July 14, 2023

Stated Clerks of Classes

Dear Stated Clerks:

Synod 2023 is now a few weeks in the past. During synod, delegates, ethnic advisers, faculty advisers, and young adult representatives poured their hearts into prayer and deliberation. As you know, there were many weighty agenda matters. The delegates and advisers conducted themselves admirably, especially during the advisory committee meetings. The advisory committee chairs and reporters, along with the officers of synod led the meetings with grace, wisdom, and diligence. Significant time was given to listening to each other and the Spirit’s leading throughout the discussions. Synod 2023 began on June 9 in worship and times of worship and prayer were distributed throughout the “business” of synod. In fact gratitude for the planning and leading of worship was a frequent sentiment shared in the evaluations after synod. Prayer played a central role, not only in worship and at the beginning and end of sessions, but also throughout the day and during the off hours.

The decisions of synod are even now being recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2023*, which should be publicly available at the beginning of September. We have been intently sorting through synod’s many decisions, highlighting for the appropriate bodies anything that would affect their specific work and ministry. Some important decisions affecting classes include (1) study and input on the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders, (2) changes regarding who may be delegated to classis and synod, (3) proposed church order changes around bivocational pastors, and (4) instructions to guide officebearers of constituent churches into compliance with the decisions of Synod 2022 regarding same-sex relationships. These are but a few of several recommendations for follow-up by your classis in the months ahead.

In addition to sending you a link to the *Acts of Synod 2023* as soon as it is available, we are enclosing a summary of synod’s decisions. Keep in mind that the digital version of the *Acts of Synod 2023* will be posted to the CRC website at [crcna.org/SynodResources](http://www.crcna.org/SynodResources) before the printed version is available. A “Stated Clerks Connect” video meeting will be scheduled for September to review decisions of synod and to help answer questions you may have arising from synod’s decisions. A Doodle will be sent out soon to find a date for this meeting.

Thank you for carefully reviewing the attached summary of synod and for assisting your classis in processing and carrying out the decisions of Synod 2023. If you have any questions as you read through the summary, or if we can be of further assistance in your work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

 

Zachary J. King Scott DeVries

General Secretary of the CRCNA Director of Synodical Services

Encl: Summary of Synod 2023 Decisions for Classes

**Synod 2023 Decisions**

These decisions are derived from drafts of the minutes of Synod 2023, and as such are *not* an official or complete accounting. We provide these in the awareness that the efforts involved to achieve the level of accuracy and historical continuity involved in preparing the official minutes creates a timing mismatch with those who need to minister, communicate, and do other work stemming from these decisions.

**Council of Delegates**

1. That synod approve all requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2023.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod accept the invitation of Lee Street CRC in Wyoming, Michigan, to serve as the convening church of Synod 2024, to be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on the campus of Calvin University (II, A, 7).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod take note of the *Our Journey 2025* (Ministry Plan) resources, including visuals, conversation cards, and other tools to aid in engaging classes and churches in the excitement and ownership of the ministry plan (II, B, 2).

*—Noted*

1. That synod recognize the U.S. Ministry Board’s appointment of Dan DeKam to the position of director of U.S. ministry operations and express its gratitude to Joel Huyser for his service as interim director of U.S. ministry operations for the past year, and for his faithful leadership and service to the CRCNA for over 28 years (COD Supplement section I, E).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod adopt the following with regard to Congregational Ministries (Thrive) (II, B, 9 and Appendix D):
	1. That synod recognize Thrive as a ministry agency of the CRCNA to engage and accompany Christian Reformed congregations as they seek to faithfully and holistically embody the gospel in their respective contexts.
	2. That synod approve the vision, mission, mandate, and core postures in the guiding reorganization document as the synodical framework for Thrive (Appendix D).
	3. That synod (a) conclude the synodical mandates and directives given to the previously separate ministries in Thrive and (b) instruct Thrive to utilize these historical guidelines as valuable information for understanding synod’s intent regarding the desired denominational support for congregations.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod affirm the work of the Council of Delegates pertaining to church planting in both the RCA and the CRC denominations (section II, A, 12, b)

*—Adopted*

1. That synod affirm the work of the Council of Delegates pertaining to opposing white supremacy and systemic racism (section II, A, 13).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod affirm the work of the Council of Delegates pertaining to the general secretary communication on racism and biblical justice (Supplement, section II, D).

—*Adopted*

1. That synod ratify the organizational concept and structure in the revised COD Governance Handbook (Appendix A) and receive the draft handbook for information (COD Supplement section I, C).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod adopt the following change to Church Order Article 45 proposed by Synod 2022 (II, A, 12, a) (additions indicated by italics):

Synod is the assembly representing the churches of all classes. Each classis shall *ordinarily* delegate one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod. A *classis may send no more than two delegates bearing the same office.*

*—Adopted*

1. That synod adopt the proposed revised “CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders” and adopt the accompanying FAQ sheet (see Addendum B) with the included introduction and the limited amendments to the text of the code of conduct.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod affirm that the Code of Conduct is subservient to Scripture and our Confessions, and must be interpreted and utilized accordingly.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod propose that Synod 2024 adopt the following revisions/additions to the Church Order and its Supplements (indicated by italics)

Add the following new Article 5-b and Supplement, Article 5-b to the current Church Order Article 5 and its Supplement (the existing Article 5 and its Supplement would become Article 5-a and Supplement, Article 5-a).

*Church Order Article 5-b*

All officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5-b

*Supplement, Article 5-b*

*—Adopted*

1. That synod propose that Synod 2024 revise Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c, section c as indicated by the following addition in italics:

*Supplement, Article 13-c, section c*

The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister’s commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one’s signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage councils and classes to implement the Code of Conduct for all staff (non-ordained as well as ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church or classis.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod mandate the Office of General Secretary to oversee the development of training modules that orient ministry leaders to the Code of Conduct.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod offer sincere thanks and gratitude to the Committee Addressing the Abuse of Power, to the Council of Delegates, and to the Code of Conduct Review Team for their countless hours and valuable efforts in laying the groundwork for the Code of Conduct.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod approve discontinuing the practice and policy of reviewing and recommending charitable organizations to CRC churches for offerings (II, A, 15; II, C, 2; see also Appendix E in COD Governance Handbook).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to provide the criteria currently used by CRCNA staff to the churches to assist in their vetting process of charitable organizations being considered for offerings.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod ratify the following with regard to organizations requesting to be placed on the recommended-for-offerings list:
	1. The list of above-ministry share and specially designated offerings for denominational agencies, institutions, and ministries of the CRC (COD Supplement section II, G, 2, a).
	2. The list of nondenominational organizations, previously accredited, that have been approved for calendar year 2024 (COD Supplement section II, G, 2, b).
	3. The inclusion of 222Disciple on the list of accredited organizations for offerings in the churches in the United States (COD Supplement section II, G, 2, c).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to do the following as recommended in the Review of Ministry Shares Reimagined (COD Supplement section II, G, 1, b; Appendix M):
2. Provide greater flexibility in the pledge process cycle, allowing churches to determine their pledge cycle based on their fiscal year.

*—Adopted*

1. Suggest to the churches what would be a reasonable amount to cover basic/core denominational operational costs as part of their pledge.

*—Adopted*

1. Provide to the churches and classes more information on pledges and giving results, including what comprises the basic/core denominational costs.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod direct the Council of Delegates to continue the Review of Ministry Shares Reimagined by doing the following:
2. Conduct a survey or make personal contacts targeted to churches that are not currently participating in the ministry-share program.
3. Conduct a study of other similar denominations (e.g., RCA, PCA, ECO, EPC, ARC) to compare quotas/ministry shares/requests to work toward a new vision for future ministry funding mechanisms.
4. Make recommendations for further changes to the ministry-share program based on the findings of the above.

*—Adopted*

**Historical Committee**

1. That synod endorse the delineation of the respective duties of the general secretary and the Historical Committee regarding oversight of the denominational archives.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod recognize that the Historical Committee is adding committee members from the Korean church community and Classis Red Mesa, where oral history is being documented.

*—Adopted*

**Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee**

1. That synod reappoint Yvonne Schenk to a second three-year term.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod receive the report on the World Council of Churches as information, noting that a formal recommendation regarding membership will come to a subsequent synod.

*—Received as information*

1. That synod recognize the Alliance of Reformed Churches as a church in cooperation for the purpose of continued pursuit toward designation as a church in communion, and, by way of exception, that while designated as a church in cooperation, congregations or officebearers with previous CRCNA/RCA dual-affiliation credentials maintain their affiliation with the CRCNA.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to appoint a team of staff and subject matter experts to work with the Alliance of Reformed Churches to address matters related to church in communion status, Church Order matters regarding “orderly exchange” of officebearers (Church Order Supplement, Art. 8), and other matters related to benefits of CRC officebearers. In addition, if a former RCA congregation or network requests it in the next year, this team is authorized to address the same matters with them.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod affirm the appointment of Jake Bentum by the Council of Delegates to serve a modified first term, effective November 1, 2022, through July 1, 2025, with eligibility for reappointment to a subsequent term.

*—Adopted*

**Thrive**

1. That synod acknowledge the reports of these denominational ministries: CCG/Centre for Public Dialogue, Chaplaincy and Care, Disability Concerns, Diversity, Faith Formation, Indigenous Ministry (Canada), Pastor Church Resources, Race Relations, Safe Church,Social Justice, and Worship; —and thank them for their work.

*—Adopted*

**ReFrame Ministries**

1. That synod encourage congregations to use ReFrame’s materials to support their own local ministries and outreach.

—*Adopted*

**Resonate Global Mission**

1. That synod, along with the Council of Delegates, encourage all Christian Reformed congregations to recognize the following Sundays as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Resonate Global Mission: Easter, Pentecost, and the second and third Sundays in September.

—*Adopted*

1. That synod thank Joel Huyser for his 28 years of dedicated service to Resonate Global Mission, World Missions, and the CRCNA.

—*Adopted*

**World Renew**

1. That synod commend the report received from World Renew.

—*Adopted*

1. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew in fulfillment of their synodical mandate and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support.

*—Adopted*

**Calvin University**

1. That synod receive the report for information and note the deep appreciation Calvin University expressed for its relationship with our denomination.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod recognize and appreciate Calvin’s commitment to engage with both local and global communities.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod ratify the decision of the Calvin University Board of Trustees to revise the Articles of Incorporation with the appointment of Dirk Pruis as the vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer.

*—Adopted*

**Dordt University**

1. That synod receive the report for information and note Dordt University’s expression of appreciation for the work of our denomination.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod note that Dordt had a record total degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment this past fall.

*—Noted*

1. That synod commend Dordt for producing graduates who are engaged in local churches.

*—Adopted*

**Calvin Theological Seminary**

1. That synod receive the report for information and encourage members of synod to tour the seminary to see the refreshed facilities.

*—Received for information*

**Institute for Christian Studies**

1. That synod receive the report for information and give thanks with ICS for the faithful work of Professor Robert Sweetman.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod express gratitude for the appointment of Professor Neal DeRoo.

*—Adopted*

**The King’s University**

1. That synod receive the report for information and express appreciation for the research grants King’s University received from the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

*—Adopted*

**Kuyper College**

1. That synod receive the report for information and note the return to NCCAA programs at Kuyper, which honors athletes who were there and formed the programs.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod note the work of Dr. Howerzyl and the graduate program director.

*—Noted*

1. That synod celebrate Kuyper’s dual enrollment program with local Christian high schools and homeschool networks.

*—Adopted*

**Redeemer University**

1. That synod receive the report for information and celebrate with Redeemer that enrollment has been booming.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod note with interest the co-op program that integrates classroom experience with work experience.

*—Noted*

1. That synod give thanks for the launch of Redeemer’s Mental Health Support Action Plan.

*—Adopted*

**Trinity Christian College**

1. That synod receive the report for information and celebrate the diverse representation at Trinity Christian College, with 40 percent of students and 25 percent of faculty being people of color.

*—Received for information*

1. That synod bring attention to Well-being Wednesday, which encourages students to pursue academic, spiritual, social, emotional, financial, and professional well-being.

*—Adopted*

**Candidacy Committee**

1. That synod declare those persons listed in the Candidacy Committee Supplement, section I, A as candidates for ministry of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Their names are as follows: Tomas Axeland, Rebecca Bokma, Joshua Carpenter, Jeremy Engbers, Catherine Ferchau, Dylan Harper, Jonathan Hwang, William Jones, Kevin Kornelis, Sung Su Lee, Brandon Mick, Robert Moore, Anastaze Nzabonimpa, Cameron Oegema, Christopher Park, Esther Park, Blake Phillips, Erik Pluemer, Ryan Poelman, Jennifer Richards, Kurtis Ritsema, Natasha Specht, Adam Sculnick, Benjamin Snoek, John VanderWindt, Jolene Veenstra, Peter Vos, Marissa Walters, Zhengfei (Stone) Wang, and Josephine Wong.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod approve the extensions of candidacy as recommended in the Candidacy Committee Supplement, section I, B. Their names are as follows: Yoon Chul Choi, Bradley Diekema, Matthew Guichelaar, Carol Hulin, Jake (Minho) Jeong, Kennedy Muli Kailiti, Eunice Kim, Jelle Koersen, Hannah Ryou Lee, Daniel F. Meyers, Matthew Mulder, Jacob Patton, Micah Ringelberg, Nicole Romero, Lynn Song, Evan Tinklenberg, Jodi VanWingerden, and Wendy Werkman.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod approve the reinstatement of candidacy to Joseph Hwang as described in section I, C of the Candidacy Committee Supplement.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod approve the action of the Candidacy Committee in declaration of need for those listed in section II for affiliation under Church Order Article 8. Their names are as follows: Sung Jin Ahn, John Kim, Hyon Joong Lim, Jordan Hall, Joshua Lee, Wilson Cunha, Ryan Landt, Samuel Lim, D’Vante Rolle, and Myunsik Kang.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod receive for information that the Advisory Committee received an appeal from a person declined for candidacy, and after discussion with the appellant the appeal was removed.

—Received for information

1. That synod approve the reorganized edition of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, described in section III of the Candidacy Committee Supplement and included in the appendix to the supplement report.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod note a correction: Rev. Marg Reckman, a member of the EPMC Facilitation Team, is listed as from Classis Ontario Southwest. She serves at Bethlehem CRC in Thunder Bay of Classis Lake Superior.

*—Noted*

**Response to Overture 1: Refrain from Reading Repetitious Notes at the Beginning of Synod**

1. If a notice on credentials presents a protest about seating female women delegates, the president of synod would name the individual or classis (see Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b,. 1.) protesting and read the following statement:

“We, as delegates, acknowledge that there are a multitude of perspectives and opinions represented among us. We recognize that on the issue of allowing women to serve in the offices of deacon, elder, minister, or commissioned pastor that “"there are two different perspectives and convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God"” (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 731). Some object that there are women seated as delegates; others lament that there are not more women among us. We choose to work together despite these differences.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 3: Refocus Ecclesiological Communication**

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to report directly back to Synod 2024 on how the concerns noted in Overture 3 have been addressed; —namely, specifying how and when the CRCNA organization comments and/or makes statements on social, economic, or political matters that synod has not previously specifically addressed.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod urge the CRCNA organization to exercise discretion when responding to social, economic, and/or political matters.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 11: Revise Church Order Article 61; Encourage Churches to Include Lament in Their Public Prayers**

1. That synod encourage congregations to include prayers of lament in their public prayers.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 12: Develop a Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Membership Decline and Require Annual Reporting of Progress**

1. That synod, in humility, acknowledge as of grave importance the troubling trend of membership decline in the CRCNA numerated in Overture 12 and our deep need to prioritize discipleship and evangelism by addressing individuals and communities holistically.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod celebrate the work that Resonate and Thrive are already doing with churches and encourage Resonate and Thrive to collaborate with the churches so that congregations can better grow in discipleship and evangelism in their contexts; that synod celebrate the work of church renewal and planting already underway; and that synod celebrate significant growth in ethnic-minority congregations.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod, with hope, urge the churches to make use of Resonate and Thrive resources, coaching opportunities, and personnel; and that synod encourage the churches to give careful thought to the responses from Resonate and Thrive to Overture 12 (see Supplement, pp. 758-71). Especially significant are six calls to commitment from CRCNA congregations (pp. 767-68).

*—Adopted*

1. That synod thank Classis Southeast U.S. for their passion in highlighting the trend of membership decline in the CRCNA and noting our deep need for church renewal and church planting.

*Note*: Resonate and Thrive, together with Calvin Theological Seminary, are already working with the churches to address the concerns brought up in Overture 12. As a result, we expect that additional resources will be needed for church renewal and planting in North America and internationally.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 12: Develop a Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Membership Decline and Require Annual Reporting of Progress**

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to work with the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to develop a comprehensive unified strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline and bring about a positive trend of membership growth to our denomination.
2. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to work with the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to continually update this plan and to report its progress regarding this plan to synod annually until such time as synod decides that this issue has been satisfactorily addressed.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 13: Declare that a Virtual Church is Not a Church**

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to oversee the creation of a report that gives thought to and a theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church: “A church which, by design, meets only online.”
2. This report will require input from (at least) a faculty or staff member of Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, and Thrive.
3. This report should address the marks of the true church articulated in the Belgic Confession.
4. This report might address similarities and differences between online ministry and a virtual church, exploring opportunities and pitfalls for each.
5. This report should be presented to the COD for discernment.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overture 14: Adopt Belhar Confession as a Confession of the CRC**

1. That synod recognize that the movement in 2017 of the Belhar Confession into the category of contemporary testimony was a significant step in a journey of ongoing racial reconciliation, and more steps are needed.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage churches to make regular use of the Belhar Confession in worship and daily practice, recognizing that, as stated in the *Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 282-83, “The history of oppression in our own countries, and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time call for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—to confess that the Lord of life, who entrusted to us the ‘message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor. 5:19), is the Lord of our hopes and aspirations for a just and reconciled people.”

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage the churches to make use of resources already available from Indigenous Ministries (Canada) and Thrive.

—Adopted

*Note*: The Belhar Confession calls us onward toward this good gospel work, and we exhort our congregations to “stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Belhar Confession, pt. 4).

**Response to Overture 2: Make a Statement on Assisted Suicide**

1. That synod task the Office of General Secretary to promptly create a position statement on assisted suicide based on the good work of previous synods on abortion (Synods 1972, 1997, 2010, etc.), life issues (Synods 2000, 2003), and previous pastoral advice given (Synods 2000, 2003).

 *—Adopted*

1. That synod appoint a task force to make a definitive and comprehensive report on the practice of assisted suicide in all its forms. This report will give guidance and pastoral advice on end-of-life matters. This binational task force will consist of two theologians, two health-care professionals, two lawyers, and two additional ad hoc members. This task force is to utilize, but not limit their study to, Scripture, the confessions, the existing studies done on abortion, life issues, and previous pastoral advice given. This task force will shape its work acknowledging that there is a “unique value of all human life,” that there is a “special relationship of man to God as his imagebearer,” and that, in concert with the previous declaration of synod, we “condemn the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death” (*Acts of Synod 1972,* pp. 63-64). Further, the task force will take special care to address the concerns noted in Overture 2. The task force will submit its report by February 15, 2025, to be included on the agenda for Synod 2025.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overtures 56 and 59: Call Churches to Repent of Affirming Same-Sex Relationships and Instruct Classes to Begin the Process of Special Discipline**

1. That synod instruct 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.

—*Adopted*

1. That synod remind all 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.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Appeal 1: St. Joseph CRC, Overture 10, and Communication 5**

1. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to assemble a task force (or similar body) to design and/or clarify an appeals process for those under discipline. This body shall address processes for members under general discipline.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overtures 16, 18, 19, 20, 21 Recommendation C, 23, 24, 29, 30, 40 Recommendation D, 46, 77 (Majority report)**

1. That synod include this background statement in the official *Acts of Synod 2023*.

*—Adopted*

**Response to Overtures 40 Recommendations A and C, 70, and 71: Addressing Harm done to LGBTQ+ Persons**

1. That synod affirm our commitments to manage disagreements within our congregations, and among churches, with love, charity, and grace, and to ensure that all who seek to follow Christ are afforded a respectful place to honestly share their views and listen to those of others.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod urge our congregations to, in accordance with scripture and our confessions, be places of belonging for LGBTQ+ members seeking to follow Christ.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod instruct all congregations of the CRCNA to show love to all people groups, including our LGBTQ+ members and neighbors, by condemning hateful or demeaning speech and violent or demeaning actions.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to develop resources and tools, or endorse existing external resources and tools, that align with our Reformed doctrinal standards (as articulated in previous synodical decisions), to equip congregations for pastoral ministry with and to our LGBTQ+ members and neighbours.

—Adopted

**Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force**

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to disseminate the report on ecclesiastical marriage to the churches of the CRC to serve as guidance regarding the issue of ecclesiastical marriage.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod strongly advise pastors of the CRC not to solemnize ecclesiastical marriages (as defined in this report) as sanctioned and solemnized solely by the church to the exclusion of the state (civil government) whereby a couple is considered “married in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state.”

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage the churches to respect and honor the marriages of Indigenous peoples, as well as those of immigrants who did not obtain a civil marriage under the oversight of their sovereign nations or prior to arriving in Canada or the United States, and counsel them in the understanding of Christian marriage and its relationship to civil authority in our countries.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod caution pastors against acting as legal experts or offering legal advice, especially with regard to the issue of ecclesiastical marriage, and that synod encourage pastors to advise couples to seek independent legal counsel as necessary.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to disseminate a letter of warning to the pastors and councils regarding the potential legal ramifications of solemnizing an ecclesiastical marriage.

*—Adopted*

**Bivocationality Task Force**

1. That synod propose to Synod 2024 the following changes to Church Order Articles 14, 15, and 23 and their Supplements for adoption (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~strikethrough~~):

a. Proposed Article 14-d

A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be nonministerial and forsakes the calling of a minister of the Word shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

*—Adopted*

b. Proposed Article 15

Each church through its council shall ~~provide for~~ attend to the proper support of its minister(s). ~~By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.~~

*—Adopted*

c. Proposed Supplement, Article 15

*“Proper Support” Defined*

Proper support of a church’s minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, ~~payment to the denomination’s ministers’ pension plan~~payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the minister has a plan that addresses these items. In many ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministerial service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The financial plan should be carefully reviewed and signed by the classical counselor when a call to ministry is made or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement[CB2].

*Guidelines for Churches ~~Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment~~ in Conversations with Pastors about “Proper Support”*

~~1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.~~

~~2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister’s family.~~

~~3~~1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.

42. ~~The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers’ Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church.~~ Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers’ Pension Plan is made.

~~5~~3. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) ~~other than ministry shall be specified~~ shall be mutually discerned by minister(s) and the supervising council. The support plan in the letter of call, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by the classical counselor, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.

4. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of ministers, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

*—Adopted*

d. Proposed Article 23-d

Each church through its council shall attend to the proper support of its commissioned pastor.

*—Adopted*

e. Proposed Supplement, Article 23-d

“Proper Support” Defined

Proper support of a commissioned pastor is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, disability insurance, a housing provision, payment to an appropriate pension or retirement plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

To “attend to” proper support does not imply that the calling church is responsible to provide all of these items of support. Rather, the calling church is responsible to ensure that the commissioned pastor has a plan that addresses these items. In many ministries the local church itself accepts these responsibilities in order to facilitate full-time or part-time ministry service. In other settings—such as church planting, various forms of chaplaincy, bivocational arrangements, multipoint ministries, and so on—the financial plan will include income and benefits provided by a variety of potential sources. The calling church’s support of the financial plan should be carefully reviewed at the time classis approves the commissioned pastor’s position. This includes a call to bivocational ministry or when a pastor and church decide to change their financial arrangement.

*Guidelines for Churches in Conversations with Pastors about “Proper Support”*

1. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.

2. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) shall be mutually discerned by the commissioned pastor(s) and the supervising council. The support plan, including the financial plan, shall be specified in writing, approved by classis along with the position description, and normally reviewed annually by the supervising council. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not normally exceed sixty hours per week.

3. The supervising council shall annually attend to nonfinancial support of commissioned pastors, including but not limited to physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage classical student funding committees (providing financial aid for students seeking to become ministers of the Word—cf. Church Order Article 21) to treat those who are in or anticipating bivocational or other nontraditional ministry arrangements in the same manner as those who are in or anticipating full-time arrangements.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to create an exit interview/ministry postmortem learning process for classes, churches, leaders, and their families to use when burnout occurs in bivocational ministry.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to provide a ministry wellness assessment for pastors in bivocational ministry and their supervisory councils to use as part of their regular conversations.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to work with the pension boards, in consultation with clergy couples, to find a just and equitable solution that recognizes the ordination of both spouses who are ministers of the Word.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage all pastors together with their supervisory councils to annually review the “proper support” required for pastors, including the financial plan.

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage church visitors to inquire about the health and welfare of pastors, including whether they have “proper support.”

*—Adopted*

1. That synod encourage the classes and congregations of the CRCNA to affirm the challenges of bivocational ministry, support the leaders of adaptive changes that are happening in our current ministry settings, and celebrate the dedicated and creative pastoral work many are doing and will do for the sake of the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

—*Adopted*

**In Loco Committee**

1. That synod adopt the following with regard to the *In Loco* Committee:
	1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of the *in loco* committee: Paul De Vries, chair, and Josh Van Drunen.
	2. That synod instruct Neland Avenue CRC to immediately rescind any and all decisions to ordain officebearers who are in a same-sex, sexual marriage/relationship, thus nullifying any current or future terms of such officebearers.
	3. That synod instruct Neland Avenue CRC to uphold our shared denominational covenants and procedures as laid out in the *Church Order* and the Covenant for Officebearers.
	4. That synod instruct 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.
	5. That synod instruct the members of the denomination to recommit themselves to the methods and processes that we have adopted in the Covenant of Officebearers and the *Church Order*.
	6. That synod declare the work of the Neland Ave CRC *In Loco* Committee completed

*—Adopted*