being affirmed. Disagreement about phrasing or having additional thoughts on these matters is okay.

It is also expected that officebearers will continue to learn and grow in their affirmation of the creeds and confessions as they learn and grow in their understanding and living out of the Scriptures, which the creeds and confessions summarize. This type of growth and learning is expected and encouraged.

If a current or potential officebearer is unsure whether their questions or wonderings rise to the level of confessional difficulty, they may find that having a conversation with a trusted confidant can help them discern. Affirming the Covenant for Officebearers is a matter of individual conscience that should, when necessary, involve discernment of the

broader community (i.e., the council, church visitors, or others). See *Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 876-79.

To assist councils, officebearers, and stated clerks in navigating questions related to affirming the Covenant for Officebearers, the Office of General Secretary has put together this [guideline document](#).

*Note:* Officebearers are not required to “affirm” decisions of synod that do not have confessional status. However, they are required to abide by them. Such decisions are to be considered “settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order” (Church Order Art. 29).

## Pension Matters

### Did Synod 2024 make any changes to the CRCNA ministers’ pension program?

Synod did not make any immediate changes to the ministers’ pension program, and in fact reaffirmed the values that led to the formation of the pension program in the first place. However, it instructed the pension trustees to “explore a broader retirement benefit that may include a blend of defined-contribution plans along with the defined-benefit plans,” and to solicit feedback from both U.S. and Canadian pastors about possible changes to the ministers’ retirement benefit program.

## The CRCNA’s Global Vision

### 1. What is the Global Vision Team?

In 2022 the Council of Delegates, recognizing the growing multiculturalism within our North American communities as well as the interconnectedness we now experience with churches around the world, instructed the general secretary to “gather a discussion group to study the integration of international churches into the composition of the CRC.”

In response, the general secretary assembled a binational team of globally experienced and connected CRC leaders (named the Global Vision Team) to develop “a conceptual framework for a global Christian Reformed Church.” The framework includes general principles/models of partnership, shared ministry, organization, governance, and

communication to respond to the Council of Delegates' instructions. You can read their report [here](#).

## 2. What did Synod 2024 decide about the Global Vision Team's report?

Synod 2024 adopted the revised Global Vision Team report as a guide for CRCNA classes that are in conversation with congregations outside North America desiring to affiliate with the CRCNA. It also tasked the general secretary with creating a vision implementation team, with a goal of developing an ecclesiastical body that would be the global CRC church. This body would not be a single global denomination but, rather, an opportunity for the CRCNA and its global partners to go deeper in partnership with each other. The report from this implementation team will come to Synod 2027.

## Racism and Diversity

### 1. There were several overtures asking Synod 2024 to respond to the ongoing sin of racism. What was synod's decision about those overtures?

Synod 2024 lamented the sin of ongoing racism in the world and desired to "build on the work of previous synods" by recommending that CRC congregations continue to use resources such as the 1996 report [God's Diverse and Unified Family](#) and programs such as [Hearts Exchanged](#).

### 2. What did synod decide about the ministry plan milestone related to diversity and unity?

CRCNA staff approached the Council of Delegates to endorse a proposal to extend the *Our Journey 2025* ministry plan for another five years (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 25, 53). The COD recommended this proposal to Synod 2024, and synod adopted it after including an additional requirement that as part of the appropriate evaluation and update process, staff should review the wording and intent of the diversity milestone ("Grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers") and its underlying materials "in light of concerns that the emphasis of this pillar should be on the virtue of hospitality rather than on the fulfillment of ethnicity quotas, and to report back to Synod 2025" (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 911-12).

Does this mean that synod or the CRCNA has stopped placing value on diversity? No. In fact, Synod 2024 reaffirmed the denomination's commitment to this value in several ways (see previous question). Instead, this request is an attempt to ensure that the resources and approach offered to congregations emphasizes a holistic and biblical understanding of diversity. This vision is realized when our congregations and denomination are welcoming and hospitable places where people of all ethnic backgrounds can belong, thrive, lead, and grow in Christ. This biblical vision is much deeper than simply measuring growth in terms of race or ethnicity.

## Task Forces and Teams

### 1. What did Synod 2024 decide about multisite churches? When will the task force on this matter report?

In response to an overture from Classis Chicago South (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 427-28), Synod 2024 agreed to appoint a task force to study multisite churches. This task force will report to Synod 2026. The mandate to the task force is to provide the following:

- direction, advice, and guidance on what models best fit Reformed theology and polity
- direction, advice, and guidance on what models should not be employed in Reformed churches
- a roadmap for how churches might become a multisite campus or enfold a church as part of a campus
- recommended changes to Church Order supplements to facilitate such arrangements and provide clarity for how such churches should properly function in relation to each other, the classis, and synod

### 2. What did synod decide about Church Order procedures and the discipline of officebearers?

In response to an overture from Classis Hackensack (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 408-10), synod approved the creation of a task force to develop Church Order procedures to discipline officebearers, including disaffiliation initiated by a major assembly. This group will report back to synod by 2026. The mandate for this task force is as follows:

- Engage in a biblical and theological study of church discipline in order to develop principles for application of biblical church discipline.

- Suggest Church Order changes to provide councils, classes, and synod with guidelines for biblical church discipline.

### 3. How did synod respond to requests to clarify categories of synodical pronouncements and other decisions of synod?

Synod received a request several years ago “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 2024*, p. 401-2). Due to a variety of factors, action on this request was deferred until this year. Because of the complexity of this question, it was decided that it was wise not to simply adopt an immediate response. Instead synod appointed a task force to review the various categories of synodical decisions and to provide clarity concerning the extent to which “settled and binding” declarations of synod require adherence from local churches and officebearers. This task force is scheduled to report to Synod 2025.