



July 26, 2016

Christian Reformed Church Councils

Dear Council Members:

Synod 2016 included for the first time deacon delegates on the floor of synod. Also welcomed, once again, to the floor of synod were seven women advisers, joining the ethnic advisers and young adult representative voices in both advisory committee work and in plenary session. An excellent team of officers took great care to guide synod through a significantly heavy agenda. Despite the incredibly tough matters addressed, delegates found time to fellowship over meals and breaks with old friends and meet new friends! In all and through all, God was glorified in the work and decisions of those gathered at Synod 2016. The delegates expressed their gratitude for the wonderful hospitality provided by the staff of Calvin College.

Among the matters addressed by the delegates to synod this year were the final reports of the synodical Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage, Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty, and the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force. Also considered this year was an overture regarding the classification of the Belhar Confession, an overture requesting the redesign of the ministry-share system, and a proposed mandate for a Synod Review Task Force. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for CRC councils and church members, our office has summarized (below) the decisions of Synod 2016. Please take a few moments to review the enclosed highlights at your next council meeting. (A separate letter is being sent regarding adopted changes to the Church Order relating to the admonition and discipline of officebearers.)

We are always grateful for the opportunity at synod to honor and declare those presented as candidates for ministry of the Word within the CRC—*forty-seven* new candidates were approved! What a blessing to witness a standing ovation of the more than 200 delegates and advisers, joined by family members of the candidates, and conclude a time of celebration with a prayer of gratitude offered for their commitment and preparation to service to the church in ministry. In addition, synod gave special recognition to *thirty-eight* ministerial retirees. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church and wish them God's grace as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

The electronic version of the *Acts of Synod 2016* will soon be posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources—watch for an announcement by way of the CRC News. The printed version will arrive in mailboxes toward the end of August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, I want to express our sincere gratitude to all who served the church as delegates and advisers to Synod 2016. These individuals generously gave significant time and energy for more than a week. The spirit of unity and love for the mission of the church was evident all around.

Yours faithfully,

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director

Encl.: Summary of Decisions of Synod 2016 for the Churches

Dr. Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director
616-224-0832
executive-director@crcna.org

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

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

Summary of Decisions of Synod 2016 for the Churches

1. Churches are called to action in response to the report of the synodical Committee to Study **Religious Persecution and Liberty**: foster regular prayer for people suffering religious persecution and live out our love for God and for others, despite the threat of persecution (the specific actions of synod follow).

Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty

1. That synod encourage each congregation to appoint a prayer coordinator or team who will keep up on religious persecution and religious liberty issues, advise officebearers about developments, and foster regular prayer for people suffering religious persecution.
5. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty and dismiss the committee with thanks for their work.
6. That synod encourage all members of the Christian Reformed Church to actively live out their love for God and for others in every area of life, despite the relative threat of persecution.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 862-63)

2. In response to the report of the **Doctrine of Discovery** Task Force, synod acknowledged that the Doctrine of Discovery is a heresy and recognized the pain of those who suffered from their experiences in the residential schools of the United States and Canada, among the following other important actions for churches to note:

Doctrine of Discovery Task Force

1. That synod acknowledge the need for great sensitivity, discernment, and long-term commitment in addressing the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, particularly in addressing CRCNA mission work among Indigenous peoples.
2. That synod acknowledge that the existing Doctrine of Discovery is a heresy and we reject and condemn it. It helped shape western culture and led to great injustices.
3. That synod, nevertheless, recognize also the gospel motivation in response to the Great Commission, as well as the love and grace extended over many years by missionaries sent out by the CRCNA to the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States. For this we give God thanks, and honor their dedication.
4. That synod recognize the pain of those who suffered from their experiences in the residential schools of the United States and Canada, including Rehoboth Christian School, and lament any of our mistakes that caused pain.
5. That synod affirm the actions of Rehoboth Christian School in publishing its "Statement of Confession and Reconciliation" upon its 100th anniversary, and its promises and fulfillment of promises to serve well the diverse community in McKinley County, New Mexico.
6. That synod celebrate the current culture at the Rehoboth Christian School, the Zuni Christian Mission School, and our Urban Aboriginal Ministries along with the many stories of renewal, transformation, grace, and cultural exchange as together God's people remain committed to mutual learning, encouragement, and healing.

8. That synod affirm initial actions for justice and reconciliation of the CRC in Canada that are already in process:
 - the public acknowledgment of “systemic evils behind colonialism,” the confession of the CRC’s “sins of assimilation and paternalism,” and the commitment to live “into a sacred call of unity and reconciliation,” as expressed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada.
 - follow-up initiatives on the calls to action of the TRC.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 922-23)

3. A significant issue before synod in June was the report of the Committee to Provide **Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage**. The pastoral guidance section of the minority report is recommended to the churches in conversation and is in keeping with previous synodical decisions. In addition, a new Church Order Supplement, Article 69-c will reference this pastoral guidance section of the minority report. Finally, synod mandated a **new study to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality** that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality.

Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

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

Grounds:

- a. The minority report, in its provision of greater clarity (particularly prohibiting the solemnization of same-sex marriages and stronger cautions about involvement of officebearers in such ceremonies as well as helpful distinctions between participation in the life of the church and participation in its leadership) reflects greater fidelity to the mandate of Synod 2013 as well as to our collective understanding of the proper expression of same-sex attraction as articulated by Synods 1973 and 2002.
 - b. The clarified guidelines articulated in the minority report provide a needed balance of freedom of individual conscience (championed by the majority report) with sensitivity to the consciences of others (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9-13) and exhibit greater fidelity to the integrity of church leaders’ life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16) while supporting the witness of the church as a family of holy love and loving holiness (1 John 5:2-3).
 - c. While the majority report correctly calls the church to repentance for our sin against same-sex attracted brothers and sisters, it does not go on to adequately present the inclusion of repentance (turning away from sin and running to new life in Christ) as part of the gospel for those of us who sin by engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. This universal call to repentance is central to Christ and the ministry of his church (2 Peter 3:9).
 - d. The minority report’s added engagement with the positive view of marriage articulated in the 1980 statement on Marriage Guidelines provides helpful resources for churches to thoughtfully respond to the reality of same-sex marriage in our time and in our church communities.
2. That synod decide to place a reference to the pastoral guidance of the minority report as a new Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c. It is intended that the Supplement to Article 69-c will refer to pages 436-43 in the *Agenda for Synod 2016* and will

indicate that the decision of Synod 2016 represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God.

4. That synod appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.
 - a. In addition to these broad outlines, the study will include the following three components:
 - 1) Discussion outlining how a Reformed hermeneutic does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse, what are for the historic church, ground breaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification.
 - 2) Dialogue with, and potential critique of, untraditional conclusions arising from arguments about a new movement of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 15), as well as conclusions arising from scientific and social scientific studies.
 - 3) Reflection and evaluation of whether or not, with respect to same-sex behavior and other issues identified in the study, it will be advisable for future synods to consider
 - changing the main text of Church Order Article 69 (see Overtures 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 38).
 - declaring a *status confessionis* (see Overture 16).
 - appointing a team of individuals to draft a statement of faith, perhaps in the style of the Contemporary Testimony, on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the teachings and conclusions of the report (see Overture 28).

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 914-16)

4. Synod asks that congregations **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. The decision and ground adopted follow:

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)

5. Synod offered a prayer of lament and expressed grief for those who have been and continue to be marginalized through **racialized violence, systemic racism, and ethnic strife** in North American society. In conclusion, synod proposed that Synod 2017 **recategorize the Belhar Confession** to the same status as that of a contemporary testimony in the CRC—same as *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.

Response to Overture 13: Adopt the Belhar Confession as the Fourth Confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

1. That synod reaffirm that all people are created in God's image and are worthy of our love, care, and protection.

Grounds:

- a. There is continued public rhetoric that diminishes the value and dignity of people based upon their racial, ethnic, cultural, or national identity.
 - b. *God's Diverse and Unified Family* states: "As God's imagebearers, all human beings without exception are endowed with royal dignity and share in dominion over all creation" (Creation, pt. 1).
2. That synod grieve alongside those who have been and continue to be marginalized through racialized violence, systemic racism, and ethnic strife in North American society.
 3. That synod offer prayers of lament as a response of solidarity with those who have been brutalized by these sinful actions and the attitudes of indifference that have frequently accompanied them.

Grounds:

- a. Overture 13 and the testimony of representatives from Classis Hackensack (among others) give evidence to the personal and communal pain being carried by many in the church and in our broader culture on account of the continued perpetuation of racism within North America.
 - b. Scripture calls us to carry each other's burdens and to weep with those who weep: Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15.
 - c. Belhar Confession Article 4 states that "the church must therefore 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."
4. That synod denounce the racialized violence, systemic racism, and ethnic strife evident in North American society.

Grounds:

- a. Events of the past several years in the United States and Canada have heightened public attention to the ongoing and systemic nature of racism within the North American context.
- b. Belhar Confession Article 4 states that "the church must therefore 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."
- c. Previous synods have issued declarations against racism in response to situations of heightened racial tension, such as in Charleston, South

Carolina (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 682; see also, *Acts of Synod 1968*, p. 18).

5. That synod recognize that Overture 13, together with the EIRC reports to Synod 2015 and Synod 2016, exposes dissatisfactions with locating the Belhar Confession in the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category.

Ground: The EIRC reports to Synod 2015 and Synod 2016 both expressed concern that our category for the Belhar Confession has been received with confusion by some of our ecumenical partners in the broader Reformed community, and that Overture 13 and personal testimonies heard by the committee express the inadequacy of its current applications.

6. That synod direct the EIRC to provide a report on the confusion with the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category as identified by our ecumenical partners in their February 2014 consultation and in subsequent conversations with the EIRC, advising Synod 2017 on the viability of the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category.
7. That synod propose that Synod 2017 recategorize the Belhar Confession to the same status as that of a contemporary testimony in the CRC—same as *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.

Grounds:

- a. Synod 2013 declined to respond to an overture requesting a change in the status of the Belhar Confession on the grounds that the EIRC's work of seeking feedback from ecumenical partners regarding the category of Ecumenical Faith Declarations was not yet complete (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 574). Per EIRC reports to Synod 2015 and Synod 2016, the current status of the Belhar Confession as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration is confusing to our ecumenical partners.
- b. Synod 2014 urged the EIRC "to continue its assessment of the place of the Belhar Confession in the life and ministry of the CRC and report back to synod at appropriate times" (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 565).
- c. The current status of the Belhar Confession does not provide the necessary weight to respond appropriately to the historic and recurring presence of racialized violence, systemic racism, and ethnic strife throughout the world.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 906-909)

6. The final report of the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG), mandated to champion **diversity within the CRCNA and its ministries**, was adopted and the following directives to continue the spirit of the work of the DIWG given to the executive director and BOT.

Board of Trustees

That synod adopt the final report from the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group and the following recommendations contained therein (Appendix D and section II, A, 11):

- a. That synod direct the BOT and the office of the executive director to ensure that sufficient funds and resources are available to carry out a communications plan for CRC diversity and related initiatives, and that resources are available to continue a commitment to all activities recommended for implementation in this report.
- b. That synod instruct the executive director, under the direction of the BOT, to ensure that the spirit and essence of all DIWG initiatives continue, including the following:

- 1) Human Resources procedures to ensure diversity in hiring and promoting.
 - 2) Communication plans that reflect cultural sensitivity and appropriate representation of ethnic groups.
 - 3) Acceptance of the voluntary input of minority and ethnic networks¹ into the life and work of the CRCNA.
 - 4) Support of procedures to ensure a safe, healthy, and supportive workplace in all CRCNA locations.²
 - 5) The executive director will continue to request an annual diversity report from each agency and ministry and will include a summary of these reports in the report to the BOT each February.
- c. That synod direct the BOT to mandate the Office of Race Relations to ensure that training and communications on the issues of race and diversity continue to be made available to the CRCNA and its local congregations. The broader responsibilities currently assigned to the Office of Race Relations must also be the responsibility of every agency and ministry in the CRCNA (i.e., ensuring the creation of a racism-free environment and promoting biblical diversity in every aspect of our ministries).
 - d. That synod instruct the executive director to encourage the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy (JIMA) collaboration group to continue to prioritize goals and assign resources for all of our justice and mercy denominational issues, and to present an annual report to the ED for the Board of Trustees (via the appropriate calling standing committee) about progress toward diversity goals.
 - e. That synod take note that the Collaborative for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) will continue the work completed by the DIWG and meet as needed to monitor overall progress toward achieving the plan and concepts contained in this report (see section V in Appendix D). It is anticipated that these meetings will take place no more than three times per year.
 - f. That synod dismiss the DIWG and consider this report to be a fulfillment of the task assigned to the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group in 2013.
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 828-29)

7. We ask that you please take note of the dates of the **Disability Awareness Week** and plan accordingly within your communities.

Board of Trustees

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).

¹ Several such formal and informal networks already exist, or are being contemplated (e.g., Home Missions ethnic leaders networks plus Consejo Latino, South East Asian and Pacific Island, and East meets West – Chinese, Black, and African-American Collaborative Network, among others).

² The Office of Race Relations also convenes a group called the Antiracism and Reconciliation Team, which specifically addresses antiracism policies and practices for the CRCNA work environments.

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.
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 832)

8. Synod adopted thirteen **revised liturgical forms** for Holy Communion (4); Baptism (3); Profession of Faith (2), Welcome of New Members (1), and forms for Ordination (3). These forms will be uploaded to the CRCNA website (crcna.org) for download and use by the churches in the coming weeks. *Note:* Several of the forms printed in the *Agenda for Synod 2016* were edited slightly by synod. The full list of new forms follows:

Board of Trustees

That synod approve the following liturgical forms and introductions printed in the Addendum of the Liturgical Forms Committee report (Appendix H) and as revised below:

- 1) Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion (as revised)
- 2) A Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion (as revised)
- 3) Introduction to the Communion for the Sick and Homebound
- 4) Service of Holy Communion for the Sick or Homebound
- 5) Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (as revised)
- 6) Form for the Holy Baptism of Infants and Young Children (as revised)
- 7) Form for the Holy Baptism and Profession of Faith of Older Children and Adults (as revised)
- 8) Introduction to the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth (as revised)
- 9) Form for the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth
- 10) Form for the Welcome of New Members (as revised)
- 11) Form for the Ordination of Commissioned Pastors
- 12) Form for the Ordination/Installation of Chaplains
- 13) Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Grounds:

- a. These forms are consistent with scriptural teaching and with the Reformed confessions.
- b. Strengthening the pool of explicitly approved synodical forms is valuable both for congregations that use the exact text of approved forms and congregations that adapt them.

- c. Revisions were needed in several places where the language in the introductions and forms for baptism as submitted by the Liturgical Forms Committee described baptism in terms that could lead to the conclusion that baptism is a sacramental sign and seal of the eternal salvation in Christ of the baptized infant. Several revisions aim to emphasize the need to embrace the gracious promises of God by faith. Other revisions incorporate references to the covenant (which were notably rare). Still other revisions sought to clarify ambiguous language and improve sentence structure.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 898-99)

9. 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. A separate correspondence is being sent regarding these important changes. *Note:* The revised Church Order and Its Supplements will be sent to churches around the first of September.

Board of Trustees

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):

- 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.

- b. That synod refer this report to the churches for study and for awareness of these important issues.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 863-66)

10. A report by the Candidacy Committee providing **clarification on Church Order Article 23** (commissioned pastors) is recommended to the churches as helpful advice. Synod also asked the Candidacy Committee to recommend revisions to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, which will be considered by 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) . . . receive the report on Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23 [*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-74] 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)

11. Councils are encouraged to establish a policy for **continuing education for their pastor(s)** based on a report to synod by a subcommittee of the Candidacy Committee (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 275-316). The specific action taken by synod regarding these matters follows:

Candidacy Committee

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

- a. That synod emphasize the following statements of Synod 2000 (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 681), as noted in section VII, A of the report.

That synod urge all councils (a) to establish a policy for continuing education, (b) to establish the expectation that their pastor(s) and ministry staff annually engage in an appropriate program of continuing education for ministry, and (c) to hold ministers and other ministry staff accountable for obtaining continuing education and for the content of the programs. This accountability is to be based on clear criteria adopted by the council in consultation with the minister(s) and ministry staff.

That synod urge church councils to grant pastors and ministry staff adequate time (approximately ten days per year) for annual continuing education and budget sufficient funds (approximately \$1,200) to cover this education.

- b. That synod encourage all councils and pastors to engage in an annual review of their plan for the pastor's continuing education (CE), as presented in section VII, B of the report, and that synod recommend the use of the Learning Covenant in Addendum 1.
- l. That synod note the various ideas in section VII, L of the report for nurturing a culture of CE and recommend them to the churches.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 849-50)

12. 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 act on any forthcoming 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)

13. 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)

14. Synod approved a recommendation that **Synod 2018** be held in the same location as the **Reformed Church in America's** General Synod (Calvin College) to allow for joint and integrative sessions of the two bodies.

Board of Trustees

That Synod 2018 meet at Calvin College during the same time frame as the RCA's General Synod in June 2018 and that the meetings include both joint and integrative sessions of the two synods.

Grounds:

- a. The above action is consistent with the accord reached by the RCA and CRC synods in 2014 held in Pella, Iowa.
- b. This will enable the kind of joint celebrative events experienced in 2014 in Pella.
- c. Integrative sessions will allow both synods to focus on joint, strategic planning for current and future collaborative efforts.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 830)

15. 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)

16. CRC churches are encouraged to seek ways to ecumenically commemorate the **500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation** in 2017. Particular attention was given by synod 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. Churches will be notified as resources are identified and developed.

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 local churches to seek out ways to ecumenically commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 843-44)

17. Delegates to synod had the privilege of interviewing the following **two faculty/administration** appointees as recommended by the board of **Calvin Theological Seminary**:

Calvin Theological Seminary

Synod proceeds according to the adopted procedure (in Article 32, section III of these minutes) and, following the completed interviews, considers the following recommendations:

- a. That synod ratify the appointment of Dr. Danjuma Gibson as associate professor of pastoral care for three years, effective July 1, 2016.
- b. That synod ratify the appointment of Rev. Geoffrey Vandermolen as the director of vocational formation for three years, effective July 1, 2016.
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 855)

18. Synod approved the following **special offerings** for CRC agencies:

That synod approve the following requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2016:

1. That synod encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Easter Sunday and Reformation Day Sunday as significant opportunities to pray for and receive an offering for Christian Reformed Home Missions (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 198).
2. That synod along with the Board of Trustees encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Pentecost Sunday and the third Sunday of September 2016 as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Christian Reformed World Missions (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 202).

3. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by World Renew and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 237).

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 825)

19. Synod instructed the **BOT to conduct a program evaluation of CRCNA ministries** and prioritize with the goal of “reducing the institutional foot print.” Synod’s action with grounds follows:

Board of Trustees

That synod instruct the BOT to evaluate and prioritize all existing programs and ministries with the goal of reducing the institutional footprint, including the following:

- Produce a detailed chart of all existing ministries that includes the following information: ministry description, date the ministry began, account of synod that established the ministry, and current financial ministry-share allocation. This chart is to be presented to the BOT by February 2017.
- Provide an update on the process to Synod 2017.
- Seek input from the churches and classes in the prioritization and evaluation.
- Bring a final report to Synod 2018 to affirm the prioritized ministries.
- Going forward, all ministries will be evaluated on a regular basis.

Grounds:

- a. A smaller institutional footprint allows for churches and classes to better support their local ministries.
- b. This process will create greater ownership of denominational programs and ministries within the local congregations.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858)

20. **Only 5 of 106 requests to the CRC Archives** by churches for a copy of their **articles of incorporation or constitution** could be fulfilled. If your church has not done so, please forward a copy to the archives. It takes just minutes to do and could save headache down the road!

Historical Committee

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.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 830)

21. Synod delighted in the appointment of a **new Banner editor-in-chief**. Mr. Shiao Chong will begin his role as editor on August 1.

That synod appoint Mr. Shiao C. Chong to the position of editor-in-chief of *The Banner*, effective August 1, 2016 (BOT Supplement section I, E and Appendix C).

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 867)

22. A familiar ministry to churches has a **new name**: Pastor-Church Relations will now operate under the name of **Pastor Church Resources**.

Board of Trustees

That synod approve the name change for the Office of Pastor-Church Relations to Pastor Church Resources (PCR) (section II, B, 6).

Grounds:

- a. Since the inception of its ministry, PCR has seen significant expansion in its responsibilities, with proportionally more of its work directed toward resourcing church leaders, congregational staff, pastors, pastor spouses, and so on through increased efforts to generate helpful materials and provide educational events. A significant portion of this work has been stimulated by the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and Sustaining Congregational Excellence initiatives. The addition of the Ministry Assessment project and the emphasis on resourcing classis health continues this momentum. The name Pastor Church Resources would better reflect this broader effort.
- b. The name Pastor-Church Relations has acquired some unintended negative consequences. Some of these are as follows:
 - 1) The brand Pastor-Church Relations explicitly or implicitly suggests that the ministry's primary or only reason for being has been to address "problems" in these critical relationships. This stigma can tend to discourage the use of consultation assistance and many other PCR services focused toward health and flourishing.
 - 2) A reticence to contact PCR has developed among congregational leaders and pastors because, for many, the idea of doing so has become a negative indicator of distress and tension. Pastors and church leaders who have asked PCR staff to facilitate educational experiences have shied away from publicizing that these persons are staff of Pastor-Church Relations, believing that this ministry name will suggest to their congregation that there are significant problems in the pastor-congregation relationship even when that is not the case.
- c. Changing the name Pastor-Church Relations to Pastor Church Resources provides a way to retain a recognizable abbreviation (PCR) while, at the same time, shifting the public focus on PCR's work in ways that will help churches access and benefit from this ministry.
(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 833-34)

23. Synod asks churches to take note of the following **two helpful resources available** from CRC ministries:

Safe Church Ministry

That synod highlight for the churches the availability of many helpful resources through the Safe Church Ministry website (www.crcna.org/SafeChurch).

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 925)

Social Justice and Hunger Action

That synod highlight for the churches the availability of the free resource, "Changed for Life," created to "provide short-term mission teams with quality materials that engage all participants and keep long-term goals in mind." This resource is available through www.bechangedforlife.org.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 925)