

PASTORAL GUIDANCE RE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Chair: Rev. Kenneth A. Baker
Reporter: Rev. Peter A. Hoytema

I. Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Re: Same-Sex Marriage (majority and minority reports)

A. Materials

1. Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (majority and minority reports), including Appendices A-D, pp. 361-443
2. Overtures 15-37 (pp. 587-658), Overture 38 (Supplement)
3. Communications 3-4 (pp. 662-68)

B. Privilege of the floor:

1. Majority Report: Rev. D. Rolf Bouma, chair; Ms. Julia Smith, reporter
2. Minority Report: Ms. Jessica Driesenga; Rev. Dr. John Rottman

C. Recommendations

1. That synod receive the majority and minority reports as information and recommend to the churches the pastoral guidance of the minority report (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 436-43) in conversation and in keeping with the synodical decisions of 1973, 1999, and 2002.

Grounds:

- a. The minority report, in its provision of greater clarity (particularly prohibiting the solemnization of same-sex marriages and stronger cautions about involvement of officebearers in such ceremonies as well as helpful distinctions between participation in the life of the church and participation in its leadership) reflects greater fidelity to the mandate of Synod 2013 as well as to our collective understanding of the proper expression of same-sex attraction as articulated by Synods 1973 and 2002.
- b. The clarified guidelines articulated in the minority report provide a needed balance of freedom of individual conscience (championed by the majority report) with sensitivity to the consciences of others. (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9-13) and exhibit greater fidelity to the integrity of church leaders' life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16) while supporting the witness of the church as a family of holy love and loving holiness (1 John 5:2-3).
- c. While the majority report correctly calls the church to repentance for our sin against same-sex attracted brothers and sisters, it does not go on to adequately present the inclusion of repentance (turning away from sin and running to new life in Christ) as part of the gospel for those of us who sin by engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. This universal call to repentance is central to Christ and the ministry of his church (2 Peter 3:9).
- d. The minority report's added engagement with the positive view of marriage articulated in the 1980 statement on Marriage Guidelines provides helpful

resources for churches to thoughtfully respond to the reality of same-sex marriage in our time and in our church communities.

2. That synod decide to place a reference to the pastoral guidance of the minority report as a new Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c. It is intended that the Supplement to Article 69-c will refer to pages 436-43 in the *Agenda for Synod 2016*, and will indicate that the decision of Synod 2016 represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God.
3. That synod dismiss the study committee with thanks.
4. That synod appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.
 - a. In addition to these broad outlines, the study will include the following three components:
 - 1) Discussion outlining how a Reformed hermeneutic does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse, what are for the historic Church, groundbreaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification.
 - 2) Dialogue with, and potential critique of, untraditional conclusions arising from arguments about a new movement of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 15), as well as conclusions arising from scientific and social scientific studies.
 - 3) Reflection and evaluation of whether or not, with respect to same sex behavior and other issues identified in the study, it will be advisable for future synods to consider:
 - changing the main text of the Church Order Article 69 (see Overtures 18, 19, 20, 21, 31).
 - declaring a "*status confessionis*" (see Overture 16).
 - appointing a team of individuals to draft a new Confession, in the style of the Contemporary Testimony, on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the teachings and conclusions of the report (see Overture 28).
 - b. The committee will be constituted of twelve individuals, CRC members who adhere to the CRC's biblical view on marriage and same sex relationships. These individuals will be gifted and suited for this task. Ideally, the committee will include:
 - at least three ethnic minority pastors and/or theologians
 - at least three faculty members from Calvin Theological Seminary: one Old Testament; one New Testament; one philosophical, ethical, or historical theology
 - a same-sex attracted and a gender dysphoric persons
 - two pastors
 - a philosopher
 - a scientist

Grounds:

- 1) A diverse makeup of study committee members will serve well to ensure a variety of perspectives and expertise.
- 2) Overtures 15, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, and Communication 4 all identify a too narrow focus and/or gaps in the CRC's theological, pastoral, ecclesial, and/or missional reflection on these critical and urgent matters.
- 3) A study which promotes a positive and expansive vision of human sexuality and gender, as well as identifying areas of brokenness and sin, will enable the church to be a beacon of hope, empowered to speak prophetically, with clarity and wisdom, to the culture in which we live.

Note: Ms. Sandra Raak (Classis Grand Rapids South) abstained from voting.

5. That synod declare this to be its response to Overtures 15-37 (pp. 587-658), and Overture 38 (Supplement), Communications 3 and 4 (pp. 662-68).