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## COMMUNICATION 1

### **Advisory Committee 8D Report (forwarded from Synod 2023)**

#### **Response to Overture 68: Shepherd Congregations into Another Denomination**

##### *A. Materials*

Overture 68; *Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 573-74

##### *B. Observations*

This overture asks to create two committees to help congregations who desire to disaffiliate to do so in a supported way. This overture does not recognize some of the materials that already exist, nor the core responsibility that a classis has for ensuring that this support is available.

##### *C. Recommendations*

1. That synod remind classes of the support that the Office of General Secretary offers for churches that are seeking to disaffiliate from the CRC.
2. That classis leaders familiarize themselves with their responsibility to offer support through a church's disaffiliation process.
3. That the Office of General Secretary pay particular attention to the needs of disaffiliating churches and of classes who are supporting them to ensure that the proper support is available.
4. That synod consider this to be its response to Overture 68.

Jason Ruis, chair  
Todd Kuperus, reporter

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## COMMUNICATION 2

### **Advisory Committee 8E Report (majority) (forwarded from Synod 2023)**

**Response to Overtures 49-51, 53-55, 57-58, 60-64, 66-69, 73-76** (see *Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1032-37)

##### *A. Materials*

Overtures 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 73, 74, 75, and 76; *Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 522-46, 550-56, 559-66, 571-84, 590-98

## *B. Introduction*

The concept of the confessional-difficulty gravamen (CDG) was created within the CRC to allow officebearers to honestly question doctrinal matters contained in our confessions, giving them space to wrestle with the biblical accuracy of these doctrines while also ensuring that there would be a season of pastoral care provided for the officebearer in his/her struggle and search for clarification.

A CDG occurs when “a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, 1). This kind of gravamen is submitted by a subscriber to a church council for “examination and judgment.” A CDG is defined as “a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). Therefore, “examination and judgment” of a CDG occurs when the subscriber receives the information and/or clarification being sought—either from the church council, the classis, or concluding with synod.

Since (1) “no one is free to decide for oneself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3) and (2) the person signing the Covenant for Officebearers must affirm “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 1), the process initiated by a subscriber submitting a CDG should be time-bound and time-sensitive and should result in a final decision whereby some terminal action takes place. This is true because signing the Covenant for Officebearers requires all subscribers to affirm that the doctrines in the standards “fully agree with the Word of God,” to promise “to be formed and governed by them,” and to “heartily believe and . . . promote and defend their doctrines . . .” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5).

This reflects the nature of a CDG as seen in the historical development of this type of gravamen in the Harry Boer case from Synod 1976. Synod 1976 understood the confessional-difficulty gravamen as a personal request for help in resolving one’s doubts. And the way a council, classis, or synod was to do that was by providing the officebearer with the “information and/or clarification” of the confessions (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). What Synod 1976 did not say and what no synod has ever said is that this type of gravamen is a way for someone to take exception to the church’s creeds and confessions.

The CRC does not allow gravamina as exceptions to the standards. While the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA are neither inerrant nor exhaustive, they are a comprehensive summary of everything deemed essential for the faith and life of our denomination.

*Note:* We wish for synod to recognize that Advisory Committee 8 had agreement on Recommendations 1, 3-a, 3-c, and 6-12.

*C. Recommendations*

1. That synod allow all officebearers delegated to Synod 2023 to remain seated as delegates.

*Ground:* Prior to Synod 2023 there was confusion surrounding the nature and use of a CDG. Now that it has been clarified, each officebearer can serve until at least the end of 2023.

2. That synod amend the Church Order Supplement to clarify the proper use of a CDG and provide a timeline for its process (changes are underlined).

a. Amend Church Order Supplement, Article 5, 1

1. *A confessional-difficulty gravamen:* a temporary gravamen in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions, and

b. Amend Church Order Supplement, Article 5, A, 1

1. 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. “Without reservation” means that the CRC does not allow gravamina as exceptions to the confessions themselves or to what synod has determined to have confessional status.

c. Amend Church Order Supplement, Article 5, B, by adding a point 3:

3. A confessional-difficulty gravamen is a personal request for help in resolving a subscriber’s doubts about a doctrine contained in the confessions. It is not a request for an assembly to tolerate a subscriber’s settled conviction that a doctrine contained in the confessions is wrong. Therefore, in all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, no assembly may exempt a subscriber from having to affirm all of the doctrines contained in the standards of the church.

*Grounds:*

- 1) There is not, nor has there ever been, a provision in the Church Order allowing a subscriber to take an exception to the standards.
- 2) There is already a provision in place to revise the confessions if they are found to be in error.
- 3) Although the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA are neither inerrant nor exhaustive, they are a comprehensive summary of everything deemed essential for the faith and life of our denomination.

3. That synod approve the following process for a CDG:

- a. During the time the officebearer has a CDG, the individual must teach, act, promote, defend, and live in unity with the confessions in all areas. The individual may not contradict the confessions openly and deliberately while the gravamen is still unresolved, and the individual must diligently work toward resolving their confessional difficulty.
- b. Based on the process laid out in Church Order Supplement, Article 5, B, 1, a council has six months, or until the next classis meeting, whichever is greater, to provide the necessary information and/or clarification being sought. If the CDG is forwarded to classis, classis shall have six months, or until agenda items for the next synod must be submitted, whichever is greater, to provide the necessary information and/or clarification being sought. If the CDG appears before synod, synod's decision will be binding and the subscriber will have until the end of that calendar year to either (1) affirm the standards, (2) file a confessional-revision gravamen, or (3) resign from office.
- c. If applicable, ministers can be honorably released at the conclusion of the CDG process.

*Ground:* It is necessary to have a delineated process that guides churches, classes, and synod according to the purposes of gravamina.

4. Since synod has already made a judgment regarding the definition of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, that synod instruct those who have submitted a CDG with respect to the definition of "unchastity" to resolve their difficulty by affirming the standards, resign, or be suspended from office by the end of 2023. This would also include, if applicable, their resigning from their position(s) in broader assemblies, boards, or committees.

*Grounds:*

- a. The process explained above has already happened in part during 2022-2023.
- b. The decision regarding the definition of "unchastity" has already been examined and judged by Synod 2022. Therefore, the above amendment and timeline do not apply.
- c. There is no need to file a confessional-revision gravamen unless new grounds are provided, since synod has affirmed the definition of "unchastity" as settled and binding.

5. That synod instruct councils to begin special discipline of officebearers who are suspended from office at the end of 2023 if they refuse to adhere to the definition of "unchastity" reflected in the standards.

*Grounds:*

- a. Church Order Articles 82-84 and their Supplements state the appropriateness and process for the special discipline of officebearers.
  - b. “Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct” (Church Order Art. 83).
  - c. Not adhering to the definition of “unchastity” reflected in the standards is a serious deviation from sound doctrine.
6. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to send a special communication to the churches detailing the proper use and timelines for a CDG, including the process for those who submitted a CDG regarding the definition of “unchastity.”

*Grounds:*

- a. Not all churches pay close attention to the *Acts of Synod*.
  - b. This is an important decision with time-bound implications for members who submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen based on the definition given in the denominational FAQ document.
7. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to amend the “Frequently Asked Questions about Synod 2022 and the Human Sexuality Report” to accurately reflect the use of a gravamen.

*Ground:* A retraction is in order when something is mistakenly printed.

8. That synod instruct classes to help churches implement discipleship for their congregations in the teachings of the standards.

*Grounds:*

- a. This allows the CRC to grow in unity around what truly unifies it—namely, the standards that locate the CRC within the larger body of Christ.
  - b. This allows churches to build up future officebearers who can wholeheartedly agree to the standards.
9. That synod allow Calvin University to continue their current course of action with respect to their faculty taking exceptions to their Covenant for Faculty, while encouraging Calvin University to diligently oversee alignment with our confessional standards.

*Grounds:*

- a. While Calvin University is an educational institution of the CRCNA, their faculty do not work directly under the Covenant for Officebearers.
- b. There is a one-hundred-year history of allowing exceptions to the Covenant for Faculty. And the Faculty Handbook has specific processes already laid out.

- c. There are considerations of academic freedom and tenure that do not apply in a church setting. “The Faculty member shall be judged only by the confessional standards of CU, and by the professional standards appropriate to his or her role and discipline” (Calvin University Faculty Handbook, 3.5.4).
  - d. “When the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has issued a formal interpretation of the confessions, that interpretation shall be binding for Calvin University” (CU Faculty Handbook, 3.5.1.1).
10. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to review its practices regarding the Statement of Exception in light of decisions made by Synod 2023 to the Church Order Supplement, Article 5, and revise their practices and handbook regarding guidelines for exceptions (Appendix Q of the COD Governance Handbook) as necessary to fully align with the spirit of the use of gravamina.

*Grounds:*

- a. Since the COD is an interim committee of synod, synod needs to provide clarity to the executive committee of the COD in evaluating exceptions to the creeds, confessions, and contemporary testimonies.
  - b. The COD should reflect as closely as possible the same standard for subscription as the churches.
11. That synod encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to clarify its position on synod’s decision regarding the confessional status on same-sex marriage by December 2023.

*Ground:* This will help build trust among the churches and institutions.

12. That synod defer to Synod 2024 the creation of any task force, study committee, or ad hoc committee as proposed by Overtures 68, 75, and 76.

*Grounds:*

- a. Our desire is that no churches leave the denomination but be reconciled back into covenant with the churches of the CRCNA. Our desire is for reconciliation, not disaffiliation.
- b. In light of recommendations being made to Synod 2023 by Advisory Committee 8, it is important to wait to see if these proposed changes and mechanisms are effective, thus changing the need or direction for any task force or committee.
- c. Synod already has authority to intervene in a lower assembly if the well-being of the churches in common is at stake (Church Order Art. 27-b and 28-b). According to the Rules for Synodical Procedure (section V, B, 12), “All other matters may be considered which synod by a majority vote declares acceptable.”
- d. Synod may (or may not) need to revisit the need in a year, but it seems wise to wait at least a year.

13. That synod consider this to be its response to Overtures 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 73, 74, 75, and 76.

Patrick Anthony  
Will Barham  
Tim Blackmon  
Dave Bosscher  
Wayne Coleman  
Jeff Cutter  
Robin De Haan  
Dave Hoekema

John Jansen  
Rafik Kamel  
Todd Kuperus, reporter  
Esther Nam  
Matthew Pearce  
Jason Ruis, chair  
Edward Yoon

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### COMMUNICATION 3

#### **Advisory Committee 8E Report (minority)** **(forwarded from Synod 2023)**

**Response to Overtures 49-51, 53-55, 58, 60, 62-64, 66-67** (see *Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1038-39)

*A. Materials*

Overtures 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, and 67; *Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 522-46, 553-56, 559-60, 563-66, 571-73

*B. Recommendations*

1. That synod add the following points 3 and 4 to Church Order Supplement, Article 5, B:

- a. "3. The officebearer is expected to submit to the church's confessions and judgments and must not teach, disciple, care, or counsel against the doctrine for which they are filing a gravamen."
- b. "4. The gravamen will be revisited yearly by the council (from date of filing) so that the officebearer may both (1) continue to serve in faithful ways—including but not limited to delegation to larger assemblies—and (2) work actively toward full realignment with the confessions."

*Grounds:*

- 1) We are, and wish to remain, a confessional denomination. This recommendation fosters a strengthened commitment to the confessions, because it requires that subscribers filing a gravamen set aside their difficulty for the sake of the larger body.
- 2) Since its establishment, the gravamen process has served our denomination well, but, as of late, some confusion around this process may have led to a misuse of this process. This recommendation provides clarification while assuming good intent from the subscriber.

- 3) Church Order articulates a balance between local authority and communal accountability (Art. 27). This recommendation upholds the “original” authority of the local council (Art. 27-a) to provide oversight of the life and doctrine of officebearers.
- 4) Scripture encourages us to continue to grow and learn (2 Pet. 3:18; Phil. 1:9; Prov. 1:5). Similarly, our Reformation heritage encourages us to continually be reformed by the Spirit of God through the Word. This recommendation thus appropriately allows for humble wondering and doctrinal wrestling within the accountability structures of council, classis, and synod. “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).
- 5) Jesus declares, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). This recommendation clarifies our accountability to one another without placing an undue burden on officebearers. This “easy yoke” facilitates our efforts to welcome and use the leadership gifts of those who join our churches from other faith traditions and through evangelism.
- 6) As Classis Holland notes in Communication 3,

The Covenant for Officebearers asks two things of someone with a confessional difficulty: (1) to present it “in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel,” and (2) to “promise to submit to the church’s judgment and authority.” Notice what it does *not* ask—namely, to *agree* with the church’s judgment, but rather to *submit* to it. As we read it, this should allow someone with a private disagreement to serve, so long as (1) they will not teach, disciple, care, or counsel against the church’s teaching, and (2) if called upon in private or public, they will teach the church’s doctrine and not their own private belief. If churches will *not* allow this—that is, if they refuse *a priori* to grant a confessional-difficulty graven in this area of doctrine and teaching, *even if the officebearer submits to the church’s judgment and authority, as expected in the Covenant for Officebearers*—then this seems to us abusive in its own right, and an abject failure to humbly and patiently “bear with one another in love” (Eph. 4:3) and to “pursue what makes for peace” (Rom. 14:19). If a provision exists in the Church Order for a confessional difficulty, then that provision should be available regardless of the difficulty, at the judgment and discretion of the local church in consultation with the officebearer. (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 605)



2. That synod consider this to be its response to Overtures 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, and 67.

Robert Boersma, reporter  
Craig Buma  
Cara DeHaan, chair  
Philip Fritschle

Jodi Gillmore  
Sonya Grypma  
Henrietta Hunse  
Bill Wybenga

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## COMMUNICATION 4

### **Classis Rocky Mountain**

This letter addresses the confessional-difficulty gravamen amendments and additions recommended by the Synod 2023 Advisory Committee 8E majority report, a similar version of which will likely be voted upon for inclusion in the Church Order in 2024. We respectfully request that synod consider the repercussions and ramifications of the additions and amendments to the gravamen process—a process outlined in the Church Order Supplement, Article 5 that has been in force and workable since 1976. Our concerns are elaborated below.

#### **I. Background**

Although the first recorded gravamen was submitted to Synod 1947, it was not until 1976 that the gravamina (plural of *gravamen*) process was defined and included in the Church Order in connection with a new Form of Subscription. A study committee approved by Synod 1974 recognized that not all gravamina were requests for the revision of the confessions and that some personal difficulties should not be open for discussion in the church. The committee recommended identifying two types of gravamina—confessional-revision gravamina and confessional-difficulty gravamina—and that the confessional-difficulty gravamen is to be dealt with “personally and pastorally.”

A confessional-difficulty gravamen (CDG) occurs when “a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confessions but does not call for a revision” (Church Order Supplement, Article 5, pt. 1). Gravamina are used by those who sign the Covenant for Officebearers as a way of affirming “three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God.” Signers of the Covenant for Officebearers also pledge to be “formed and governed” by the confessions and to “promote and defend their doctrines faithfully,” conforming their “preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living” in accordance with them. Officebearers promise to receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of

love and fellowship with their brothers and sisters as together they seek a fuller understanding of the gospel.

It is important to note that the gravamen process is intended to promote confessional subscription and integrity of belief—as well as unity in the church. When a confessional-difficulty gravamen is submitted as outlined in the Church Order, the submitter continues to uphold their belief in the confessions. The officebearer may not contradict the confessions openly and deliberately or teach in opposition to them while the gravamen remains unresolved. This is a matter of integrity and honesty, and without the gravamen process, officebearers might avoid the risk of sharing their concerns. A gravamen is an opportunity for officebearers to make known their conscientious difficulties so that matters can be confidentially and pastorally judged, clarified, and adjudicated by their council.

The 2023 Synod Advisory Committee 8E (Church Order II), in its majority report, recommended that synod add the word “temporary” to the *confessional-difficulty gravamen* definition and to describe a CDG as a request for help in resolving a difficulty within a six-month period, or by the next classis meeting, whichever time period is greater. The recommendation is that if the matter is not resolved by that deadline, it must be forwarded to classis, at which point another six-month timeline is imposed on the process. The next step, if still unresolved, is to forward the gravamen to synod. If the CDG is ultimately forwarded to synod, the subscriber will have until the end of that calendar year to affirm the standards, file a confessional-revision gravamen, or resign from office. The recommendation also noted that “ministers can be honorably released at the conclusion of the CDG process” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1035).

## **II. Concern**

We affirm that the gravamen process was intended to be temporary and that the goal is to reach resolution, but grappling with complex theological matters requires wisdom, integrity, support, and perhaps time; the pace may vary for any number of reasons such as personal background, history with the issue, magnitude of the issue, and available training and resources. Six months to resolve a CDG and affirm all standards while engaged with the local council is an arbitrary deadline that appears to apply to all confessional difficulties, no matter the nature of the difficulty or the involvement of the subscriber’s concern. Our concern is that this brief, arbitrary deadline has the potential to unhelpfully constrain or undermine the “pastoral and personal process” that Church Order has entrusted first to the local council, the entity best equipped to manage it pastorally and personally.

The gravamen process is intended to promote honesty. It would be easier for an officebearer to simply be quiet. Instead, by raising concerns via the gravamen process, the officebearer opens the door for conversation and dis-

cussion. This process also helps to avoid future conflict and sets expectations and a clear process, which provide some ground for unity. The level of disagreement presented in the gravamen may determine the nature of adjudication by the church council. For example, the courses of action for a leader struggling with infant baptism in contrast with a leader who doubts that Jesus Christ was fully man and fully God may differ significantly. The gravamen process allows a degree of judgment, discernment, and responsibility by local church councils. It is the local church council that is aware of the character of the gravamen author and their fidelity to the CRC confessions and agreement not to teach or support a different view. Both the officebearer and the local council commit to a process governed by integrity, sensitivity, and grace. Imposing a six-month deadline to govern the process is a move that, in our judgment, seems oblivious or indifferent to the complexities that may influence its integrity.

Furthermore, there are likely to be unintended consequences for churches like some of ours, where most congregants come from non-CRC backgrounds and the pool of eligible officebearers with a high degree of familiarity and comfort with the full scope of all the confessions may be smaller than at other CRC churches. A deadline like the one proposed creates a situation in which otherwise highly qualified officebearers who are engaged in a thoughtful and deliberate process confidentially with their church council under a gravamen may feel they must either compromise their integrity to remain in service or be squeezed from a leadership role before the confessional difficulties are resolved, simply because the calendar hits the six-month mark. Yet Church Order affirms that submission to the confessions can occur without full agreement during the period in which a confessional difficulty is experienced. There can be openness and honesty within the confidentiality of council while remaining faithful to the confessions within the congregation. The Church Order specifies a process in which the matter is submitted to classis and ultimately to synod if the council determines it is unable to judge a gravamen. However, the process no longer remains confidential at that point, which threatens its “personal and pastoral” aspiration. Our fundamental concern is that the integrity of the process at the local council level may be undermined by the imposition of a six-month timeline.

The current gravamen procedure must be undertaken with honesty, openness, clarity, confidentiality, and respect by both the submitter and the church council, and this process has served the church appropriately for over forty-five years. At this time of polarizing disagreement and struggle, we strongly desire that the conflict not be heightened by adding to and effectively changing the gravamen process.

Classis Rocky Mountain  
Kelly Vander Woude, stated clerk

**Classis Holland**

*Note:* The Office of General Secretary believes that this overture fails to present sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration of a synodical decision. This is therefore being included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024* as a communication, allowing for transparency and for the officers of synod, or a motion from the floor, to decide otherwise.

**I. Background**

On November 7, 2022, the Council of Church of the Savior of South Bend, Indiana, considered and approved a confessional-revision gravamen (CRG) submitted by one of its officebearers. This CRG requested a change, for weighty biblical and theological reasons, to Synod 2022's interpretation of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 as including "homosexual sex" (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922). According to Church Order Article 5 and its Supplement, if accepted by a council, a CRG becomes an overture to classis, "open for discussion in the whole church."

Accordingly, the council of Church of the Savior submitted its CRG as an overture to Classis Holland at its regular meeting on February 3, 2023. Church of the Savior did so with the full expectation that Classis Holland would consider it in the spirit of the Covenant for Officebearers, which states, "We also promise to . . . receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel." Instead, and contrary to both the Church Order and the spirit of the Covenant for Officebearers, Classis Holland decided by majority vote not to discuss it at all.<sup>1</sup>

Church of the Savior then appealed to Synod 2023, where, according to Church Order Article 5, "all the signers of the Covenant for Officebearers shall be free to discuss [the CRG] together with the whole church until adjudicated by synod." No such discussion occurred. Responding to the CRG overture (Overture 34, *Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 468-72), Synod 2023 did not accede to it, on the ground that "the Human Sexuality Report addresses this" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1008). So, in essence, what happened was this: Church of the Savior objected to a recommendation of the Human Sexuality Report adopted by Synod 2022. Synod 2023 responded by saying, "The Human Sexuality Report addresses this."

In addition to failing to receive Church of the Savior's CRG "in a spirit of love and fellowship" or according to the process laid out in the Church Order, Synod 2023 failed to give a response to it that made rational sense. Church of the Savior's CRG was not the only gravamen treated this way;

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<sup>1</sup> Classis Holland sent a communication to Synod 2023 acknowledging that it did not handle the CRG properly (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 896).

none of the CRGs submitted to Synod 2023 were given anything like proper consideration or thoughtful responses.

## II. Overture

Classis Holland overtures Synod 2024 to consider the confessional-revision gravamina submitted to Synod 2023, including Church of the Savior's, in the spirit of the Covenant for Officebearers and according to the process laid out in the Church Order. While there are various ways this might be accomplished, at minimum the CRGs need to be given adequate time for discussion on the floor of synod, as well as to be considered carefully and answered thoughtfully by a committee of qualified delegates or by a separate study committee of qualified members.

*Grounds:*

1. Synod is bound to abide by the Church Order.
2. Classis Holland and Synod 2023's responsibility to receive Church of the Savior's confessional difficulty "in a spirit of love and fellowship" remains unfulfilled.
3. Church of the Savior's and others' CRGs raised weighty concerns about Synod 2022's interpretation of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 that should be responsibly addressed by the church.

Classis Holland  
Calvin Hoogstra, stated clerk

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## COMMUNICATION 6

### Classis Minnkota

1. Classis Minnkota wholeheartedly endorses Recommendations 2-8 and 10-12 from the 2023 Advisory Committee 8's majority response to Overtures 49-51, 53-55, 57-58, 60-64, 66-69, 73-76 (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1032-37).
2. Classis Minnkota does not endorse Recommendation 1 from the 2023 Advisory Committee 8's majority response to Overtures 49-51, 53-55, 57-58, 60-64, 66-69, 73-76 (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1034).

*Grounds:*

- a. The Public Declaration of Agreement with the Beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church in North America specifies that delegates be "in full agreement with what the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America confess." In that a confessional-difficulty gravamen is an instrument "in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession" (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5), a delegate who has filed a gravamen is not in full agreement with what the church confesses.

- b. Those who cannot fully affirm this statement in the Public Declaration of Agreement with the Beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church in North America should not be seated as delegates.
3. Classis Minnkota does not endorse Recommendation 9 from the 2023 Advisory Committee 8's majority response to Overtures 49-51, 53-55, 57-58, 60-64, 66-69, 73-76 (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1036-37).

Classis Minnkota  
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

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## COMMUNICATION 7

### Members of Fourteenth Street CRC, Holland, Michigan

*Note:* The Office of General Secretary believes that this overture fails to present sufficient and new grounds for a revision of a synodical decision. This is therefore being included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024* as a communication, allowing for transparency and for the officers of synod, or a motion from the floor, to decide otherwise.

#### I. Overture

We, the undersigned members of Fourteenth Street CRC of Holland, Michigan, overture Synod 2024 to take the following remedial measures related to Synod 2023's affirmation of Synod 2022's conclusion that its interpretation of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 has confessional status:

- A. Reverse *Acts of Synod 2023*, Article 69, Items C, 2 and 3, thereby acceding to Overtures 16, 18, 23, 24, and 77 that were before Synod 2023, and declare the following:
  1. That synodical interpretations of the Reformed confessions, including Synod 2022's interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, do not have confessional status and cannot have confessional status pursuant to the settled and binding decision of *Acts of Synod 1975*, Article 46.
  2. That officebearers are not required to subscribe to *Acts of Synod 2022*, Article 65, Item 2 or to any other synodical decision.
- B. Declare that *Acts of Synod 2022*, Article 65, Item 2 contradicts the CRCNA's official position that subordinates synodical decisions to the confessions and is therefore inoperative. Alternatively, declare the last sentence thereof inoperative and repudiate Synod 2022's conclusion that its interpretation has confessional status.

*Grounds:*

1. Synod 2022 departed from Synod 1975 while claiming to follow its decision.
  - a. In 1975, synod decided to deny confessional status to synod's interpretations of the confessions. Synod 1975 said, "No synodical decision involving doctrinal or ethical pronouncements is to be considered on a par with the confessions. . . . an interpretation of the confessional writings . . . given by synod must be regarded as the official interpretation, and is, therefore, binding for every officer and member of our denominational group. . . . However this use does not elevate them to the status of the confessions" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598.)
  - b. Synod 1975 also stated that subscription to synodical decisions is not required of officebearers, who are expected to abide by synod's decisions even if they disagree with them (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 601-2).
  - c. In 2022, synod cited Synod 1975 as precedent for its decision as follows:

That synod affirm that "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the Seventh Commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation "an interpretation of [a] confession" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status. (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922)
  - d. Synod 2022 misrepresented the 1975 decision when it claimed the 1975 decision supported its confessional status conclusion. Synod 1975 ruled out any possibility of Synod 2022's interpretation having confessional status. Despite receiving overtures informing it of this, Synod 2022 willingly chose a path of noncompliance and did not use the proper means to enact change in the CRCNA. If Synod 2022 believed Synod 1975 was wrong to declare a subordinate status for synodical interpretations of the confessions, it should have overturned the precedent established by Synod 1975 instead of pretending to follow it.<sup>1</sup>
  - e. To be clear, Synod 2022 did not declare confessional status for its interpretation, rather, it concluded that confessional status was the logical result of Synod 1975's decision. Synod 2022's decision is set forth as an argument with two premises and a conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Synod 2022's decision cannot be recast as a reversal of the 1975 precedent without violating Church Order Supplement, Article 47, since such a substantial alteration can only be adopted after churches have had an opportunity to give input on the proposed change to the following synod. To date, no recommendation to reverse *Acts of Synod 1975*, Article 46, has been made.

- 1) Premise 1: Synod’s affirmation of the proposed definition of “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 is synod’s interpretation of a confession.
  - 2) Premise 2: *Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603, states, “When a synodical pronouncement is set forth as an interpretation of the confession, this is its use and function.”<sup>2</sup>
  - 3) Conclusion: Therefore, synod’s interpretation of Q&A 108 has confessional status.
- f. Synod 2022, Article 65, Item 2 also contravened Scripture by provoking dissension that could have been avoided by compliance with synodical precedent; the discord created by Synod 2022’s unprecedented decision is self-evident.<sup>3</sup>
2. Synod 2023 failed to address the error of Synod 2022.
    - a. Synod 2023 was informed by multiple overtures<sup>4</sup> that Synod 2022’s claim of confessional status for its interpretation contradicted the 1975 decision that it claimed to follow. Synod 2023 declined to accede to these overtures and summarily affirmed Synod 2022’s erroneous decision (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1021-22). Synod 2023 never addressed the contradiction between what the 1975 decision says and what Synod 2022 claimed. Neither Synod 2023’s decision nor the majority report even mentioned the 1975 decision, which was at the crux of these overtures.
    - b. The first ground for Synod 2023’s decision says:
 

Synod 2022 gave due process, according to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, to the matter of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality and its conclusions without any decisions ruling the declaration “confessional status” out of order, leaving such a declaration in place. (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021)

That run-on sentence says, in effect, that because Synod 2022 had not decided its confessional status decision to be wrong, it must have

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<sup>2</sup> Synod 2022 quoted this sentence from Synod 1975 as its first ground in support of Article 65.

<sup>3</sup> The HSR quotes Galatians 5:19-21 as support for its conclusion that its definition of “unchastity” has confessional status because Paul includes “sexual immorality” as a sin that threatens a person’s salvation. Paul also lists dissensions, factions, and discord as acts of the flesh that jeopardize our inheritance to the kingdom of God. Synod promotes factions and fractures unity when it frames an issue as a choice between two polarized options and excludes other available options; Synod 2022 compounded the polarization by presenting this issue in terms of the ultimate dichotomy between salvation and the unspoken alternative (*Agenda of Synod 2022*, pp. 459-60).

<sup>4</sup> See Overture 18, para. 1 and 3, c (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 411-12); Overture 20, para. IV, B (p. 420); Overture 21, para. II, C, 2 and 6 (pp. 428-29); Overture 23, para. A (p. 433); Overture 24, para. A (pp. 437-38); and Overture 77 (pp. 879-88).



been right. Such a rationale nullifies the overture process in violation of Church Order and is not a reason to ignore Synod 2022's obvious misinterpretation of the 1975 decision. Synod 2023's statement that Synod 2022 left "such a declaration in place" is simply wrong because there was no such declaration of confessional status by Synod 1975 or by any other synod to leave in place. Synod 2023 made no comment on whether it even noticed the dichotomy between the decisions of Synod 2022 and Synod 1975. Such unresponsiveness is not "due process."

- c. Synod 2023's second ground, quoted below, cites synod's 1976 decision adopting the "Guidelines and Regulations for Gravamina" found in Church Order Supplement, Article 5:

In accordance with the *Acts of Synod 1976*, synods have the ability to interpret what the confessions teach. *Note*: "No one is free to decide for himself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in" (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 69; Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3).

(*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021)

- 1) None of the overtures addressed by Synod 2023's decision took issue with synod's ability to interpret the confessions<sup>5</sup> or with the gravamen process adopted by Synod 1976. Instead, they claimed that Synod 2022's confessional status conclusion violated Synod 1975's decision. Since Synod 2023 did not deny that claim, should we assume that it found it to be true? It certainly seems that Synod 2023 recognized Synod 2022's error, since it did not defend or even comment on Synod 2022's alleged violation. Instead, Synod 2023 cited Synod 1976's decision as if to assert that Synod 2022 arrived at the right conclusion albeit for the wrong reason. However, it did not explain how it thought Synod 1976's decision supported Synod 2022's conclusion. Synod 2023 did not say this paragraph from Synod 1976 is a basis for confessional status or a reversal of Synod 1975's decision. Any argument that interprets the 1976 decision as an alternate basis for Synod 2022's confessional status conclusion ignores the harmony between the 1975 and 1976 decisions. There were no overtures to Synods 1975, 1976, or 1977 arguing that synodical interpretations of the confessions should be given confessional status. The denomination appears to have been unified behind the 1975 decision, which it

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<sup>5</sup> To the contrary, Overture 24 says, "Interpretation comes with the authority of the synod" (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 437).

continues to publish as its official position. If there is any question about what Synod 1976 meant by its carefully chosen words, we should look to the *Acts of Synod 1976*.

- 2) Synod 1976 said this about the paragraph from the gravamina guidelines quoted by Synod 2023: “Paragraph three of the form is not primarily intended as an instrument to accomplish creedal revision, but as an instrument for adjudicating personal difficulties with the confessions and for keeping the individual subscriber in right relationship with the church” (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 565). “In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed” (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 69).
- 3) Because Synod 1976 eliminated the right to submit gravamina directly to synod, the “assembly” to which officebearers must address their gravamina is their council. Since the officebearer has no right to appeal but must acquiesce in the council’s decision, a gravamen only goes to classis if council decides it is unable to judge it, and it only goes to synod if classis decides it is unable to judge it. This procedure almost guarantees that the decision being acquiesced in will not be synod’s. “Acquiescence” is a begrudging submission that occurs when we allow others to have their way despite believing they are wrong. Nowhere does Church Order say the officebearer must subscribe to the assemblies’ decision. “Subscription” goes beyond submission and denotes wholehearted agreement signified by the signing of one’s name. One can acquiesce without subscribing. Further, the acquiescence required by the gravamen guidelines is not acquiescence to the confessions but to the decision on the gravamen as to what doctrines are confessed. This is an important, albeit subtle, distinction. The gravamen process exists for officebearers who come to believe “that a *teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God’s Word*” (emphasis added); the process is not available to officebearers who disagree with synod’s interpretations of the confessions. Disagreement with synod’s interpretations is not the same as disagreement with the confessions.

This does not mean officebearers are free to individually decide what is and is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. When individuals serve as officebearers, they “sign as members of a community engaged . . . in a common work and dedicated to a common cause” (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 567). That is why the Covenant

for Officebearers is expressed in the plural rather than the singular: “We believe,” “we confess,” etc. Regardless of personal disagreement with the assembly’s decision on a gravamen, the individual must acquiesce and join the chorus of officebearers or leave office. This process ensures that the assemblies of the church speak and teach in a unified voice (pp. 570-71).

- 4) Synod 1976 limited the gravamen process to difficulties with and requests to revise the *confessions*. It rejected the recommendation to allow gravamina addressing “ecclesiastical pronouncements relating to the Confessions” (*Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 67-68). If Synod 1976 believed that such pronouncements had confessional status, the broader definition would have been necessary. Because Synod 1975 rejected confessional status for such pronouncements just a year earlier, Synod 1976 would have expressly stated it was reversing the 1975 decision if that was its intent. Further, if Synod 2022 thought the 1975 decision had been reversed, it would not have cited it as the precedent for its decision. Likewise, if the denomination thought Synod 1976 had reversed Synod 1975, it would not post the 1975 decision on its website as its official position ([crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements](http://crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements)).

Synod 2022’s confessional status decision has caused confusion over whether officebearers must now subscribe to synodical interpretations and whether the gravamen process adopted by Synod 1976 now applies to synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters. However, the gravamen process does not impart confessional status on synod’s interpretations of the confessions. The only avenue to confessional status under the gravamen guidelines adopted by Synod 1976 is via a confessional-revision gravamen.

- d. Synod 2023’s next ground for excusing Synod 2022’s noncompliance with precedent is as follows:

The theological and biblical components of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, received for information by Synod 2019, were before the churches for three years, giving the churches significant “opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes” (Church Order Art. 47) prior to Synod 2022. (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021)

This is untrue because the HSR’s recommendation on confessional status was not in the committee’s 2019 report. Also, the HSR did not cite the 1975 decision as the basis for its confessional status recommendation; it was Synod 2022’s own idea to cite Synod 1975 as the

precedent for its confessional status conclusion. There was no advance notice that Synod 2022 was going to misconstrue Synod 1975's decision as the basis for its decision. Regardless, Church Order does not excuse misrepresentations and violations of precedent on the basis of notice given.

- e. Synod 2023's last ground is also procedural: "This overture does not contain 'sufficient and new grounds' (Church Order Art. 31) to reverse Synod 2022's decisions" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021).

In effect, Synod 2023 is saying that because Synod 2022 received overtures warning it that Synod 1975's binding decision prohibited any declaration of confessional status for its interpretation of Q&A 108, Synod 2022's decision to ignore those overtures has made its misinterpretation of the 1975 decision immune to challenge, and, because its decision has confessional status, we must all now pretend that when Synod 1975 said synod's use of synodical pronouncements to interpret the confessions "*does not* elevate them to the status of the confessions" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598; emphasis added), what it really meant all along was that such use *does* elevate them to the status of the confessions.

Synod's efforts to guide churches into compliance with its recent decisions is recognition that compliance is very important. Given the importance synod puts on compliance by others with its decisions, synod must recognize its own noncompliance as a sufficient basis for reconsideration. Synod 2023's rejection of overtures for presenting the same grounds that Synod 2022 refused to address is a violation of Church Order, which should never be used to perpetuate noncompliance. Until synod resolves the dichotomy between its 1975 and 2022 decisions, the request that it do so remains both new and sufficient.

- f. Although the majority report lauded its "reflective humility in the pursuit of clarity" in the matters before it, in the end it clarified nothing and was silent on the error it was asked to address (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1013). It called Synod 2022's decision unprecedented, contradicting Synod 2022's own claim that it followed the 1975 precedent. It claimed to "detest any misuse of the Scripture and confessions," yet affirmed Synod 2022's violation of Synod 1975's precedent to justify a decision for which there is no authority (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1014). Synod 2023's claim that Synod 2022's "confessional status" decision was forced by "a crisis of necessity years in the making" does not justify its affirmation of Synod 2022's clear error. The majority report blamed this crisis on synod's failure to implement the care prescribed by Synod 1973 for those who are same-sex attracted (p. 1014). Are we to believe our denomination never faced a crisis that tempted synod to usurp confessional authority? It is argued that

Synod 2022's decision was necessary because some churches felt free to disregard synodical decisions as "pastoral advice," claiming they were not "settled and binding" unless they had "confessional status." Such arguments forget that Church Order Article 29 says all decisions of the assemblies are "settled and binding." If synod's decisions are only binding when coupled with declarations of "confessional status," churches would be free to disregard any decision that has not been coupled with such a declaration.

- g. The following facts are not in dispute:
- Synod 1975 held that subscription to synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters cannot be required because such decisions lack confessional status.
  - No subsequent synod has been asked to reverse Synod 1975's decision, which remains our denomination's official position.
- h. If our denomination were to reverse its official position adopted in 1975 and impart confessional status on synodical interpretations of the confessions, we would expect it to do so just as clearly as it announced 48 years ago that such interpretations do not have confessional status. Those who believe synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters should have confessional status should submit an overture asking synod to reverse its 1975 decision and adopt an unequivocal decision to that effect.

## II. The Unanswered Questions

The following questions, which Synods 2022 and 2023 evaded, deserve a thoughtful response from Synod 2024 so that its position on these issues becomes unmistakable.

1. Does the 1975 synodical decision cited by the *Acts of Synod 2022*, Article 65, support the conclusion that synodical interpretations of the confessions have the same status as the confessions?

We answer "No." Synod 1975's decision applies to all synodical pronouncements without exception, including synod's interpretations of the confessions. Synod 1975 cited Synod 1881's interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism as an example of a synodical pronouncement that does *not* have confessional status:

It is obvious that these particular synodical pronouncements of a doctrinal and ethical nature serve a unique function. *However, this use does not elevate them to the status of the confessions.*

(*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598; emphasis added)

2. Must officebearers subscribe to and members agree with *Acts of Synod 2022*, Article 65, item 2, or any other synodical decision?

We answer "No." Again, Synod 1975 answers the question Synod 2023 evaded:

Full agreement with the confessions is expected from all members of the church and subscription to the confessions is required of all officebearers by signing the Form of Subscription. While synodical decisions are “settled and binding,” subscription to synodical decisions is not required. . . . Officebearers are expected to “abide by” certain specified deliverances of synod as well as to synodical decisions in general.

(*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 601-2; underlining added for emphasis)

### III. Recommendations

A. Synod 2024 can and should answer “yes” or “no” to the questions above, and it should explain its answers to provide us with a clear understanding of what officebearers must subscribe to. If Synod 2024 believes the decisions of Synods 1975, 2022, and 2023 were all correct, it should fully explain how it reconciles the latter two decisions with the former.

B. The CRCNA recognizes only three documents with confessional status: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 761-62; Church Order Supplement, Art. 5). When synod interprets one of these confessions, its interpretation remains subordinate to the confessions (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 44).

C. We do not dispute synod’s authority to interpret the confessions; however, our confidence in synod’s competence to provide faithful and coherent interpretations has been eroded by Synod 2022’s inexplicable “interpretation” of the 1975 synodical report that it cited to justify its self-serving assumption of confessional authority.<sup>6</sup> It should concern us that Synod 2023 has defended Synod 2022’s method of interpretation, which permits synod to deny at will what prior synods have clearly decided.

D. This overture asks Synod 2024 to reverse *Acts of Synod 2023*, Article 69, Items C, 2 and 3 because it violates the CRCNA’s official position subordinating synodical decisions to the confessions and prohibiting subscription to synodical pronouncements.

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<sup>6</sup> The rationalization that Synod 2022 engaged in to adopt Article 65 Item 2 evokes a type of “intellectualism” that Herman Bavinck identified as one of the three pathologies of Christian life, which “places all the emphasis on the Word, doctrine, and knowledge, which can lead to ‘orthodoxism,’ rationalism, and various forms of gnosticism” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics, Volume One*, p. 415). Bavinck noted that intellectualism, in the fuller life of the church, becomes manifest in confessionalism, “which has a confession but no life” (*Ibid.*). He warns that intellectualism “can operate in two directions: people may want to keep the church’s teachings pure, or they may wish to change and improve them. . . . Among those who wish to preserve the church’s teachings, this intellectualism manifests itself as orthodoxism,” which “considers being orthodox the ultimate and decisive criterion of truth and godliness” and “which regards the teachings of the church as immutable . . . and therefore regards them as no longer subject to any scriptural test” (*Ibid.*, pp. 422-23). Bavinck refers to orthodoxism as “one of the most common and dangerous spiritual sicknesses in Protestantism” (*Ibid.*, p. 423).

E. Synod 2023’s noncompliance with synodical precedent has negative consequences on the CRCNA. It sends a message that noncompliance is acceptable; it threatens our unity; and it erodes our faith in leadership that, when made aware of an error, refuses to acknowledge and correct that error.

F. Synod 2022 misrepresented Synod 1975’s decision as a justification for its “confessional status” conclusion, and Synod 2023 affirmed that misrepresentation. This has damaged synod’s credibility and compromised our denomination’s witness to the world. If our denomination cannot be honest with itself, why should anyone outside our denomination believe us when we announce that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead?

G. The question that Synod 2024 now needs to answer is whether it will perpetuate or correct the errors and misrepresentations of the past two synods.

H. If there is any doubt that the 1975 synodical decision stands for the exact opposite of what Synods 2022 and 2023 claim, the 10-page report should be read in its entirety and can be found at [crcna.org/sites/default/files/1975\\_synodical\\_decisions.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/1975_synodical_decisions.pdf).

Members of Fourteenth Street CRC of Holland, Michigan

Doug Rooks	Meredith VanderHill
Maria Rooks	Micah VanderHill
Jack Berghoef	Greg Hofman
Nancy Berghoef	Jude Hofman
Barry Bandstra	Robert Keeley
Debra Bandstra	Laura Keeley
David Genzink	Mary Jellema
Deborah Genzink	Suzette Staal
Barbara Steen	Gary Vander Veen
Roger Brummel	

*Note:* This overture was submitted to the February 1, 2024, meeting of Classis Holland but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 8

### **Classis Grand Rapids East**

Warm greetings from Classis Grand Rapids East.

Classis Grand Rapids East (“Classis GRE”) sends this communication to Synod 2024 to provide information about the new Alignment Committee appointed by our classis. The mandate of the committee is as follows:

To listen to the churches of classis; describe where each church is at on sexuality issues, with its rationale; and discuss with each church ways to follow synodical guidelines, given their position and their desire to minister faithfully with all.

Some of the initial work of the committee will address the following:

- Matthew Tuininga filed an appeal against the council of Grace CRC (Minutes of 9-21-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Section 3.0, p. 2). Grace CRC approved a statement of full participation for those in same-sex relationships that Dr. Tuininga believed was in violation of recent decisions of synod about human sexuality (Minutes of 9-21-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Appendix, p. 1). Dr. Tuininga also appealed Grace’s decision to not require and process gravamina from its officebearers (*Ibid.*). Classis GRE sustained Dr. Tuininga’s appeal (Minutes of 9-21-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Section 3.1, p. 2; Appendix, p. 2).
- Synod instructed Classis Grand Rapids East to guide the Neland Avenue CRC congregation and leadership into alignment with the biblical guidelines affirmed by Synod 2022 regarding same-sex sexual relationships (*Acts of Synod 2023*, Art. 75, p. 1027).
- Synod instructed all classes to guide into compliance the officebearers of their constituent churches who publicly reject the biblical guidelines affirmed by Synod 2022 regarding same-sex relationships (*Acts of Synod 2023*, Art. 78, pp. 1029–30).
- Synod 2023 also reminded “church visitors throughout the CRCNA of their authority and responsibility to, in a spirit of love and grace, guide officebearers into alignment with the biblical guidelines, including but not limited to all areas of human sexuality” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, Art. 78, p. 1030). The Alignment Committee and the Classis GRE church visitors have agreed to work in cooperation on matters related to human sexuality.
- Synod 2023 acknowledged and lamented the ongoing shortcomings of our denomination and its congregations in their pastoral posture and care to those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1008-9, 1010). The Alignment Committee will encourage and advise its congregations how to grow in their pastoral care to LGBTQ+ people and the use of their gifts in the offices and structures of the church (See *Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1010).

Classis GRE sends this communication out of its love and commitment to the denomination and to provide an overview of its ongoing work in response to synod’s recent decisions about human sexuality. We recognize the pain felt throughout the denomination as churches respond to these decisions and each other. We hope this communication is received in the spirit intended of accountability and faithfulness. To place this communication in the context of our ongoing work in classis, we provide this overview:



- At its January 2023 meeting, Classis GRE addressed the report of the *in loco* committee and discussed an overture that classis adopted as a response to the *in loco* committee report (Minutes of 1-19-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, 123.2, 2.3, Decision to Adopt a Response to Neland Avenue CRC, p. 2.; Minutes of 1-19-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Appendix, Overture Asking Classis Grand Rapids East to Adopt a Response to Neland Avenue CRC, pp. 7-11).
- Classis GRE adopted three of the four recommendations from the *in loco* committee: to acknowledge the admonishment of synod, to provide pastoral care to those most affected, and to provide a report to Synod 2023 (the 2023 overture approved by classis and sent to the *in loco* committee served as this report) (*Ibid.*).
- In response to the fourth recommendation from the *in loco* committee: to appoint an oversight committee to engage with Neland Avenue CRC, Classis GRE proposed an alternative. It agreed to wait until Synod 2023 addressed Neland Avenue's appeal, after which classis would engage further with Neland Avenue (*Ibid.*). This would give Neland due process under the Church Order and also provide accountability (*Ibid.*).
- Classis GRE planned to use a pastoral approach with Neland Avenue rather than appoint an oversight committee that inevitably creates an adversarial posture (*Ibid.*). To support this work, Classis GRE suggested that it would use the denominational resources of Thrive to discern together with the congregations in our classis how to respond to the decisions of synod about human sexuality and Neland Avenue CRC (*Ibid.*).

Classis GRE is honoring its commitments to this denomination, including those made in its 2023 overture:

- Classis GRE approved the formation of an Alignment Committee and sustained the Tuininga appeal in September 2023 (Minutes of 9-21-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Sections 3.0 and 3.1, p. 2).
- Classis GRE held a first listening session with the assistance of Thrive with the congregations of Classis GRE on Oct. 26, 2023 (Minutes of 10-26-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Section 2, pp. 1-2).
- Classis shared the feedback from this listening session and received further input from congregations on November 30, 2023 (Minutes of 11-30-23 Meeting of Classis GRE, Sections 2 and 3, pp. 1-2).
- Classis approved the mandate and membership of the Alignment Committee in January 2024 (Minutes of the 1-18-24 Meeting of Classis GRE, Section 6, p. 4).
- The Classis GRE Alignment Committee held its first meetings on January 23, February 6, and February 20, 2024.
- The Alignment Committee soon will start to schedule in-person meetings with the councils of classis, beginning with Neland Avenue

and Grace CRCs, as part of its cooperative arrangement with the church visitors.

- The Alignment Committee will be guided by advice published by this denomination in 2023 for what “guiding into alignment” looks like (Synod 2023 FAQ Document | Christian Reformed Church (crcna.org), Q&A 9). It is work that is patient, private, and pastoral (*Ibid.*). These guidelines recognize that doing this work well will take time. The decisions of Synod 2024 may also factor into our discussions in important ways. We recognize that there is an appropriate urgency to our mandate, but also agree with the denominational guidelines that we need to proceed with patience.

Questions about this committee may be sent to [gre.alignment@gmail.com](mailto:gre.alignment@gmail.com). The Alignment Committee invites conversation with other classes who are engaged in similar work and would like to support each other by sharing their best practices and challenges. Classis GRE asks for the prayers and support of the denomination as it moves ahead with this important work.

Classis Grand Rapids East  
Robert Arbogast, stated clerk

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## COMMUNICATION 9

### Council of Fourteenth Street CRC, Holland, Michigan

*Note:* The Office of General Secretary believes that this overture fails to present sufficient and new grounds for a revision of a synodical decision. This is therefore being included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024* as a communication, allowing for transparency and for the officers of synod, or a motion from the floor, to decide otherwise.

#### I. Background

Synod 2022 chose to interpret the term “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 with reference to a representative list of sexual sins and then declared that interpretation to have “confessional status” (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922). After a further year of dialogue and debate on these matters (via overtures, gravamina, communications, and an appeal), Synod 2023 affirmed the decision of Synod 2022, leaving it essentially unchanged (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021-22). Having read the Synod 2022 and Synod 2023 decisions and grounds, we wish to try one more time to persuade Synod 2024 to alter those decisions while keeping with their basic intent, because the specific language used in those decisions is in conflict with Report 47 of the *Acts of Synod 1975* (pp. 595-604), which clarifies how synodical decisions relate to the confessions.

By way of background, we wish to acknowledge a few things that make these decisions (and potentially altering them) difficult and complicated. First, with reference to Synod 2023's affirmation of Synod 2022's decision, we recognize that there is some tension between the *Acts of Synod 1975* Report 47, which suggests that *no* synodical decision rises to the "status of the confessions," and the *Acts of Synod 1976* decision (Art. 64, C, 3, a, 3; now Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3), which gives synod the right, in the case of a question or dispute, to clarify what is (or is not) confessional doctrine to which officebearers subscribe via the Covenant for Officebearers.<sup>1</sup> We suggest that this tension between the *Acts of Synod 1975* and the *Acts of Synod 1976* has created competing narratives about whether synod's declaration rightly has "confessional status." Did Synod 2022 simply "interpret the confession" — an interpretation which *cannot* have confessional status (à la 1975)? Or was Synod 2022's "interpretation of the confession" simply its way of clarifying a "doctrine confessed in the standards" (à la 1976; Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3), which *is* thereby confessional. We admit the tension here, and believe that Synods 2022 and 2023 have largely acted in keeping with the *spirit* of the 1976 decision (Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3). But by using (and affirming) the *language* of the 1975 decision, Synods 2022 and 2023 have actually violated a plain reading of that report.

This leads to our second opening reflection. The conflict of Synod 2022's specific language with the 1975 report was raised to Synod 2023 in several overtures. We trust the advisory committee that dealt with these overtures when they say that they "wrestled with the conclusive, unprecedented language of Synod 2022" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 1013-14). But perhaps this unprecedented language should have been a sign to the committee that there was a problem here that needed fixing rather than simply unprecedented language that needed affirming. When synod is shown an error in its own

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<sup>1</sup> Some have wanted to pick up on the language of "acquiescence" in Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3 to suggest that the officebearer only has to "acquiesce" (i.e., abide) to a doctrine deemed confessional rather than "subscribe" (i.e., agree) to it. This is true of synodical decisions generally but not of confessional doctrine (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 601-2). Critically, what is being addressed in Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3 (from *Acts of Synod 1976*) is clarification of *confessional doctrine* by an assembly, not a synodical pronouncement as such (*Acts of Synod 1975*). In this context, then, what the officebearer "acquiesces" to is a decision of the assemblies, in the event such a question arises, about *whether or not something is confessional doctrine*. It then follows that if a council/classis/synod clarifies that something *is* confessional doctrine (per their role as prescribed in Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3), that doctrine is then *subscribed* to via one's signature on the Covenant for Officebearers (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 601). That is, after all, the very context of Supplement, Art. 5, A, which outlines "Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant for Officebearers." If one cannot subscribe to the confessional doctrine thus clarified by the assembly, the confessional gravamen process comes into play.

formulation and does not act to correct it,<sup>2</sup> or even to provide substantial argument in support of its prior action,<sup>3</sup> this undermines and erodes trust in synod's authority. This overture hopes to restore trust and build confidence in synodical decisions and authority. When we seek to do the right things, we should not neglect to do them in the right way.

We believe that the wisest way to do this is to reclassify Synod 2022's interpretation of unchastity as an "interpretation of the confession" which is "settled and binding" as an "interpretation of the confession" in accordance with a plain reading of Report 47 from *Acts of Synod 1975*, and then spell out what this means for our churches, officebearers, and members, as our overture does below.<sup>4</sup> This would maintain the clear direction set by Synods 2022 and 2023 as well as set clear expectations for our churches that must be acquiesced to. It also holds real promise to call all of us to more than acquiescence but, rather, to deeper and costlier discipleship together and to submission to one another (and our assemblies) out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).

Finally, even though we are asking for the decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023 to be altered, we wish to make the following abundantly clear:

1. We agree with and are grateful for the basic intention and clarity of Synods 2022 and 2023 pertaining to the CRCNA's biblical and confessional position on matters of human sexuality.
2. When confusion or disagreement arises as to what the Bible and our confessions teach on a theological or ethical matter, synod has the right and responsibility to interpret these matters for us. Moreover, we believe that Synod 2022 was wise to do so in this situation, and we have no

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<sup>2</sup> While synod may technically have the authority to ignore the 1975 precedent and conclude differently on its own (Rules for Synodical Procedure 2022, p. 23), that does not mean it is *wise* for synod to do so if there are other ways to get at the same decision that are in keeping with Church Order and synodical precedent (i.e., Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3; *Acts of Synod 1976*).

<sup>3</sup> The grounds of Synod 2023's affirmation of Synod 2022's decision in response to the overtures submitted to it are disappointingly thin (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021).

<sup>4</sup> While this is our preferred route, we acknowledge that according to Church Order synod has another option before it as well. Synod 2024 could reclassify Synod 2022's interpretation as suggested above, but also clarify that some *doctrine* is at play in Q&A 108 (e.g., marriage) that is, in fact, confessional doctrine to which officebearers subscribe via the Covenant for Officebearers, *and do this with explicit appeal to the language of Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3 as the grounds*. This path would result in an interpretation of unchastity that is "settled and binding" (Synods 2022/23) as well as a confessional doctrine (e.g., marriage) to which officebearers subscribe (Synod 2024). While we do not think this option is wise or necessary in our present moment, we recognize that Synod 2024 may feel differently, which is why we mention this as a possibility. Again, our purpose in this overture is to help set synod's decisions on stronger footing so as to restore and build trust in synod's authority.

quarrel with its interpretation of “unchastity” as such. On the contrary, we agree with it.

3. This overture is *not* an attempt to create a “local option” for divergent belief and practice in the CRCNA but, rather, simply an attempt to bring the decisions of Synod 2022 and Synod 2023 in line with the 1975 synodical report referenced above (see further below). On the contrary, as the grounds of the overture below make clear, churches and officebearers *must* acquiesce to this decision. If they do not—if they were to preach, teach, or act in defiance of synod’s decision—they would open themselves up to the process of church discipline (Church Order Art. 78-84).

With the above background and clarification, then, we offer the following overture.

## II. Overture

The council of Fourteenth Street CRC of Holland, Michigan, overtures Synod 2024 to alter the decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023 that the “interpretation of the confession” regarding “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922; *Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1021) has “confessional status” pursuant to the *Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603, in the following two ways (A and B):

- A. Declare our agreement with Synod 2022 that the interpretation of “unchastity” in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 is an “interpretation of [a] confession” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). However, revise Synod 2022’s declaration that this interpretation has “confessional status” (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922) and declare instead that Synod 2022’s interpretation of “unchastity” shall be considered “settled and binding” (Church Order, Art. 29) in its use and function as an “interpretation of [a] confession” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603), noting the following:
  - This is the most significant category of pronouncement on doctrinal and ethical matters available to synod (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 597).
  - “All officebearers and members are expected to abide by these synodical deliverances” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603).
  - As such, “those who err” would be subject to discipline with the understanding that “the purpose of admonition and discipline is to restore [the erring member] to faithful obedience to God and full fellowship with the congregation, to maintain the holiness of the church, and thus to uphold God’s honor” (Church Order Art. 78).
  - We affirm that “the members of the church are accountable to one another in their doctrine and life and have the responsibility to encourage and admonish one another in love” (Church Order Art. 79-a).

*Ground:*

Synod rightly has the authority to pronounce on doctrinal and ethical matters that concern the whole church (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 597). Regarding the authority of these decisions, the following statements all

pertain to Synod 2022's decision and serve as the grounds for our recommended alteration:

1. Synodical decisions "shall 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).
2. At the same time, "No synodical decision involving doctrinal or ethical pronouncements is to be considered on a par with the confessions" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598). That is to say, no synodical pronouncement *itself* (even an "interpretation of the confession") can ever be "elevate[d] . . . to the status of the confessions" (p. 598).
3. Instead, "clothed with synodical authority, [such pronouncements] serve that precise use and function for which they were specifically designed by synod" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598). At Synod 2022 this pronouncement took the form of an "interpretation of [a] confession" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922). As such, "When a synodical pronouncement is set forth as an interpretation of the confession, this is its use and function" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 603). It follows, then, that Synod 2022's "interpretation of the confession" does not itself have "confessional status" but is, rather, "settled and binding" (Church Order Art. 29) in its "use and function" as an "interpretation of the confession."
4. Regarding the "settled and binding" authority of a synodical "interpretation of the confession," Report 47 of the *Acts of Synod 1975* states, "Such an interpretation given by synod must be regarded as the official interpretation, and is, therefore, binding for every officer and member of our denominational group. . . . *One cannot place one's personal interpretation of the Confessions or a part thereof above the official interpretation of synod. That would make void the significance and power of the Forms of Unity*" (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598; quoting *Acts of Synod 1926*, pp. 191-92; emphasis ours). All teaching, preaching, discipleship, and discipline within CRCNA churches should therefore conform itself to the "settled and binding" character of this interpretation.
5. Two things follow from the above and should be recognized by all members and officebearers in the CRCNA:
  - a. On the one hand, it should be acknowledged that the "measure of agreement expected" *is* different for a synodical decision than it is for a confessional doctrine. As the 1975 report says, "Full agreement with the *confessions* is expected from all members of the church and subscription to the confessions is required of all officebearers by signing the Form of Subscription. While *synodical decisions* are 'settled and binding,' subscription to synodical decisions is not required. Registering a negative vote with regard to a

synodical decision is permissible, although this is not tolerated with respect to the confessions” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 601-2). As this makes clear, disagreement with a synodical decision is possible/allowable, even as that decision remains “settled and binding” on the church.

- b. With that said, it should also be acknowledged that in making the decisions it did, Synod 2022 was attempting to call local churches, officebearers, and members *away* from such disagreement and back toward unity on this doctrinal/moral subject. In this way, Synod 2022 attempted to use the confessions as what we say they are—“Forms of *Unity*.” As the 1975 report says, “The well-being of the church is fostered when there is substantial unity with respect to the decisions of synod” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 602).
6. In sum, by declaring its *interpretation* to have “confessional status,” Synod 2022 blurred lines that are clear in the 1975 report, setting a poor and confusing precedent for future synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters. Altering Synod 2022’s decision in the way described above brings it in line with the position of the 1975 report on the relationship between synodical decisions and the confessions. At the same time, it honors synod’s intent to clarify the meaning of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 in the strongest way possible, so as not to allow divergent practice at the local church level by appeal to the suggestion that previous synodical deliverances were “pastoral advice” that can be set aside.<sup>5</sup> As such, the purpose of this overture is to alter Synod 2022’s decision so as to bring it in line with the conclusions of the 1975 report while affirming the “settled and binding” authority and significance of its interpretation of “unchastity” in Q&A 108.
- B. Adopt the following definition of *chastity* in order to guide the interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108: “Chastity is the pursuit of that purity of heart which Jesus calls blessed (Matt. 5:8). Whether in married or single life, chastity is the preservation of sexual union for the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage, within which such sexual union serves both natural and symbolic ends: the joining of male and female in one flesh (Gen. 2:24); the bearing of children (Gen. 1:28); and the nuptial union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32). Chastity is thus a gift which preserves the holy state of marriage and signals our ultimate betrothal to Christ, and unchastity is any transgression that undermines this state and this betrothal.”

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<sup>5</sup>As the 1975 report says, “There is an obvious difference between the use and function of a pronouncement as interpretation of the confessions and a decision involving ‘guidelines’ or ‘pastoral advice’” (*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 598).

*Ground:*

Synod 2023 did not accede to this recommendation when it was made to it in Overture 21 to that synod (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 426-27; *Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1006), offering the following grounds: (a) “It is not necessary to define *chastity* as it is not a word we find in the Heidelberg Catechism”; (b) “The Human Sexuality Report adequately describes chastity (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 442).” We wish to continue this dialogue with Synod 2024, offering the following reasons for why the above definition of *chastity* would serve the CRCNA well by providing further guidance to churches to recognize and pursue chaste living within and outside of marriage.

1. Strictly speaking, the word *chastity* may not appear in Q&A 108, but the word “*unchastity*” does (the negative form), as does the word “*chaste*” (the adjectival form). In the nature of the case, one cannot know what *unchastity* is nor what chaste living entails unless one knows what *chastity* means. The negative vision of what we are to avoid (*unchastity*) implies a positive vision of what we are to pursue (*chastity*). Or as the catechism itself says, “We should . . . live decent and *chaste* lives” (Q&A 108). Synod 2022 interpreted the negative term (“*unchastity*”) with reference to helpful representative examples. But what does it mean to live “*chaste* lives” (the positive vision)? Synod 2022 recognized the need to call the CRCNA to “radical obedience” in this area of our lives (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922 [cf. p. 906]), which surely means more than simply avoiding *unchastity*. It means pursuing *chastity*. Adopting the above definition complements Synod 2022’s interpretation of “*unchastity*” by holding out a positive vision for all of our people about what it means to “live decent and *chaste* lives” (Q&A 108).
2. It is true that the Human Sexuality Report describes the virtue of *chastity* (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, pp. 442-43), but nowhere on those pages does it seek to define it.<sup>6</sup> The HSR says good things on those pages, but it does not collect those things into a tangible positive vision. One does not walk away from those pages thinking, “Now I know what the pursuit of *chastity* will entail.” Nor does the HSR on those pages connect *chastity* positively to the spousal relationship of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33), nor to Christ’s own words about purity of heart in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:8), as our definition does. Moreover, the HSR is a long document, not easily digested. We would be wise to draw out and distill some of its cardinal points for the sake of catechesis. Synod 2022 did this relative to “*unchastity*,”

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<sup>6</sup> The closest it comes is the following: “To practice *chastity* is to live out one’s sexuality in a way that conforms to God’s created purpose for human beings as male and female, whether married or single” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 442). But that is rather thin as a definition.



and in doing so helped us name and avoid sin. We suggest that, in many ways, the deeper and more radical call would be to pursue *virtue*. Synod 2024 could help us do this by adopting a simple and accessible, yet thoroughgoing and challenging, definition of *chastity*.

Council of Fourteenth Street CRC, Holland, Michigan  
Paul Katerberg, clerk of council

*Note:* This overture was submitted to the February 1, 2024, meeting of Classis Holland but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 10

### Member of Ivanrest CRC, Grandville, Michigan

#### I. Introduction

The CRCNA has long said that it wants to hear from young and LGBTQ+ voices. Mine is one of those. I'm a 23-year-old in the church. I also identify as LGBTQ+. I believe in the transformative and healing power of the gospel and the infallibility of Scripture. I believe that we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, alone. I believe in the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God—that God is sovereign over all things. But I am also concerned about how the CRCNA has made its recent decisions on human sexuality and their impact on many of my family members in Christ—including some of whom are also LGBTQ+.

I was reading Ephesians 5 recently and came across Paul's encouragement to "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 18-20).

Upon reading this, I was inspired to try my hand at writing a psalm of sorts of my own. And that's what this communication is. It's my attempt to express in psalm-form some of what I've been feeling and thinking.

It should be noted that although the message contained in this communication is primarily for the affirming/more affirming-leaning churches in the CRCNA, my hope is that this communication might, Lord willing, encourage rich and meaningful conversation between and within *all* the various churches in the CRCNA, and encourage my siblings in Christ in all these various churches to do some deep reflection. My hope is also that such conversation and reflection will foster greater compassion, patience, humility, and peace in all of us.

#### II. Words of Clarification

For those who are not used to reading poetry, the main gist of this

communication is to gently encourage affirming/more affirming-leaning churches to consider graciously leaving the CRC of their own accord. Rather than stick it out for a protracted fight (which, I worry, will, in the end, hurt them and their faith more than help it), I would like to see them leave the CRC for denominations or churches that can care for them better (and see them receive the proper support and assistance they'll need from the CRC's broader assemblies, should/when they choose to do this). I don't mean to offend but simply to inform/remind people of the option if they haven't fully considered it before.

### III. Communication

There is joy in knowing God's kingdom of heaven will come  
Regardless of what happens to this denomination.  
No power on earth or in hell can stop the full restoration  
That the Lord has promised will come to pass on all creation.

And that is why I find myself unafraid  
Of the decisions that were made and the ways things have changed.  
That is why in the midst all the hurt and pain,  
I have continued to put all my faith in the Lamb who was slain.

Also, I suppose my faith remains strong and intact  
Because I've somehow always been acutely aware that

The CRC is just one of the many parts of the body,  
Thus, it should never be revered as if it were the whole body itself.  
Plus, while I've always appreciated that it has been given a special responsibility,  
I've always recognized this was also true for churches everywhere else.

Furthermore, the CRC, like the rest of the church, isn't and has never been perfect.  
I know full well that any good fruit it bears is because of the Spirit.  
In fact, the best the church can do is strive towards purity.  
It is only God alone that can make its holiness complete.

Consequently, I, a queer youth in the CRC, would like to communicate the following  
To the churches that have been most affected by Synods 2022 and 2023<sup>1</sup>:

*The children of God are everywhere—they are in churches that are independent,  
And they worship and serve him in other denominations too.  
So, if the Christian Reformed Church is no longer a good fit,  
Do not fret, but rather, take comfort in knowing there's still a place for you*

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<sup>1</sup> This includes churches who are open and affirming or are in the process of becoming so, as well as churches who are struggling with the "confessional status" designation that was given to Synod 2022's interpretation of the word "unchastity" which was upheld by Synod 2023, because they have always held space for diverse views on same-sex marriage in their communities.

*In the body of Christ. As a matter of fact, it could be  
That you were never meant to stay indefinitely  
In this one particular part of the body that is the CRC.  
Or maybe you were always meant to serve in another part of the body.*

*Now, I'm not saying this out of ignorance to your plight,  
Nor am I saying this because I think the other group<sup>2</sup> is completely in the right.  
I'm saying this because they are equally precious in God's sight,  
And I can tell they're genuinely striving to live as children of light.*

*Like you, they're doing the best they know how to be the salt of the earth,  
And invite others to experience the beauty of spiritual rebirth.*

*And it's clear to me that the Spirit is working in their communities,  
Just like it's evident to me that the Spirit's been at work in yours.  
Thus, I would encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities  
That you'll find if you just allow yourself to go beyond the CRC's doors.*

*In fact, for a while, I've been thinking that maybe God allowed  
These past two years of synodical decisions to turn out like this  
Because he has decided to select you from the rest of the crowd  
To start something or somewhere new that'll make greater use of your gifts.*

*And as for the churches who are alright with the decisions of Synod '22 and '23  
I've been thinking maybe God decided to appoint them as the primary stewards of the CRC.  
And if this is the case, I feel there is no need to constantly worry,  
For I trust that God will help them care for those who remain appropriately.*

*Of course . . . I'm fully aware that many of you have been in the CRC since you were young<sup>3</sup>,  
So parting from it, would feel strange, and disorienting for you — maybe even wrong.  
And for some of you, it's more complicated. Serving in the CRC has been a long-  
standing family tradition and so your attachment to it is especially strong.*

*So I do understand that what I am suggesting would be incredibly hard for you to do.  
But at the same time, the Spirit has been continuously prompting me to be honest with you.*

*And so that's what I'm doing here despite the anxiety it is causing me,  
Hoping and praying that this message will be received charitably.  
Truth be told, there's two other reasons why I think it might be  
Better for you to separate from this denominational entity.*

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<sup>2</sup> By "other group" I mean the group of churches who were in favor of the "confessional status" designation that was given to Synod 2022's interpretation of the word "unchastity" which was upheld by Synod 2023, and whose communities are experiencing little to no negative effects from this particular decision.

<sup>3</sup> My own family has been part of the CRC ever since I was baby. Like a lot of you—I have grown up in the Christian Reformed Church.

*First, it seems that some of you have developed an unhealthy bond with the CRC  
To the point where it's like your love for this denomination is actually keeping you from  
Investing time in strengthening your relationship with all the persons of the Trinity  
And helping those in your communities develop their gifts for the glory of God's kingdom.*

*I think that having a little bit more of a distant relationship with this church might help  
You avoid further conflating your love for the church with your love for Christ.  
I'm concerned that remaining will only be to the detriment of your health  
And that what is normally a virtue will become your greatest vice.*

*Second, I know that a lot of you want to stay and keep fighting because you're wary  
Of how the other churches are going to minister to people who are LGBT.  
But I can already see that staying here has been sapping you of energy  
And has been hindering you from helping LGBTQ people more effectively.*

*Because, you see, since every LGBTQ person is unique and different,  
What type of church community will best aid their spiritual development  
Depends on their individual life experiences and circumstances—both past and present.  
Hence, the approach to care the other group desires every church to implement*

*May suit some LGBTQ people well but for many others it falls short  
Of providing them what they need in terms of spiritual mentorship and support<sup>4</sup>.*

*So, there's a need for churches like you that wish to operate under a different model.  
Unfortunately, doing so while remaining part of the CRC isn't really feasible.  
Thus, to help the body of Christ better reach out to a wider range of LGBTQ people  
Please consider changing the church affiliation in which you share the gospel.*

*One last thing. I notice that many people associate the word "separation" with "isolation."  
However, when one separates from someone that doesn't necessarily equate  
To one completely cutting ties with them—and no longer having any kind of connection.  
Just like a child who leaves their parents to live on their own, their love for them is still great.*

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<sup>4</sup> Case in point: I have friends who are LGBTQ+ and currently only feel safe attending an affirming church largely due to the trauma they have experienced within more conservative religious spaces. At the same time, I also know a few LGBTQ+ people that wouldn't have any difficulties becoming confessing members of the CRC as it pertains to the "confessional status" designation that was given to Synod 2022's interpretation of the word "unchastity" in the Heidelberg Catechism, because they have come to hold the traditional view of marriage of their own accord.

And then there's LGBTQ+ youth in the CRC (like myself) who have yet to form their own views on sexuality and marriage, or have already formed particular views on these things but also have been deeply committed to showing a healthy respect and appreciation for views different from their own, and open to learning more about these differing views—and so feel conflicted about the "confessional status" designation that was given to Synod 2022's interpretation of the word "unchastity" in the Heidelberg Catechism.

*They just don't live under the same roof anymore, and may see them less.  
But if they truly care for their parents, they'll find ways to maintain a good relationship  
With them as they become more independent and adjust to life away from the nest.  
Similarly, I can imagine you part of a different denomination but still having fellowship*

*With churches in the CRC, where the nature of your relationship wouldn't be the same  
But your relationship would be one of mutual respect and goodwill and void of undue strain.  
Though you would be of different church affiliations, you'd be united in the holy name  
Of Christ, our dearest Lord and Savior, who will forever reign.*

*Furthermore, it's worth noting that to have a close relationship with this denomination  
A church does not need to be part of it — it can be of a different church affiliation.  
This is because the CRC has a history of building and supporting ecumenical relations<sup>5</sup>  
Not only with churches in the U.S and Canada, but with churches in other nations.*

*With all this said, I do hope that you take time to consider what I've expressed.  
Again, I know that if you do choose to follow through with this request  
It will be a challenging transition, and cause much heartache and distress.  
And yet . . . I can't shake off the feeling that in the end, it'll be for the best.*

Member of Ivanrest CRC, Grandville, Michigan  
Lain Martinez Vasquez

*Note:* This communication was presented to the council of Ivanrest CRC at its December 2023 meeting but was not adopted. This communication was then presented to Classis Grandville at its January meeting, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 11

### Member of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta

#### I. Introduction

My name is Aaliyah Verhoef, and I am a 17-year-old, grade 12 student. I attend River Park CRC, the church that I have attended since my birth and where I am a baptized member. As a youth, I am writing this both on behalf of myself and on behalf of a handful of the youth who will be the future of our beloved church.

#### II. Thoughts on the HSR

Conversations surrounding the Human Sexuality Report and synod have been common in my church and even in my own house. Both of these

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<sup>5</sup> [crcna.org/eirc/ecumenical-relations/relationships](https://crcna.org/eirc/ecumenical-relations/relationships); [crcna.org/eirc/ecumenical-relations/ecumenical-charter](https://crcna.org/eirc/ecumenical-relations/ecumenical-charter)

spaces have been good at inviting everyone's opinions, but I feel that, as a whole, the opinions and thoughts of youth are not paid attention to.

Youth have valuable ideas and opinions that deserve to be heard. We are greatly affected by the church's decisions, and yet we are not given the voice or the power to influence them. I understand that many young people are thought of as being uninformed or as only speaking our parents' views. However, as the next generation and the ones that will be stewarding the future of the church very soon, I believe that this is a huge oversight.

I, personally, have many opinions on the issues that the church is currently facing. In the past few years I believe that synod has made decisions that have negatively impacted the church and will continue to do so. However, although I disagree with the stance that the CRC has taken on many aspects of sexuality (especially their stance on the "unchastity" of homosexuality), my main issue with the whole situation is the way it is being handled.

This conversation has become less of a discussion and more of an argument. We are failing to listen respectfully to others with an open mind and heart.

In this way, the church is setting a bad example.

### **III. Unity without uniformity**

In John 17:22-23, Jesus says: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." The way I read this, Jesus is calling us to be united. Through our unity, the world will know that God has sent us to spread his Word and his love.

Right now, Christians are so divided on so many issues that the rest of the world is barely able to recognize us as the family that we are meant to be. As 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." We are meant to be the body of Christ, and a body cannot function without all of its parts.

The question I pose is this: How do we achieve unity without uniformity? This is what I believe we must do.

River Park Church's vision is "Reaching Out, Drawing In, Creating Mosaic Community." A mosaic is a picture or pattern produced by arranging together small, unique pieces of all different shapes and colors. Similarly, every person is different and beautiful, but it is only together that we can find the true beauty and see the whole picture. There is beauty in difference. There is value in variety. Without unique perspectives and people, a glorious mosaic cannot be created.

It is my belief, one that I share with many people in my community, that it is more important to be united and find ways to respect and care for each other despite disagreement than to hold the same stance on certain issues.

Matthew 22:37-39 shows Jesus' response when asked which is the most important commandment: "Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Each of us is trying to love God in the best way we know how. We all read the Bible and try to understand and respect what God is telling us to do. Even if we land in different places, we are only trying to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds.

When we can recognize this about each other, we will be better able to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must respect each other just as we want to be respected. We must listen to each other's opinions just as we want our opinions to be heard.

This is what it means to live in unity without uniformity. That, despite our differences and disagreements, we can find ways to live in community with each other and love one another as God loves us. This is what I hope we, as the future of the church, will be able to accomplish.

What I have written above is completely by me. However, this communication isn't only about sharing my opinion. It is intended to be a catalyst so that synod might listen to more of the youth and young adults in the CRCNA.

#### **IV. Thoughts of other youth**

In trying to hear the opinions of other youth, I created a form with 12 questions, eight of which were meant to gather general information about the respondent. The other four questions are included below, with the responses from a handful of youth from multiple churches (whose names have been changed to protect identity). These responses represent a tiny fraction of the people and opinions in our vast and varied community. I feel that it is important that more of these young voices are heard in our church when we are facing such important decisions.

*When you think of the CRC's position (or even that of the church in general) and its response to human sexuality (including homosexual sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation) how do you feel about it?*

"I disagree with the stance they have taken, and think that it will do more harm than good and push people out of the CRC and potentially the church as a whole."

—Mary, age 16

"I respect how everyone has their own opinions when it comes to the human sexuality report. I feel strongly that, more and more, the politics within the church have started to take away from the main purpose of worshipping the Lord. I feel that everyone, no matter how they identify, should be able to worship freely. When I think of the CRC in the state it

is in currently, it makes me sad to think that we are dividing different groups of Christian people based on what they believe is right, and not sticking with the main idea and purpose of church, which is worshipping the Lord.”

—Alyssa, age 17

“I feel my church personally has addressed it in the best possible way for the people of the church. We have decided to become mostly accepting, yet are trying to meet at the consensus of the majority.”

—Annika, age 17

“I feel disappointed as I feel that this decision has caused a lot of unnecessary division within the church. Church should be a place where everyone feels welcome, and I believe that, as followers of Christ, our most important calling is to love others above anything else. Excluding certain people from the church community is the opposite of loving our neighbors. The church has experienced a long history of corruption, caused by the forceful implementation of Christianity, the silencing of certain questions or issues, and the shaming upon sinners. We should learn from the mistakes of the past and create a welcoming environment for ALL people, because the more people we turn away, the greater stain we put on the church. It proves as a bad example for nonbelievers who are already weary of Christianity when they hear that we shame certain demographics. Why would anyone want to join a community that targets certain “sinners” and treats their sin as worse than the sins of every other heterosexual member of the church? The big issue with this report is that it claims that homosexuality is a sin; but if this sin is being so harshly punished, then what about everyone else’s sins? There is no formula or scale for the way that we should deal with sin. This is because God is the only true judge of sin, as we are ALL sinners. I believe that this is the beauty of a church: a community of equally sinful individuals figuring out how to pursue relationships with Christ together.”

—Katherine, age 16

“I feel that the stance the CRC has taken is unfair and does not glorify God. I feel it is not being seen through the eyes of the Lord as it is not including certain people just because of the way they live their lives. God did not teach us to judge others but to love our neighbor as our self and to be accepting people with love in our hearts. In my opinion, it is a misrepresentation of what it means to be a Christian. I feel it was a poor decision and it was not given enough time to be discussed.”

—Sam, age 17

“I have mixed emotions on this topic. Some things I am agreeing with, and some things I have not made a complete decision on. I have not explored gender identity and sexual orientation as much as I have with



human sexuality. I am on more of the agreeing side that same-sex marriage is okay. I'm still figuring this out, but I'm not in the middle and I'm not disagreeing; I am not 100 percent affirming but more like 75 percent affirming for the stage I'm at right now."

—Chad, age 15

"I think that the church should not discriminate against someone based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Just because you don't agree with someone else's position on something doesn't mean that you are given the right to tell them what they can and cannot do. Especially if they want to be a part of the CRC community but are not being welcomed."

—Sophie, age 14

*How have you experienced conversations about this topic? Have these been difficult conversations?*

"I have had many conversations with my family members and my peers about the idea of the human sexuality report, and I have learned from those conversations that every person has a different side to the story and that it is important to listen to all different views of the topic. Some of these conversations have been difficult but feel very necessary."

—Alyssa

"Yes. This has been a big conversation because some of my closest friends hold different opinions on this topic than I do, and we each try to have the other understand our side of this conversation. I think these conversations have been long and hard as we try to make others understand why this is an important topic for our futures."

—Sophie

"The conversations I have been a part of are filled mostly with hurt. They are difficult in that I see how this report has hurt those around me, and in how it is pushing people away from God. However, I have not been a part of difficult conversations in the sense of hearing the other side of the argument firsthand."

—Mary

"I have found the conversation on the topic to feel productive and to give me a deeper understanding of what those around me feel. I have not had any significantly difficult conversations on the topic, but I do feel the conversations are only made difficult by those who are uncomfortable about the topic."

—Sam

"I have been part of these conversations, especially with friends. Some of my friends have different beliefs than I do and are strongly opinionated on those beliefs. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable because they have said things that I find offensive toward my beliefs and just casually joke

about it. These conversations have been difficult because of the opposite opinions and the way they can get heated instead of staying respectful.”

—Chad

“Yes, these conversations are difficult because they do bring up a lot of pain for certain friends and individuals in the community, and these decisions mean a lot to many people as well.”

—Katherine

“Definitely challenging topics to discuss due to the spectrum of individuals and how close it is to their hearts. We are all trying to make sense of it all, and many are stuck in the middle. So, yes, it is a difficult yet needed talk.”

—Annika

*In conversations about the topic mentioned above (sexuality in the church), has your opinion been invited or heard?*

“Yes, the people who I have engaged in conversation on this topic have invited me in and listened to my point of view.”

—Mary

“I have mostly discussed with my family on this topic, and they have been accepting and happy to listen to me when I share my opinion.”

—Sam

“Honestly, it depends on who it is with. Some have chosen to not respect my opinion and tell me that my opinion is not important because it does not align with theirs. I feel very hurt in these communities. With others, on the other hand, my opinions are heard and brought into big conversation, and I feel respected in these spaces.”

—Sophie

“Yes, definitely. Many people have had the opportunity to share and be heard within my particular church. I think my church has done the best to hear from both sides in order to decide the next steps and stage of the church.”

—Annika

“I feel in some cases my opinion has been invited, and I have felt safe to share how I feel without the fear of being judged, but I have also been in conversations where I have felt ashamed for having a different perspective on the topic and have not felt safe to share how I felt.”

—Alyssa

“In conversations my opinion has been heard, but not very much. When this topic is being talked about within my school community I try to stay silent about it because I know in the end it will just become heated and will not be a healthy environment. My opinion is so unheard in other outside-of-school conversations, but I try not to step in too much.”

—Chad

“No, as someone who is under 18, my opinion has not been asked for.”  
—Katherine

*Anything else you would like to share?*

“God “will repay each person according to what they have done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism’ (Rom. 2:6-11). I think of this verse in relation to this discussion within the church. It reminds me not to judge others because I am equally as imperfect and shall be judged along with everyone else in the eyes of the Lord.”

—Sam

“My family has put many hours of work and thought into this topic, and it has turned me from not caring as much to caring a lot—and I think it is very important for everyone to understand that this is more than just a small little topic to me, my family, and my community. It is a big topic that can and will affect the rest of our lives. I believe that this is going to the young and newer generations to talk, listen, and discuss. As we talk about this, many of us truly and honestly do care about this, and it is left to us to think about the effect this can hold on our future.”

—Sophie

“Worshiping God has nothing to do with our individual beliefs about sexuality. Communities can remain diverse. I just feel like if we want to grow the earthly community of Jesus’ followers, it will not happen through shame, judgment, and exclusion. This will only turn people away from the idea of Christianity.”

—Katherine

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Member of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta  
Aaliyah Verhoef

*Note:* This communication was discussed by the council of River Park Church over multiple days in January, and on January 28, 2024, the council did not adopt this communication as its own but supported me in sending it on to classis by appending the following note:

The following communication has been thoughtfully prepared by a high school student from River Park Church. As council, we wholeheartedly support the sharing of multiple perspectives and as such support submitting this to classis. Not all members of our council are

in full agreement with all the opinions and views presented. However, we do believe in listening to each other without judgment and in coexisting in a community that can respectfully disagree on some topics. As they are the future of the church, it is important that youth and young adults have an opportunity to be heard, and as such we endorse bringing this forward.

*Note:* This communication was processed at the March 8, 2024, meeting of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan but was not adopted as its own.

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## COMMUNICATION 12

### **Council of River Park CRC, Calgary, Alberta**

As the Council of River Park Church of Calgary, Alberta, we believe that River Park Church is a congregation of people loved by God the Father as we follow Jesus our Lord with the support of the Holy Spirit, participating as one body composed of many parts in the life and work of the kingdom.

#### **I. Who we are**

Originally established as First CRC of Calgary, Alberta, in 1952, we have been through many shifts and changes. One thing is consistent: we are a community that loves to follow Jesus together.

*We are a multiethnic congregation.* Current Christian literature defines a multiethnic congregation as one in which no single racial or ethnic group accounts for 80 percent or more of the membership. Even by this definition, there are very few multiethnic congregations in North America. We are one—to God be the glory.

*We are creating a mosaic community.* This is our vision. It includes more than just multiethnic membership. Being called to create a mosaic community means we are working to become more fully multicultural (yes, this is different from being multiethnic). In addition to being multiethnic or multicultural, we are also a community of diverse genders, ages, and socioeconomic situations. We gather with both married and single people, widows and widowers. We already have diversity in our leadership, in our approaches to mission and discipleship, in aspects of our theological convictions.

*Amid all of this diversity, we are one family in Christ.* Through pursuing our vision at River Park Church—“reaching out, drawing in, creating mosaic community”—God has brought together a wonderfully diverse worshipping community. Some have been CRC their whole lives. Some have recently joined the CRC because they have found River Park Church to be their home. But when we come together, we come as one Christian family.

## **II. Our responses to recent synodical decisions about the HSR**

We have tried our best to communicate with synod as decisions are being made. We sent an overture that was on the agenda for Synod 2022, asking that synod not accede to the Human Sexuality Report's recommendation about "confessional status." Our sense was that adopting "confessional status" would harmfully divide the CRCNA. Synod 2022 decided to adopt "confessional status." In response, we sent an overture to Synod 2023, asking that synod listen carefully to our whole CRCNA community to hear more carefully the impact of this "confessional status" decision. Instead of listening, Synod 2023 adopted a motion to "guide into compliance" those who disagree. We believe this decision to also be unwise and divisive. In addition, the committee responding to this overture did not address our questions about the confessional-revision gravamen.

## **III. Expressing our concerns with the trajectory of the CRCNA**

In the above ways, we have tried to be faithful in communicating with our covenant community in the CRCNA.

We are communicating once more.

We are concerned about going further down this path of "guiding into compliance" the local church with the heavy hand of classical discipline. There has been no healthy listening; to then bring discipline is harmful.

We do not consider it to be wise or helpful to add additional restrictions to the gravamen process. We have faithful officebearers who have filed gravamina. They are respected by our congregation and leading well.

We are deeply concerned that synod continues to make decisions that negatively impact our local congregation.

Council of River Park Church, Calgary, Alberta  
Joanne Spronk, clerk

*Note:* This communication was presented to the meeting of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan on March 8, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## **COMMUNICATION 13**

### **Classis Minnkota**

Classis Minnkota informs the delegates of Synod 2024 that it has sent the following communication to the Program Committee of Synod 2024:

1. In keeping with the instructions given in the Supplement to Church Order Article 45, delegates from Classis Minnkota who believe the seating of women delegates is in violation of the Word of God wish to have their protest recorded in the minutes of synod. This protest will be noted on our synodical credentials to be read out loud as synod convenes.

2. Classis Minnkota is deeply convinced that the seating of delegates who have filed a confessional-difficulty gravamen is contrary to God's Word.
  - a. To stand in full agreement with the Public Declaration of Agreement with the Beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church in North America while at the same time having secretly communicated "difficulties" with the confessions is a violation of the ninth commandment.
  - b. In keeping with the Rules for Synodical Procedure, section VIII, F, Classis Minnkota delegates will register their protests immediately from the floor if the initial procedures delineated in section II, A, 1 are completed without addressing this issue.
  - c. This intent to register a protest is noted on our synodical credentials to be read out loud as synod convenes. Should appropriate steps be taken to mitigate this great concern, the Classis Minnkota delegates will not protest.

Classis Minnkota  
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

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## COMMUNICATION 14

### **Classis Minnkota**

Classis Minnkota sends delegates to synod each year that protest the ordination and seating of women at synod. In the interests of transparency and clarity, classis wishes to explain the rationale for our protests by sending this communication.

The churches of Classis Minnkota affirm that men and women are created by God with equality in essence and dignity but with distinction in some roles. We praise God for the beautiful diversity he created when he made us male and female. These distinct roles are taught in Scripture, derive from God's creative will, and are to be manifest in complementary roles in the family and church. This belief is reflected in an accurate translation of the Belgic Confession, Article 30, which reads, ". . . when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." (See the original French wording, which refers to persons using the masculine gender.) This belief is therefore not rooted in chauvinism or patriarchy but in Scripture and in our historic confession of faith. It is our hope and prayer that this communication will provide a clear and respectful understanding of our convictions in this matter.

We believe that men and women are created equal as imagebearers of God and as heirs of salvation. We also believe that men and women complement each other in mutually enriching ways and that God has given each gender specific callings in the church and home. We seek to honor and glorify God

by celebrating and using the gifts and abilities he has given to us within the roles he has established for us.

*A. As a classis we affirm the following convictions:*

1. That men and women equally bear the image of God and are called to serve him throughout their lives (Gen. 1:27-28).
2. That we are to follow Christ's example when he honored and respected women during his earthly ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42) and as he continues to equip them for service in his church today (1 Cor. 12:4-7).
3. That the roles for men and women in the church must be defined solely by the Word of God and not by human ideologies such as feminism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, or sexist oppression (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
4. That from the beginning of creation God assigned headship to males in the family and in the church (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).
5. That the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" and then grounded this argument in the good created order (1 Tim. 2:12-13). The church, therefore, should not ordain women to its authoritative offices.
6. That the purpose of spiritual gifts is not self-fulfillment but service to God and others, to the end that God receives all the glory (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26).
7. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women is contrary to Scripture.

*B. We also offer the following observations:*

1. That even though Synod 1995 declared that both complementarian and egalitarian views are faithful interpretations of the Word of God, synodical practice since that time has become markedly egalitarian, making it difficult for complementarians to participate in good conscience.
2. That the complementarian position is held by many male and female members and by other officebearers, churches, and classes in the CRCNA.
3. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women has resulted in offense, division, strife, loss of members, and our expulsion from NAPARC in 1997.
4. That celebration of the egalitarian position and practice through video and song (as done at Synod 2018) causes offense and pricks the consciences of those who hold to the historic complementarian position regarding women in church office.

As members of the body of Christ in the CRCNA, Classis Minnkota does not present this communication in order to offend our brothers and sisters

who hold to the egalitarian view; rather we wish to explain that our convictions are rooted in the Word of God. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Classis Minnkota  
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

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## COMMUNICATION 15

### **Members of LaGrave Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

#### **I. Background**

In the wake of Synods 2022 and 2023, many CRC congregants are struggling with the serious impasse that now exists between their beliefs and those of the denomination.

For some, the heart of the impasse is differing understandings of marriage and human sexuality that arise from different interpretations of Scripture, highlighted particularly by Synod 2022's declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage. We also have read Scripture, have sought the Spirit's direction, and have come to a different conclusion.

For others, the heart of the impasse is Synod 2022's decision to give "confessional status," a new category of synodical decision, to its declaration regarding same-sex sexual activity, thereby making this declaration on the same level as all doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church and requiring all CRC members to agree with this teaching and all officebearers to explicitly bind themselves to this teaching when they sign the Covenant for Officebearers.

For others, it is not just the confessional status of the declaration but the synodical push to police the denomination for any violations of confessional orthodoxy and purge the church of any dissenting voices that has them concerned about what is happening to their denomination. Instead of seeking ways to give room for honest differences of biblical interpretation, synod has instructed its classes to find any and all officebearers and churches with convictions that differ from synod's confessional declaration and "guide [them] into compliance." Instead of allowing the confessional-difficulty gravamen provisions of our Church Order to give officebearers some gracious room to express their conscientious objection to this new confessional position and thereby still sign the Covenant for Officebearers with integrity and remain members in good standing, there is now a strong push to restrict the use of the gravamen provisions of our Church Order.



More and more, some of our members fear that synod as a deliberative assembly is broken. Overtures to synod that raise significant biblical and theological matters that the church must engage with are summarily ignored, including confessional-revision gravamina that synod is required to adjudicate. Synod bundles together scores of such overtures and declares a sweeping decision by synod to be its “answer” to all of them but doesn’t necessarily answer the overtures at all. This breakdown in synodical deliberation, combined with the overwhelming margin of support for this new direction in the church, leaves more and more of our members feeling voiceless and helpless and lacking confidence in synod as a way to discern the work of the Spirit in our midst.

## **II. Members in Protest**

Given Synod 2023’s unequivocal reaffirmation of Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, there are now fewer options to address synod with these concerns. Yet members who share these concerns feel deeply that they must speak into the current crisis in the CRC. To that end, members are invited to sign the Resolution below and thereby identify themselves in a communication to Synod 2024 as a “Member in Protest” in LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

“Protest” is fitting ecclesiastical language in the Christian Reformed Church. We are “Protestants” after all. And protest is a term and category used in our Church Order, Supplement to Church Order, and Rules for Synodical Procedure. A protest is one type of communication to synod. And when Rev. David Struyk could not in good conscience continue as a delegate at Synod 2023, he was not noisy or unruly about it. He simply announced, “I leave in protest.”

We, the undersigned members of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, pray that the broader church and Synod 2024 will receive this protest at recent developments in the CRC as a cry of the heart from members who love the LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church.

## **III. Resolution**

We, the undersigned members of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, declare ourselves to be “members in protest” in the Christian Reformed Church. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological

- reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance."
2. We qualify our status as members of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, given that the "confessional status" attached to Synod 2022's confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: "Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration."
  3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objection to Synod 2022's confessional declaration and sign the Covenant for Officebearers will seriously impede the ability of many to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right nor morally necessary for any church's ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration.
  4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our members with Synod 2022's confessional declaration as expressed above are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC's official teaching on this matter.

Members of LaGrave Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ken Afman	Kerrie Doezema	Barb Leegwater
Mary Afman	Albert Doorn	Isabella Lindh
Jo Arnoys	*Ann Mary Dykstra	Polly Lindh
Bradd Beidler	*Chuck Dykstra	Roland Lindh
Rog Bratt	*Barb Engbers	Barbara Noordeloos
Sue Bratt	*Bruce Engbers	Bob Noordeloos
Bill Boer	Sharon Etheridge	Jon Pastoor
Laurie Boer	Irene Fridsma	Sue Pastoor
Mary Boyk	Ken Fridsma	Marcia Pater
Ryan Boyk	Bryan Ganzevoort	Don Plantinga
Ben Buter	Leila Ganzevoort	Evonne Plantinga
Dave Buter	Elise Greidanus	Liesl Pruis
Kristen Buter	Nelson Greidanus	Rory Pruis
Glenda Buteyn	*Jan Heerspink	Jim Reiffer
Katie Carson	*Donna Klein	Marilou Reiffer
Deb DeHaan	*John Klein	Jason Reiffer
Steve DeHaan	Jerry Kruyf	Melissa Reiffer
Frank Doezema	Susan Kruyf	Liz Rozeboom

Ger Rozeboom	Tom Waalkes	Kay Hoitenga
Ted Rozeboom	Arvin Wierda	Austin Kanis
Gloria Rozeboom	Joyce Wierda	Bob Otte
Lonnie Rynders	Harold Wiersma	Judy Otte
*Dave Setsma	Madelyn Wiersma	Alex Pastoor
*Lynn Setsma	Rick Workman	Emma Pastoor
*Grace Shearer	Paul Wright	Dongo Pewee
Marge Snoeyink	Verla Zuiderveen	Lisa Pewee
Ginge Steele	Mary Jo DeJong	Gordon Ryskamp
William Stroo	Robert DeJong	Joyce Ryskamp
Dick VanDeelen	Elaine DeStigter	Judi Scholten
Jan VanDeelen	Connie DeVries	Scott Scholten
Dave VanderArk	Claire Doorn	Karen Schuitema
Lorrie VanderArk	Micah Doorn	Mike Schuitema
Connie Kuiper VanDyke	Aaron Eding	Kristen VandenBosch
Karl VanDyke	Jana Eding	Joe Vriend
David VerSluis	Tom Glover	Millie Vriend
Janis VerSluis	Jacob Hartman-Tanis	

\*Members of steering committee

*Note:* The above communication was presented to the council of LaGrave Avenue CRC on January 8, 2024, but was not adopted; it was also presented to Classis Grand Rapids South on March 7, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 16

### Members of Inglewood CRC, Edmonton, Alberta

We, as members in good standing of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta, hereby register our protest of certain actions of Synods 2022 and 2023, as hereafter described. By this protest . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as "Synod 2022's confessional declaration"). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance."
2. We qualify our status as members of a Christian Reformed Church, given that the "confessional status" attached to Synod 2022's confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament

that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our names:  
 “Yes, we are members of a Christian Reformed Church, but we must clarify that we do not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”

3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as members to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
5. We declare that the only way we can remain Christian Reformed Church members with integrity, given Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, is “under protest.” Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon our local church, our classis and our denomination.

Members of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton Alberta

Ellen Paquette	John Hiemstra	Rose Nydam
Jim Joosse	Shirley Hiemstra	Devin Boonstra
Trica Boonstra	Amy Nydam	Elly Klumpenhauer
Diana Nelson	Sharon DeMoor	Sheryl Plantinga
Jessica DeMoor	Gary VanderVinne	Jenny Van Belle
Jenna Hoff	Thea Fennema	Dave Nydam
Jack Vandendorp	Karin Van Weelden	Ray Fennema
Gerda Kits	Ron Horjus	Henry Woudstra
John Rhebergen	Peggy Horjus	Alice Joosse
Rita Rhebergen	Sim VanderVinne	Coni Rozema
Rebecca Rozema	Sandra VanderVinne	Janet Paquette
Anita Vandenberg	Judy VanderVinne	Connor Fennema
Jennifer Fennema	Margery Stolte	
Leendert Mos	Henry Bosch	

*Note:* This communication was submitted to the March 8, 2024, meeting of Classis Alberta North but was not adopted.

**Council of First CRC, Vancouver, British Columbia****I. Background**

Since December 2020, the congregation of First CRC of Vancouver, British Columbia, has been participating in prayer and discernment related to engaging with the CRCNA's Human Sexuality Report (HSR) using the restorative practices from Pastor Church Resources (now part of Thrive). We began with listening circles (designed with the denomination's *Challenging Conversations Toolkit*), which resulted in a communal decision to send an overture asking that synod not accede to Recommendation D of the HSR regarding confessional status—an overture that was adopted by Classis B.C. North-West and sent to Synod 2022. Following Synod 2022, we held further conversations and listening circles, and we have been engaging since that time in the specific Next Steps process as laid out by Pastor Church Resources, resulting in a communal conversation that we held in mid-October to talk about specific actions we might consider while moving forward.

A number of clear themes emerged from our “Moving Forward” conversation, and we wanted to share three of them with you:

1. We lament. Our vision at First CRC is to follow Jesus, grow together, and extend hospitality—and together we seek to live into our core values of being sustained by worship, formed in Christ, made for relationship, and being here for good. As we see the impact of the difficult discussions and decisions regarding the Human Sexuality Report, we acknowledge the challenge to live out our vision and values, and we lament the pain that has been caused in our congregation, in our denomination, and in the LGBTQ community.
2. Specifically, these are the laments in our congregation:
  - the impact that this has had on First CRC, including on those who have left, those uncertain about their belonging in our congregation, and those who are now weary and wary about how we can carry on
  - that, at times, thoughtful dialogue has been replaced with polarization, when Christ's prayer for his followers under pressure is that we would remain unified to God's glory (John 15-17)
  - the ways one aspect of human sexuality has seemingly eclipsed other areas of Christian discipleship
  - the ways our congregants, including members of the LGBTQ community and other individuals, have been talked about and treated in the denomination-wide discussions
  - the process of Synods 2022 and 2023, looking for a quick majority without listening to the significant minority reports or pausing after pleading from the delegates

- the discord and disconnection we experience as a congregation in the Christian Reformed Church, wondering where we, personally and congregationally, belong
- the witness of the church being negatively impacted when we have failed to love God with all of who we are, and to love each other as ourselves

We acknowledge with humility that we “see through a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). But as we seek unity and pursue God-honoring lives, we want to acknowledge the pain we see both historic and present, and to articulate our hope for the postures we wish to take as we live together as a community in Christ moving forward.

Still we call this to mind: because of the Lord’s love and his faithfulness, he will see us through this by leading us, bringing us peace, helping us to trust each other, and filling us with hope (Lam. 3:21-24).

3. Noting synod’s decisions related to confessional status, the nature of the discussion on gravamen, and the seeming dissipation of synod as a deliberative body, we are left discouraged. We register our protest that synod left no room for disagreement and raised the matter to confessional status. We acknowledge disagreement in our council and congregation concerning these matters noted above, and concerning postures synod has taken in its decision making. This does not mean we disagree with the entirety of the HSR—in fact, we appreciate much of it.
4. We love the Christian Reformed Church, and we desire to stay together with our classis and navigate questions regarding the HSR locally rather than being forced to follow synodical decisions that ask us to discipline or further harm congregations that we love.

To that end, we submit the Communication of Protest below, a formal complaint which we have adapted, which a number of CRC congregations are considering adopting, and which was shared by a group within the CRC called Better Together. As Better Together notes, “While some may question the use of this term, the category of “Protest” is fitting ecclesiastical language used within the Christian Reformed Church. “Protest” is a term and category used in our Church Order and its Supplements, and it can be found within the Rules for Synodical Procedure. Additionally, a protest is an appropriate form of communication to synod.”

## **II. Communication of Protest**

We, First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver, submit the following Communication of Protest. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal

- marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023’s decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
  3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their respectful objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
  4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
  5. Synod 2022’s confessional declaration has been a hardship for us. However, we seek to remain like-minded in Christ (Phil. 2:5-11), desiring to continue to participate in the denomination because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon it.

Finally, the Council of First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver forwards this communication to Synod 2024.

Council of First CRC, Vancouver, British Columbia  
David Bacon, clerk

*Note:* This communication was submitted to the February 6, 2024, meeting of Classis B.C. North-West but was not adopted.

**Council of Church of the Savior, South Bend, Indiana**

We, the council of Church of the Savior of South Bend, Indiana, declare ourselves to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023’s decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Office Bearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, is “under protest.” Though under protest regarding Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon our denomination.



The Council of Church of the Savior CRC adopts this protest as its own and forwards it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Church of the Savior, South Bend, Indiana  
Charis Schepers, clerk

*Note:* This communication was submitted to the February 1, 2024, meeting of Classis Holland but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 19

### **Council of Ann Arbor (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church**

We, Ann Arbor (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church, declare ourselves to be a "church in protest" within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as "Synod 2022's confessional declaration"). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance."
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the "confessional status" attached to Synod 2022's confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: "Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration."
3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church's ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church's members with Synod 2022's confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at

all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC's official teaching on this matter.

5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is "under protest." Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Council of Ann Arbor (Mich.) CRC  
Larry Gruppen, president of council

*Note:* This communication was submitted to Classis Lake Erie at their meeting on Saturday, March 2, 2024, but was not adopted. Therefore the Council of Ann Arbor CRC submits this letter of protest to be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024*.

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## COMMUNICATION 20

### **Council of Waterloo (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church**

We, Waterloo Christian Reformed Church, declare ourselves to be a "church in protest" within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as "Synod 2022's confessional declaration"). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance."
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the "confessional status" attached to Synod 2022's confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: "Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration."

3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church's ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church's members with Synod 2022's confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC's official teaching on this matter.
5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is "under protest." Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Finally, we forward this protest as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Waterloo (Ont.) CRC  
Roelof Eikelboom, chair of council  
Pamela Joosse, clerk of council

*Note:* This communication was presented to Classis Huron on February 21, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 21

### Members of Ebenezer CRC, Leduc, Alberta

#### I. Background

Our congregation was not given the opportunity to use denominational materials (such as the *Healthy Conversations Toolkit*) to engage in healthy, church-wide discussions. Many of us felt voiceless as we watched Synod 2022 and Synod 2023 and are concerned about the Advisory Committee 8 majority report, forwarded to Synod 2024, and its implications.

#### II. Communication of protest

We recognize that a communication of protest or complaint is less weighty than an overture; however, we also realize that it allows many members of

our congregation to allow their names to stand alongside one another regardless of their own specific and limited concerns regarding confessional status and in recognition that the restrictions on confessional-difficulty gravamina have far-reaching implications on the health of our congregation and the denomination. It is our prayer that this act of solidarity will give “voice” to more individuals in congregations before synod.

We, members of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church of Leduc, Alberta, and of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, declare ourselves to be a “community in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We are concerned that churches have not been equipped or supported in the practical impact the decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023 are having on their well-being.
2. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including but not limited to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level.
3. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including but not limited to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
4. We protest synod’s recent use of “confessional status,” as it sets a concerning precedent requiring all CRC members to agree with specific teachings and all officebearers to explicitly bind themselves to such teachings (in particular, when they sign the Covenant for Officebearers). Such use of “confessional status” also impacts CRCNA agency employees and board members. Synod’s actions seem to lead to a lack of discussion rather than healthy engagement and appreciation for diverse voices within the body of Christ.
5. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are not settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
6. We protest that overtures to synod that raise significant biblical and theological matters with which the church must engage have been summarily ignored (including confessional-revision gravamina that synod is required to adjudicate). Instead, synod has bundled together scores of

such overtures and summarily declared sweeping decisions to be its answer to all of them, disregarding the fact that the answers provided often fail to engage the actual concerns within the overtures themselves adequately. This breakdown in synodical deliberation, combined with the seemingly overwhelming support for this new direction in the church, leaves more and more churches feeling voiceless and helpless and raises questions about synod’s capacity to be a deliberative body.

Finally, this community of members of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Leduc, Alberta, as members also of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, adopts this protest as its own and forwards it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Members of Ebenezer CRC, Leduc, Alberta

Frank de Boer	Abe Horneman	Josh Van de Kraats
Donna Debbink	Tena Horneman	Nicole Van de Kraats
George Debbink	Leanne Klooster	Owen Van de Kraats
Jenna Debbink	Heather Leddy	Terry Van de Kraats
Mike Debbink	Emily Meetsma	Ed van’t Hoff
Albert DeBoer	Bryan Meetsma	Monica van’t Hoff
Marianne DeBoer	Tamara Perry	Bea Vlieg
Grace Deunk	Dennis Prins	Pete Vlieg
Joe Deunk	Ruby Prins	
KerryAnne Hoogland	Alice Van de Kraats	

*Note:* This communication was presented to the meeting of Classis Alberta North on March 9, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 22

### **Council of Community CRC, Wyoming, Michigan**

#### **Background**

Community CRC of Wyoming, Michigan, includes some members who agree and some who disagree with Synod 2022’s declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage. Both sides of the argument are using biblical grounds, and some on both sides are settled in their view. We as a body, in the interest of unity in the greater gospel of Christ and our mission in our own community, want to maintain room for both opinions and have the freedom to continue to openly wrestle with this issue without condemnation of one side or the other.

#### **Declaration**

Therefore we, Community CRC, declare ourselves to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. It seems to us that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church's ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations.
2. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022's elevation of the statement "all same-sex sexual activity is sinful" to confessional status because this requires all members of the CRC to agree on that point. We consider members of our church who either agree or disagree with that declaration for biblical reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance." That would imply that those with disagreements on any point of our confessions or confessional interpretations thereof must be guided into compliance.
3. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church in protest, given that the "confessional status" attached to Synod 2022's confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: "Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that some in our church do not agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration."
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of some of our church's members with Synod 2022's confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a disagreement between some members in good standing in our church and the CRC's official teaching on this matter.
5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is "under protest." Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Finally, the council of Community CRC adopts this protest as its own and now forwards it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Community CRC, Wyoming, Michigan  
Char Kubiak, clerk of council

*Note:* This communication was presented to classis Grand Rapids South at its March 7, 2024, meeting but was not adopted.

**Council of Fellowship Church, Edmonton, Alberta**

Fellowship Church of Edmonton, Alberta, declares itself to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023’s decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that the vast majority in our church does not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must always be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, is “under protest.” Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon our denomination.

Finally, the council of Fellowship Church, Edmonton, adopts this protest as its own and forwards it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Fellowship Church, Edmonton, Alberta  
John E. Hull, chair

*Note:* This communication was presented to Classis Alberta North at its March 7, 2024, meeting but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 24

### **Council of Avenue CRC, Edmonton, Alberta**

We, Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton, Alberta, declare ourselves to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023’s decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at



all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC's official teaching on this matter.

5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is "under protest." Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Council of Avenue CRC, Edmonton, Alberta  
Francine Drisner, authorized signatory for council

*Note:* This communication was presented to the meeting of Classis Alberta North on March 9, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 25

### **Council of Bethany CRC, Muskegon, Michigan**

We, Bethany Christian Reformed Church of Muskegon, Michigan, love the CRC and wish to remain in faithful fellowship as we have done for over 100 years. However, we object to Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all officebearers to agree with Synod 2022's declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage.

Therefore . . .

1. We protest that the decisions of synod on same-sex-marriage have placed us in an agree-or-leave position.
2. We protest that agree-or-leave is an unfair and tragic thing to force onto people who are fellow followers of Christ, many of whom have been longtime members and loyal supporters of the CRC.
3. We protest that church officebearers must be limited only to people who heartily and unreservedly agree with the confessional interpretation of Synod 2022.
4. We protest that officebearers in our church who disagree with synod's decision for sound biblical and theological reasons, or even allow for the possibility of a different interpretation, are now to be considered out of compliance and must be guided into compliance or resign their position.
5. We would support expanding the definition of "confessional status" allowing for godly people on both sides to remain in fellowship while

continuing to search the Scriptures and engage with Jesus-followers who are same-sex attracted.

6. We would support actions by synod to again revisit the issue of same-sex sexual activity and to include all viewpoints on the issue during their discussion.
7. We believe that any restriction upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina (under consideration by Synod 2024) preventing officebearers from declaring conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, are neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary.

We submit this letter of protest as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Bethany CRC, Muskegon, Michigan  
Chris Ufnal, clerk

*Note:* This communication was presented to the meeting of Classis Muskegon on February 22, 2024, but was not adopted.

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## COMMUNICATION 26

### **Classis Grand Rapids East**

At its February 29, 2024, meeting, Classis Grand Rapids East adopted the six communications below from Boston Square CRC, Fuller Avenue CRC, Grace CRC, Neland Avenue CRC, Woodlawn CRC, and Eastern Avenue CRC. While not all of the congregations of classis are in protest, classis as a whole considers it important that synod hear these cries of the heart from several of our congregations.

#### **I. Protest Communication—Boston Square CRC**

We, Boston Square Christian Reformed Church, affirm that . . .

1. Our core identity is as God’s imagebearers and God’s adopted children. Assurance of this core identity pervades all of Scripture, the teachings of the church universal, and our Reformed creeds and confessions.
2. God calls the church to be a community of believers who love and accept one another despite our differences. Faithful Christians may disagree on the application of Scripture and the confessions to specific cultural issues and norms without jeopardizing either their standing within the kingdom of God or their welcome within the church.
3. Sexuality is a good part of our created being, yet faithful Christians may disagree how best to apply the message of Scripture to grateful living within our created sexuality. Within our own congregation, members disagree on these issues, but we are determined to live together in faithful community as part of the family of God.

4. Many members of our congregation have been harmed by the deliberations and decisions of Synod 2022 and Synod 2023, especially by the condemnation, judgment, and self-righteous legalism expressed or suggested by members of our denomination. These messages have been harmful to God’s people—to individuals, churches, the CRCNA, and the church universal.

Therefore, we, Boston Square Christian Reformed Church, reluctantly declare ourselves to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We reject Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, even within faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We reject Synod 2023’s declaration that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We openly acknowledge that the carefully considered disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration are settled. We do not want to deny, minimize, or hide the fundamental disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter. Not all members of our congregation (or indeed even our council) think that the traditionalist position affirmed by Synod 2022 is wrong, but we are in agreement in lamenting how the “confessional status” declaration unnecessarily pits believer against believer.
3. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes the uniform agreement of all CRC members. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity is under protest. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon our denomination.
4. We deny that this is a defining issue for faithful discipleship, and by God’s grace we will not allow it to divide us.

Council of Boston Square CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

## **II. Communication to Synod 2024—Fuller Avenue CRC**

We, the Council of Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church, declare ourselves to be a “church in protest” within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. By this declaration . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022’s use of “confessional status” to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s

- confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as “Synod 2022’s confessional declaration”). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023’s decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
2. We qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the “confessional status” attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes uniform agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a metaphorical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that many in our church do not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
  3. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of many churches to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
  4. We desire to be transparent with synod that the disagreements of many of our church’s members with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, as expressed above, are settled. While all members of the church must at all times be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members in good standing in our church and the CRC’s official teaching on this matter.
  5. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, is “under protest.” Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God’s blessing upon our denomination.

Finally, the council of Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church adopts this communication of protest as its own and forwards it as a communication to Classis Grand Rapids East, requesting that Classis Grand Rapids East adopt it and forward it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Fuller Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

### **III. Letter of Protest from Grace CRC Council**

As a result of decisions by the Synods of 2022 and 2023 and the decisions ahead for Synod 2024, we, the leadership of Grace Church, protest actions

already taken by synod regarding human sexuality and those actions recommended for consideration by Synod 2024. We write with enormous concern about the moralistic spirit we perceive in the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the direction that is taking the denomination.

Grace Church openly disagrees with the assertion that same-sex relationships, including marriage, are not chaste and with the elevation of synod's definition of unchastity to the level of confessional status. We also oppose changing the gravamen process.

Our church has collaboratively participated in a years-long process of discernment, engagement with Scripture and theological texts, listening to members of our church community, and prayer. The result of that process is our full participation policy that encourages all who love Jesus, including those in same-sex relationships, to use their gifts of leadership within our church.

We will not attempt to relitigate arguments but instead will highlight the implications and ramifications we discern are ahead for the CRCNA.

We believe that the harm inflicted by synod's decisions is real. In the name of faithfulness to one interpretation of Scripture and one view of purity of doctrine and life, the CRC is causing trauma and deep sorrow in our queer siblings, and harm to our congregations, both those that hold to the views expressed in the HSR and our publicly affirming congregations. Many congregations are focused on disaffiliation, either by pushing others out or figuring out how to leave, and are not devoting pastoral care to those experiencing the greatest degree of harm. Distracted from ministry, especially from spreading the great good news, people are looking for new church families, forced to leave those with whom they have shared lives of faith, sometimes for a lifetime. People who have participated enthusiastically in the life of the CRC are trying to figure out if it is possible to preserve favorite ministries such as World Renew and Calvin University from outside of the denomination that created them. Pastors in anguish are struggling to know how to follow their faithful and conscientious convictions without jeopardizing their ordination or losing their congregations.

We believe further chaos will occur if Synod 2024 changes our gravamen process. Starting with the Wittenberg door, our tradition has always made room for the expression and exploration of nonmajority positions. Recent examples include wide discussion of human origins stimulated by the scholarship of Dr. Donald Wilson of Calvin University and of the beginnings of the universe by Prof. Howard Van Til. President Spoelhof, the Calvin Board of Trustees, and synod supported the freedom of these scholars even when not always agreeing with their positions. At Calvin Seminary, Professors Harry Boer and Harold Dekker both wondered aloud about the universality of God's grace. Neither were defrocked, dismissed from their positions, or subjected to church discipline. *Status confessionis* was not used

to silence or exclude them. Open dialogue and commitment to allowing respectful room for differences are necessary to continually reforming our beliefs and practice, particularly when those positions are in conflict. Such open conversation and forbearance in the face of disagreement has allowed the CRCNA to modulate its position on divorce, remarriage, and racism, as examples.

Synod 2024 will consider restrictions on the gravamen process. Approving these proposed restrictions would upend our tradition and create a significant barrier to our ability to function at the congregational level and as a denomination. Current and potential office-holders who have questions about any doctrines (e.g., infant vs. adult baptism, election, predestination, depravity, and atonement) may be unwilling to serve if they will be subject to the constant threat of church discipline. The intellectual integrity and personal moral agency of church leaders will be compromised.

A significant reality is that many have lost confidence in synod as a deliberative body. Synodical processes have allowed for overtures that raise significant matters to be summarily dismissed without dialogue in advisory committees or the whole body of delegates. The synodical committee that produced the HSR ignored queer voices and scientific data and was biased in its membership. These breakdowns hampered synodical decision making and have left many individuals and entire congregations feeling voiceless and marginalized.

Here is a quick summary of our concerns:

- We disagree with assigning confessional status to a singular interpretation of “unchastity.”
- Restrictions on the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina will impede the ability of church councils to function.
- Disagreements within the denomination’s churches are not settled by declaring synodical actions to be “binding.” Minimizing conscientious disagreement among leaders and other members who are in good standing can be a barrier to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to God’s continuing revelation of what God’s love looks like.

Our council at Grace CRC has chosen obedience to our understanding of God’s revelation to our church community rather than to the denominational stance recently taken. The only way we can remain in the CRCNA is “under protest.” This letter is our cry of the heart to the denomination we have loved.

Council of Grace CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

#### **IV. Communication from Neland Avenue CRC, February 2024**

The mission of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church is “Believing that the grace of God, the sacrificial love of Jesus, and the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit are at work in the world and also in us, Neland Church

seeks to be a community of hope where all will experience and extend the deep welcome of Christ.”

Since 1915, Neland Avenue CRC has served as Christ’s witness within the Christian Reformed Church. For most of those years, the church has been standing at the corner of Neland Avenue and Watkins Street in the heart of Grand Rapids. Through many changes in church and neighborhood Neland has endured, and the Neland faith family remains committed to living out the Scriptures, the confessions, and its mission.

Nearly ten years ago, the Neland faith family embarked on a careful review of its mission. We have long been committed to serving with our neighbors and neighborhood; however, members of the congregation who identify as LGBTQ+ wondered if they were fully included in Neland’s mission.

Years of prayer, scriptural discernment, educational programs, and meaningful conversations led to the understanding that, yes, Neland’s mission called for the full participation of our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ, including those in same-sex marriages, alongside members who hold traditional views of gender and marriage (see appendix below). The kingdom of God is deep and wide and, as Jesus preached and embodied, open to all—especially to those typically overlooked by church leadership.

As we’ve stood with the marginalized, however, we as a church have felt increasingly marginalized. The decisions of Synods 2022 and 2023 have left us wondering: Is there still a place for us in the CRC? Many of our members wish for our congregation to stay in the CRC because of the theological roots we share, the strong ministries of the CRC, and deep personal ties; many others feel we can no longer stay. The actions and tone of recent synods have brought harm to our LGBTQ+ members and division to the denomination.

So, as we’ve wondered if there is still a place for Neland in the CRC, we find that a deeper question has emerged: What is God calling us to hold on to—to stay faithful to? As we see it, there’s not just one thing but two that we’ve been holding on to; two Great Commission priorities that we cannot let go:

First, **mission**: Since 2016 we have stood for full participation of all members in the body of Christ—including our LGBTQ+ siblings who have been marginalized for so long. We need them. We need the fruit of the Spirit they clearly bear. And we believe they are called to belong and bless others with all their gifts, as much as any part of our body. We find our identity not just in looking back but looking forward to our forever family in the kingdom of God. Only with that consideration can we understand marriage and sexuality, which are a shadow of things to come.

Second, **unity**: While many claim it’s impossible for Christians of different perspectives to hold together in these polarized times, we read in the Bible that “all things are possible with God,” in Christ. We refuse to let

go of that promise. We do not believe our unity stems from uniformity to a specific interpretation of a confession or an ethical norm. Our unity is in the family of God, formed and held fast in Christ alone. We abide in Christ's covenant of grace, not in any we make on our own.

While our members think differently about questions of human sexuality, our Neland faith family has walked this journey together, understanding that our mission to serve others in Christ's name is more important than total agreement on complex social issues. We continue to be blessed by members who hold a variety of views on marriage and sexuality, even as we are being blessed with many new members—people drawn to mission and unity, not Church Order debates and disciplinary actions.

We believe that to be faithful to Christ and to the Scriptures is to hold to both mission and unity. And we believe it is possible to live faithfully in a community where some matters remain unclear or uncertain. God has given the CRC many churches and numerous classes that serve as testimonies that this unity in diversity is possible.

Thus we pray that Synod 2024 will give us room to do the following:

- **Live out our mission**, by continuing to allow officebearers to conscientiously object to the Synod 2022 decision on same-sex marriage through an unrestricted gravamina process, and by respecting the authority of the local church to elect its officebearers in accordance with the Scriptures.
- **Live in Christ-centered unity**, by continuing to allow our church and classis to fully participate in synod and in the work of the denomination, and by refraining from punitive or probationary disciplines of our leaders, our church, or our classis.

If synod should act to prohibit or inhibit this work—which we believe God's Word and Spirit are clearly calling us to do—it would sadly be closing the door on our participation in this denomination.

We hope you will receive this communication as an opportunity and as a plea from the heart: to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”; we share “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:3-6). Impossible as it may sound in these divisive times, we know that “all things hold together” in Christ (Col. 1:17).

Council of Neland Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

#### *Appendix*

1. To further understand Neland Avenue CRC's journey, please refer to the following:
  - Neland Avenue CRC's communication to synod on electing its deacon, via Classis Grand Rapids East (*Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-*



2021, pp. 594-616; [crcna.org/sites/default/files/2021\\_agenda\\_supplement\\_shaded.pdf#page=95](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/2021_agenda_supplement_shaded.pdf#page=95))

- Classis Grand Rapids East's Overture 55: Adopt in Principle a "Local Discernment" Approach, Appoint a Study Committee to Articulate the Best Biblical Rationale for *Traditional* and *Affirming* Viewpoints, and Continue Denomination-wide Prayer Initiative (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, pp. 663-80; [crcna.org/sites/default/files/2022\\_agenda.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/2022_agenda.pdf))
  - Neland Avenue CRC's appeal of synod's instruction to rescind its decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage (*Agenda for Synod 2023*, pp. 622-27; [crcna.org/sites/default/files/2023\\_agenda.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/2023_agenda.pdf))
2. For a thoughtful study that helped open our minds through careful biblical study and a review of the discoveries of science to the Spirit's work, please read Classis Grand Rapids East's communication to Synod 2016 (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 663-68) and its Study Report on Biblical and Theological Support Currently Offered by Christian Proponents of Same-Sex Marriage (2016, rev. 2017; [classisgreast.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ssmRevised.pdf](http://classisgreast.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ssmRevised.pdf)).
  3. Finally, a biblical analysis presented by Neland Avenue CRC member Rev. Duane Kelderman: [youtube.com/watch?v=VAw5mMCCmL4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=VAw5mMCCmL4).

## **V. Communication to Synod—Woodlawn CRC**

The Congregation of Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is wrestling with the impact of recent synodical decisions and anticipating the impact of potential synodical decisions. In keeping with synodical procedures, we present this communication out of love and concern for the church. By this communication . . .

1. We express our disagreement with Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal commitment (hereafter referred to as "Synod 2022's confessional declaration"). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for sound biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing. We disagree with Synod 2023's decision that they must be "guided into compliance."
2. We declare that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina, by which officebearers can currently declare their conscientious objections to the interpretations of the confessions, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration, and sign the Covenant for Officebearers, will seriously impede the ability of our church to function, especially at the council level. If our church leadership were to be limited only to those who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022's confessional declaration, then we would restrict from church leadership many present members.

3. We declare that the only way we can fully function as a Christian Reformed Church with integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is by expressing our objection to this past decision, and by communicating our deep concern for a potential restriction of the confessional-difficulty gravamen process. Though we are expressing our objection and concern, we nevertheless continue to support the CRCNA because we have a deep love for our denomination and seek God's blessing upon her.

Finally, the council of Woodlawn CRC humbly adopts this communication as its own and forwards it to classis, requesting that classis adopt it and forward it as a communication to Synod 2024.

Council of Woodlawn CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

## **VI. Communication to Synod—Eastern Avenue CRC**

We, the undersigned congregation of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, wish to declare to Classis Grand Rapids East and to Synod 2024 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America that we are a church in protest in the Christian Reformed Church. By this declaration . . .

1. We reaffirm our desire to remain faithful to the teachings of Scripture, the historic creeds of the Christian faith, the three confessions of the Christian Reformed Church (as interpreted prior to the 2022 Synod of the CRCNA), and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
2. We acknowledge that across different historical eras and varying cultural contexts the church has needed to apply the teachings of Scripture to contemporary thought and practice in its endeavor to be a faithful witness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
3. We recognize that in these endeavors siblings in Christ who have sought to be faithful have, at times, come to differing interpretations of what is required to conform to the teachings of Scripture.
4. We welcome as full and faithful members of our congregation all who claim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, seek to live their lives in conformity to his teachings, and desire to serve him.
5. We express our desire to remain unified in Christ with other members of the Christian Reformed Church in the essentials of the faith and lament the recent movement toward requiring certain uniformity in thought and practice as markers of inclusion within Christ's church.
6. We protest Synod 2022's use of "confessional status" to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage (hereafter referred to as "Synod 2022's confessional declaration"). We consider church members and officebearers in our church who disagree with that declaration for weighty biblical and theological reasons to still be members in good standing.

- We disagree with Synod’s 2023 decision that they must be “guided into compliance.”
7. We necessarily must qualify our status as a Christian Reformed Church, given that the confessional status attached to Synod 2022’s confessional declaration assumes universal agreement of all CRC members. We lament that we now are forced to have a hypothetical asterisk by our church name: “Yes, we are Christian Reformed, but we must clarify that our congregation does not agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.”
  8. We note that any restrictions upon the use of confessional-difficulty *gravamina* by which officebearers can declare their conscientious objections to interpretations of the confessions—whether it be on infant baptism, women’s ordination (should some future synod bar that as a confessional matter), or Synod 2022’s confessional declaration—and still sign the Covenant of Officebearers will seriously impede the ability of our church and others to function, especially at the council level. We judge that it is neither right, feasible, nor morally necessary for any church’s ministry leadership to be limited only to the people who unreservedly agree with all of the confessional interpretations, including Synod 2022’s confessional declaration.
  9. We desire to be transparent with synod that our congregation’s disagreement with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration is a settled matter. While all members of the church must always be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it would be disingenuous for us as a church to deny, minimize, or hide a fundamental and intractable disagreement between a significant number of members of good standing in our church and the CRC’s decision to make a particular interpretation a confessional matter.
  10. We declare that the only way we can remain a Christian Reformed congregation with integrity, given Synod 2022’s confessional declaration, is under protest. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we treasure our relationship with the CRCNA, honor the positive Reformed witness it has made in many areas of human life, and seek God’s blessing upon our denomination.

Council of Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Classis Grand Rapids East  
Robert Arbogast, stated clerk