



July 25, 2016

Stated Clerks of Classes

Dear Friends:

Delegates and advisers to Synod 2016, despite a very weighty agenda, were blessed by a spirit of graciousness and love through their deliberations, worship, and fellowship during the week-long meetings. The decisions made are now recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2016*—soon-to-be printed. Over two hundred participants selflessly gave of their valuable time and inspiring leadership to the church—we are truly grateful for their commitment and service to the church.

The Synodical Services Office has been working intently at disseminating the many decisions, implementing and highlighting for the appropriate bodies any that would affect specific work and ministry. Several important decisions affecting classes include (1) caution expressed by synod with regard to classes planting churches outside of Canada or the United States, (2) encouragement to recognize the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in their fall 2017 meetings with particular attention to the *Five Solas*, and (3) encouraging the continuing education for pastors. A separate correspondence will be sent from the Executive Director outlining revisions to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84 with regard to sexual misconduct by a church leader.

In addition to sending you a copy the printed *Acts of Synod 2016* when available, we are enclosing a summary of synod's decisions, outlining matters that are specific to your work. Watch for notification in the near future for access to the electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2016*, which will be posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. (The printed version of the *Acts* will follow for your easy reference.)

Thank you for carefully reviewing the attached summary of synod and for assisting your local classis in processing and carrying out these decisions. 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 call or write.

Yours faithfully,

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

Diane (Dee) S. Recker
Director of Synodical Services

Encl: Summary of Synod 2016 Decisions for Classes

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407
616-241-1691
616-224-5895 fax

 www.crcna.org

3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 STN LCD I
Burlington ON L7R 3Y8
905-336-2920
905-336-8344 fax

Summary of Synod 2016 Decisions for Classes

1. Synod responded to a report on **planting churches or affiliating with congregations outside of Canada and the United States** with specific caution for classes noted below:

Board of Trustees

That synod receive the report regarding planting churches outside of Canada and the United States and adopt the following recommendations contained within ([*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 70-75]; Appendix G and section II, A, 20):

- a. That synod declare that classes and congregations considering planting churches under the CRCNA name outside of Canada and the United States and/or considering the affiliation of congregations outside of Canada and the United States should do so only with utmost caution and care, keeping in mind the following principles and covenants:
 - 1) The guiding principle and practice in church planting outside of Canada and the United States must be to enable any new group to affiliate with other Christian groups in their home nation.
 - 2) A clear commitment must be to honor our ecumenical partners in other countries. They must be able to offer their blessing or refuse a proposal for church planting within their national borders.
 - 3) Motives for any affiliation need to be discerned and discussed openly, recognizing the need to honor and properly balance the desires for doctrinal purity, Christian unity, true accountability, and shared ministry.
 - 4) Any congregation that desires to affiliate with the CRCNA or become organized as part of a CRCNA classis would need to demonstrate readiness to actively relate with other congregations in the CRCNA through involvement in the classis; subscribe to CRCNA polity and confessions; and contribute, as they are able, to the ministry support and accountability expected of all other CRCNA congregations. *Note:* An affiliation process has been adopted by synod and is available to the classes for use as guidelines.
 - a) The guidelines of Church Order Article 38 are relevant to this advice, and set definite expectations for any planted or affiliating congregation outside of Canada and the United States to join the CRCNA officially.
 - b) Limits of classis leadership must be recognized in navigating relationships implied by such affiliation. Any experiment should be done with great caution and transparency. This would require early communication with our denominational mission agency, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), and the denominational offices that such a project is being contemplated. Further, all parties should actively consult and partner as decisions are made regarding if, how, and when to proceed.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 837-38)

2. A revised **Process for Affiliation of Congregations and Their Pastors with the Christian Reformed Church in North America** was adopted and will soon be available as a separate, downloadable document on the CRCNA website.

Board of Trustees

That synod endorse the revised Process for Affiliation of Congregations and Their Pastors with the Christian Reformed Church in North America as found in Appendix F [of the *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 65-70] (cf. section II, A, 19).

Ground: This report provides a helpful framework for the affiliation process by bringing together material previously found in multiple locations.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 845)

3. Classes are encouraged to facilitate the development and review of a **learning covenant for new pastors and the continuing education for pastors**. The specific action taken by synod regarding these matters follows:

Candidacy Committee

That synod approve the following with respect to continuing education for pastors:

- c. That synod encourage each classis, through regional pastors and mentors, to help develop a Learning Covenant for new pastors (Article 6, 7, or 8 ministers of the Word and Article 23 commissioned pastors) in order that they can grow in an awareness of our denominational covenants and practices, and that synod endorse the variety of ideas for such educational opportunities as presented in section VII, C and Addendum 2 [*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 288-89, 307-16].
- d. That synod encourage each classis, through mechanisms such as mentors, regional pastors, peer groups, church visitors, and classical ministry leadership teams, to help churches and pastors engage in the formation and annual review of the learning covenant for the pastor's CE.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 849)

4. A report by the Candidacy Committee providing **clarification on Church Order Article 23** (commissioned pastors) is recommended to the classes as helpful advice. Synod also asked the Candidacy Committee to recommend revisions to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, which will be forthcoming to a subsequent synod.

Candidacy Committee

That synod, considering the request for clarification regarding Church Order Article 23 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 640-41),

- a. Receive the report on Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23 (Appendix A; [*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-75]) as presented by the Candidacy Committee and recommend it to the congregations and classes for review as helpful advice in the administration of Church Order Article 23.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848)

5. Synod mandated a task force to address the **equality of funding for seminary students** in response to two overtures from Classis Hamilton. Synod 2017 will receive this task force report and its recommendations.

Response to Overtures 6 and 7—Financial Support for Seminary Students

That synod form a task force to address the following:

- a. Issues of equity in classis-based funding of seminary students.
- b. Financial challenges faced by students from Canada who desire to attend Calvin Theological Seminary.
- c. The impact of these financial circumstances on CRC members accessing a Reformed preparation for ministry within the CRCNA.

The task force shall be composed of representatives from Calvin Theological Seminary, the Candidacy Committee, three classis committees responsible for student funding, and two current or recent CTS students. The task force shall present its findings and any recommendations to Synod 2017.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 854)

6. Synod adopted significant **changes to the Supplements to Church Order Articles 82-84**—those dealing with the admonition and discipline of officebearers. The specific changes adopted are inserted below. (See also a separate letter from the Executive Director.) The revised Church Order and Its Supplements will be sent to churches around the first of September.

Board of Trustees

2. That synod adopt the report of the Committee Reviewing Church Order Articles 82-84 and their Supplements and its recommendations as outlined in the following (BOT Supplement section I, D and Appendix B; [Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 863-64]):
 - a. That synod adopt the following proposed changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements:

Proposed changes to Supplement, Articles 82-84

New sections a and b, indicated by italics (the former sections a-g would remain unchanged and would be relettered as sections c-i):

- a. *An administrative leave may be imposed without prejudice by the council in order to investigate allegations of deviation from sound doctrine or godly conduct. Compensation and benefits would continue, and any duties to be performed during the leave would be specified by the council. All suspensions and administrative leaves are temporary.*

Ground: This statement offers administrative leave as an option for cases in which an allegation has been made but guilt or innocence has not yet been established. In addition, it explains the temporary nature of these actions.

- b. *Officebearers who confess to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct will be considered guilty of serious deviation from godly conduct and worthy of discipline.*

Ground: This statement acknowledges the serious nature of sexual misconduct by a church leader and the damaging impacts it brings to individuals and to church communities.

A new section j (indicated by italics):

- j. *When a minister resigns under discipline or to avoid discipline, he or she should be released from office per Article 14-c, noting that the provisions of Supplement, Article 14-b also apply to Article 14-c, especially in these situations.*

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-c

Ground: This addition provides a cross-reference to Supplement, Article 14 and will aid churches in dealing with situations of resignation.

Proposed new Supplement, Article 83
(indicated by italics)

One of the key dynamics in considering abuse of office is the imbalance and misuse of power. The power inherent in the role of officebearer represents a sacred trust and must not be misused.

Ground: Power is a foundational dynamic in ministry and in other professional relationships. Adding this statement to the Supplement will help ensure that the power dynamic is understood and is not ignored in considering these issues.

Proposed changes to Supplement, Article 84

A new “Examples” paragraph to replace the paragraph under section 1, d (indicated by italics):

Examples of related ungodly conduct include, but are not limited to, participation in pornography, engaging in sexual contact in return for payment or any other favor, or voyeuristic behavior, displays of sexually offensive material, suggestive gestures and remarks, and other sexually intimidating behavior.

Ground: The committee believes that this paragraph should be more comprehensive and be updated to more current language.

A definition of sexual misconduct to replace the Note under section 2 (indicated by italics):

Sexual misconduct should never be viewed as a lesser offense than sexual abuse. Rather, sexual misconduct is broader than sexual abuse, so sexual abuse is a subset of sexual misconduct (cf. BOT Supplement I, Appendix B, section II, B. Differentiate sexual misconduct from sexual abuse).

The “Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader” adopted by Synod 2010 (cf. Agenda for Synod 2010, pp. 503-504) define sexual misconduct as

- *exploiting or grooming (preparing) a minor or an adult—regardless of consent or circumstances—for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy, with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the minor or adult;*
- *unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, co-volunteers; or*
- *sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.*

Ground: The most recent definition of sexual misconduct approved by synod should be used.

Insert the following additional Note (indicated by italics):

Note: These rules that prevent the reinstatement of deposed officebearers in particular situations also apply to those ministers who have been released by way of Article 14 and have been declared “dismissed” or “in the status of one deposed” due to those situations.

Ground: If these former officebearers confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct, as per the parameters defined in the Supplement to Article 84, they should not be allowed to serve again in office.

Proposed new Supplement, Article 14-e
(indicated by italics)

The provisions of Supplement, Article 84 related to reinstatement of ministers who have been deposed also apply to ministers who resign under discipline or to avoid discipline and later seek reordination by way of Article 14-e.

Ground: Just as deposed officebearers are not allowed reinstatement to office in certain circumstances related to sexual misconduct, so also ministers who resign from office in certain cases of sexual misconduct should not be allowed to be reordained in those same circumstances. This procedure is included in the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* as a recommended practice.
(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 866)

7. In response to Overture 3, synod asks the classes to **invite the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members** when matters are addressed that may affect their lives and discipleship. The specific action follows:

Response to Overture 3: Adopt the Practice of Appointing Same-sex Oriented Advisers to Synod

That synod advise the classes and congregations to invite, as much as possible, the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members when dealing with matters that affect the lives and discipleship of same-sex attracted members within the CRCNA.

Ground: It is the stated goal of the CRCNA, and has been for forty-three years, that same-sex attracted persons who are fellow believers are welcomed in the

church, and their gifts used in the building of the kingdom of Christ. Every statement, review, and assessment since 1973 has lamented how little progress has been made toward this goal, while yet hoping that change is just around the corner. This advice would remind us of our unrealized ideals and call us to faithfulness and repentance.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 929)

8. Synod, in response to the BOT report on financial sustainability, assigned **the BOT to create a process for classes to encourage churches to “do their share” as able**. Synod recognizes that classes are in an ideal position to understand the circumstances of their member churches. Classes can anticipate further communication as the BOT addresses this request.

Board of Trustees

That synod ask the BOT to create a process for the classes to encourage churches to do their share as they are able and to find ways to connect ministry with all the churches.

Grounds:

- a. This process will foster a climate of mutual accountability around financial matters.
- b. Classes are in an ideal position to understand the circumstances of their member churches.
- c. This action was affirmed by Synod 1939 (*Acts of Synod 1939*, p. 22).
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858)

9. Similarly, the BOT is tasked to conduct a program evaluation of CRCNA ministries and dare to **reimagine ministry share**. The specific action with grounds follow:

Board of Trustees

That synod ask the BOT, following the ministry evaluation/prioritization, to reimagine ministry shares using the following guidelines and to report to Synod 2019.

- Fund the prioritized ministries at agreed-upon levels.
- Simplify the calculations.
- Consider options other than the number of professing members over 18 as a basis of the calculation.

Grounds:

- a. The churches are asking for a reimagined system as evidenced by Overture 10 and the recent actions of Classes Illiana and Muskegon (both have moved to a percentage of income model and away from the per-member assessment).
- b. Since “money follows ministry,” it is appropriate to reimagine ministry shares after the ministry and program evaluation.
- c. We envision a reimagined system that allocates the right-sized financial responsibility to churches in such a way (e.g., a percentage of revenue) that all churches contribute to the ministry-share system.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 858-59)

10. Classes are encouraged to recognize the **500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation** during the fall 2017 meetings with particular attention to the *Five Solas*. An *ad hoc* group, including members from the Worship Ministries Office and *The Banner*, has been

mandated to assist in commemorating this special anniversary. Stay tuned for more information as the group gets underway.

Response to Overture 12: Prepare a 500th-Anniversary Celebration of the Start of the Protestant Reformation

The request for a celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation received wide agreement and appreciation from the committee. However, the pragmatic components (anticipated costs, research logistics, and time needed to publish new materials) associated with Overture 12 would be difficult, if not impossible, to meet before the fall of 2017. While the committee does not believe synod can accede to the overture, the committee proposes the following recommendations as a means of honoring the spirit of Overture 12.

That synod encourage classes to recognize the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in their fall 2017 meetings with particular attention to the *Five Solas*.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 843)

11. A new synodical task force has been appointed to take a look at synod itself and how it functions. The full mandate and parameters for this new task force is contained in the *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 48-53.

Board of Trustees

That synod adopt the proposed mandate, parameters of composition, and timeline for a Synod Review Task Force to review the practices and functions of synod as proposed in Board of Trustees Report, Appendix A (II, A, 1).

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 826-27)

12. We ask that you take note of the dates of the **Disability Awareness Week** and plan accordingly. Synod also calls your attention for the importance of appointing a **regional disability advocate** and asking this person to report regularly to classis.

Board of Trustees

1. That synod encourage CRC churches, classes, and educational institutions to sponsor events to celebrate Disability Awareness Week, October 10-16, 2016 (II, B, 7, a).

Grounds:

- a. People with disabilities make up 15 to 20 percent of the population in North America. Specific and intentional events that recognize the importance of breaking down barriers and including people with disabilities will remind God's people of the welcome our Lord gives to all of his people (Luke 14:15-24) and will encourage them to press on toward becoming a community in which every member knows that he or she is indispensable (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
- b. The Bible calls God's people to be a caring community as the covenant people of God. In 1985 the CRC committed itself as a denomination to eliminate barriers of architecture, communication, and attitude "in order to use the gifts of all people in our life together as God's family." Although our Lord Jesus calls all of his people to ministry in his church, the church has not always made it possible for people with disabilities to participate fully and sometimes has isolated them and their families.

- c. The dates of Disability Week coincide with the CRC denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
 - d. The RCA celebrates Disability Awareness Sunday on the second Sunday in October. Having similar dates for this celebration facilitates and enhances deeper collaboration between the Disability Concerns offices of the RCA and CRC. Further, this date aligns our celebration with those of numerous organizations and agencies that highlight disability awareness in October.
2. That synod encourage Christian Reformed classes to identify at least one person to serve as a regional disability advocate, and encourage each classis to invite their regional advocate to report to classis at least once per year (II, B, 7, b).

Grounds:

- a. The new Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church emphasizes regional ministry. Regional disability advocates help the congregations of their classis minister more effectively with people who have disabilities in the churches. Disability Concerns provides resources and training for regional disability advocates to serve the churches of their classis in ministry.
- b. Regional disability advocates help churches identify church disability advocates who can serve their own congregations so that ministry is brought directly to the congregational level. We assist in recruiting and training these ministry leaders to help churches better reflect the body of Christ, especially as described in Luke 14:15-24 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.
- c. Deacons serve a critical role in congregational mercy and justice. These twin concerns will have an even more prominent place at our wider assemblies now that deacons will be delegated to all classis and synod meetings. Regional disability advocates (and church disability advocates) can help deacons minister *to* people who have disabilities if they have significant, long-term needs, and can help deacons minister *with* people who have disabilities because they, like all other congregation members, have been gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 832-33)

13. Synod heard a report that *only* 5 of 106 requests to the **CRC Archives** by churches for a copy of their **articles of incorporation or constitution** could be fulfilled. Please encourage churches to send a copy to the archives. It takes just minutes to do! In addition, if your classis name is found below in recommendation 2, please **encourage churches to submit copies of their minutes to the archives**.

Historical Committee

- 1. That synod instruct all churches and classes to send duplicates (photocopies, faxes, or email attachments) of their constitutions and articles of incorporation to the archives. Copies can be sent via surface mail, fax, or email, respectively, to Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402; fax: 616-526-7689; or crcarchives@calvin.edu.

Ground: This will enable the Historical Committee to respond helpfully to the frequent requests it receives for copies of misplaced articles of incorporation and other documents.

Note: The Historical Committee received 106 such requests over the past year, and it had the requested documents for only five of those requests.

2. That synod encourage classes Alberta North, Alberta South/Saskatchewan, Atlantic Northeast, B.C. North-West, B.C. South-East, California South, Central California, Central Plains, Chatham, Chicago South, Columbia, Georgetown, Grand Rapids North, Grand Rapids South, Grandville, Greater Los Angeles, Hackensack, Hanmi, Heartland, Holland, Hudson, Huron, Iakota, Illiana, Kalamazoo, Ko-Am, Lake Erie, Lake Superior, Minnkota, Muskegon, Northcentral Iowa, Northern Illinois, Northern Michigan, Pacific Northwest, Quinte, Red Mesa, Rocky Mountain, Southeast U.S., Toronto, Wisconsin, and Yellowstone, all of whom have member churches more than ten years old that have not had their minutes duplicated, to ask their member churches to contact the archives to have this done.

Grounds:

- a. Submitting minutes to the Historical Committee preserves copies of important church records that may be damaged or lost.
- b. More than 20 percent of the churches have not provided their minutes to the Historical Committee.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 830-31)