

AGENDA FOR SYNOD



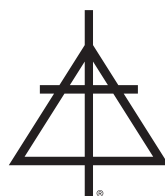
Responding to God's
gracious call.



Christian
Reformed
Church

**AGENDA
FOR SYNOD**

2016



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

June 10-17, 2016
Covenant Fine Arts Center
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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The Christian Reformed Church is active in missions, education, publishing, media, pastoral care, advocacy, diaconal outreach, and youth ministry. To learn about our work in North America and around the world, visit www.crcna.org.

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Synod 2016 will begin its sessions on Friday, June 10, at 8:00 a.m. in joint worship with the conferees of Engage 2016: A Multiethnic Gathering at the College Chapel on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The opening business session of synod will convene at 9:00 a.m. in the college's Covenant Fine Arts Center Auditorium. North Hills CRC, Troy, Michigan, will serve as the convening church of synod. Reverend Randall Engle, pastor of North Hills CRC, will serve as the president pro-tem until synod is duly constituted and its four officers have been elected. A community-wide Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise will be held Sunday, June 12, 2016, at 3:00 p.m. at the College Chapel, Calvin College, 1835 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids.

Prior to arriving at synod, *all* delegates and advisers to synod are encouraged to take time to view the video orientation accessed on the synod site—secure for delegates and advisers only. The orientation will assist first-time delegates and advisers in understanding the nature of synod and will provide helpful reminders for returning delegates and advisers to synod.

The congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America are requested to remember the synodical assembly in intercessory prayers on the Sundays of June 5 and 12. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will equip the synodical delegates to serve in faith and obedience and will lead the Christian Reformed Church into new and challenging areas of ministry. May Synod 2016 be an experience in which we are further “built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22) as we strive to be faithful to Christ’s call in our congregations and ministries.

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

I. Welcome

Thank you for serving as a delegate to Synod 2016. Whether you are a returning delegate or you are coming for the first time, we sincerely hope and pray that you will find synod to be a rewarding and blessed experience. You come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, as members of the CRC, and as representatives of the classes that delegated and appointed you to serve. Synod is more than just a gathering of church leaders or a governing body. It is a reflection of the church and a time for reflection and celebration of what God is doing in and through the Christian Reformed Church in North America. God has richly blessed us, and you have been given a unique privilege to serve him and his kingdom by your engagement at synod.

The synodical services staff, under the leadership of Ms. Dee Recker, is available to assist you in whatever way they are able. Please feel free to contact the Office of Synodical Services, if you need information or have any questions before arriving, by writing synod@crcna.org or calling 800-272-5125 or 616-224-0833.

II. Confidentiality of the executive sessions of synod

The Board of Trustees calls the matter of confidentiality to the attention of Synod 2016 and urges that all necessary precautions be taken to prevent violations of confidentiality.

Synod 1954 stated that “the very principle of executive sessions, or sessions that are not open to the public, involves the practical implication that reporters may not ‘report’” (*Acts of Synod 1954*, p. 15). If reporters are not permitted to report on executive sessions of synod, it is certainly a breach of confidentiality also for delegates to the synodical assembly to report—publicly, privately, orally, or in print—on the discussions held in an executive session of synod (cf. *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 16).

III. Audio and video recordings of synod

Synod 1979 authorized the making of an official audio recording of the entire proceedings of the general sessions of synod as a way to verify the written record of the synodical proceedings. Although the general sessions of synod are recorded, executive sessions are not recorded. Delegates to synod are informed at the opening session of synod that all the general sessions are being recorded. Synod has designated that the office of the executive director be responsible for the use and storage of these materials.

The following regulations were adopted by Synod 1989 concerning audio and video recordings of synodical sessions by media representatives and visitors:

A. Representatives of the media are permitted to make video recordings of synodical proceedings provided they observe the restrictions placed upon them by the synodical news office under the direction of the general secretary of synod.

B. *Visitor privileges*

1. Visitors are at liberty to make audio recordings of the public proceedings of synod provided they do so unobtrusively (i.e., in no way inhibiting or disturbing either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).
2. Video recordings are permitted provided the following restrictions are observed:
 - a. Video cameras are permitted only at the entrances, not backstage or in the wings.
 - b. Auxiliary lighting is not permitted.
 - c. Videotaping [video recording] is to be done unobtrusively (i.e., in such a way that it in no way inhibits or disturbs either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).

(Acts of Synod 1989, p. 445)

IV. Proposed daily schedule

Although each new assembly is free to alter the schedule, the following general schedule is tentatively in place for Synod 2016:

Thursday orientation

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Orientation for ethnic advisers, women advisers, faculty advisers, and young adult representatives
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Orientation for first-time delegates
7:45 - 9:00 p.m.	Orientation for chairs and reporters, and alternate chairs and alternate reporters of advisory committees
9:00 p.m.	Welcome reception and ice cream social with Engage 2016 conferees

Opening Friday

8:00 - 11:00 a.m.	Opening session of synod Election of officers Finalization of committee assignments
11:15 - 12:15 p.m.	Advisory committees meet for introductions
12:15 - 1:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 - 3:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
3:00 - 3:20 p.m.	Break
3:30 - 5:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings

Saturday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 9:15 a.m.	Brief plenary session
9:30 - 11:45 a.m.	Advisory committee meetings
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Tentative plenary session

Sunday

Morning worship at area CRC churches	
3:00 p.m.	Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise
7:00 p.m.	Workshops

Monday – Thursday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Plenary session
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Plenary session
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Plenary session

Friday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Plenary session

*Synod will adjourn no later than noon Friday.

DELEGATES TO SYNOD 2016

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Alberta North		
Minister	William D. Nieuwenhuis	Minister. Leonard H. Batterink
Elder	Janet Paquette	Elder Henry A. Bosch
Deacon	Wilma A. McLaughlin	Deacon Jason S. Dalstra
Other.	William J. Delleman	Other Bruce E. Gritter
Alberta South/Saskatchewan		
Minister	H. Charles Kooger	Minister. Michelle R. Gritter
Elder	Michelle L. Slomp	Elder Ed Oosterhof
Deacon	Sharon M. Zwart	Deacon Bert Tanis
Other.	Paul W. Verhoef	Other Kenneth J. Vanderploeg
Arizona		
Minister	Daniel R. Kuiper	Minister. Jonathan Gerstner
Elder	Samuel Estala Aranda	Elder _____
Deacon	Erika Colyn	Deacon _____
Other.	José Rayas	Other Marc A. Van Berkum
Atlantic Northeast		
Minister	Brent A. Pennings	Minister. Jantina Cornelison
Elder	Cornelius Hutt	Elder Henry G. Kuperus
Deacon	Terry L. Woodnorth	Deacon _____
Other.	Bruce M. Dykstra	Other Tobias T. Lewis
B.C. North-West		
Minister	Chelsey L. Harmon	Minister. Curtis D. Korver
Elder	Elisabeth Termaat	Elder Kathy N. Smith
Deacon	Elly T. Homan	Deacon _____
Other.	Andrew J. Aukema	Other Joel Ringma
B.C. South-East		
Minister	Edward H. Gerber	Minister. Andrew G. Vander Leek
Elder	Winnie Vandenberg	Elder Lee Hollaar
Deacon	Justin M. Verwoerd	Deacon Joanne Meyles
Other.	Bert Slofstra	Other Joe Schalk
California South		
Minister	John H. Caicedo	Minister. Scott Elgersma
Elder	Arlan G. Vanden Bos	Elder James M. Seim
Deacon	Daryl L. Switzer	Deacon _____
Other.	DaeWoo Park	Other Phil Du Bois
Central California		
Minister	Mark E. Hofman	Minister. Andrew C.S. Narm
Elder	Karen Wynbeek	Elder Gerald De Vries
Deacon	Lorna Van Gilst	Deacon Carolyn L. Petersen
Other.	Andrew C.S. Narm	Other Mark C. Humphreys

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Central Plains		
Minister	Richard J. Admiraal	Minister. Josh Van Engen
Elder	Leon J. Groenendyk	Elder Lee S. Talma
Deacon	Calvin D. Bandstra	Deacon _____
Other.	Lawrence J. Birchler	Other. Gary W. Brouwers
Chatham		
Minister	Peter A. Hoytema	Minister. Philip A. Apoll
Elder	Marianne Kingma	Elder Bill Barneveld
Deacon	Margherita Bierling	Deacon Jan A. Den Boer
Other.	Aaron M. Thompson	Other. James R. Poelman
Chicago South		
Minister	Derek Buikema	Minister. Ronald D. Vanderwell
Elder	Jei B. Wilson	Elder _____
Deacon	Bryan Boersma	Deacon _____
Other.	Elsa Fennema	Other. _____
Columbia		
Minister	Anthony R. De Korte	Minister. John Van Schepen
Elder	Eric Lintner	Elder Seth A. Atsma
Deacon	Marli Lintner	Deacon _____
Other.	Gordon L. Nyhof	Other. Louis M. Korf
Eastern Canada		
Minister	Daniel C. Zylstra	Minister. Daniel G. Brown
Elder	Jean J.A. Lauziere	Elder Cor Dykstra
Deacon	Yettie Zandbergen	Deacon René M. Wall
Other.	Beatrice F. Wallace	Other. Daniel Meinema
Georgetown		
Minister	Gerald A. Koning	Minister. Stanley A. Drenth
Elder	James Roskam	Elder Christopher L. Bouma
Deacon	Melissa S. Dykema	Deacon Marcia K. Jasperse
Other.	Terry L. Scholten	Other. Leonard A. Kuyvenhoven
Grand Rapids East		
Minister	Jack Roeda	Minister. David H. Beelen
Elder	Khary J. Bridgewater	Elder Abel Zwart
Deacon	Rachel N. Klompmaker	Deacon Mike J. Cornell
Other.	Steven J. De Ruiter	Other. David H. Beelen
Grand Rapids North		
Minister	Zachary J. Olson	Minister. Sean M. Baker
Elder	William L. Lugrand	Elder _____
Deacon	Earle W. Hogle	Deacon Ellen G. Zierleyn
Other.	Benjamin S. Browneye	Other. Peter R. Byma
Grand Rapids South		
Minister	Michael W. Hoogeboom	Minister. Henry J. Schenkel
Elder	Eric D. Kamstra	Elder Nelson Haan
Deacon	Sandra C. Raak	Deacon Anthony C.S. Tiggelman
Other.	Daniel I. Bud	Other. Raymond A. Blacketer
Grandville		
Minister	James M. Boer	Minister. Thomas K. Groelsema
Elder	Steve Zuidervent	Elder Sandy F. Johnson
Deacon	Steve B. Vos	Deacon Sione Polume
Other.	Cedric W. Parsels	Other. Sandy F. Johnson

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Greater Los Angeles	Minister Sam Lee Elder Michael Whitten Deacon Sheri Admiraal Other Fernando Valencia	Minister Brent Wassink Elder Merwyn Tanis Deacon _____ Other Matthew B. Ford
Hackensack	Minister Petr Kornilov Elder Anthony Matias Deacon Tracie A. Traylor-Rhodes Other Lenore Maine	Minister Paul J. Van Dyken Elder Karen J. Walker Deacon Amy Vander Vliet Other Amy Vander Vliet
Hamilton	Minister Andrew J. Zomerman Elder Garry H. Sytsma Deacon Gina Taylor Other Christopher J. Schoon	Minister Henry P. Kranenburg Elder Martin W. Tigchelaar Deacon _____ Other Joel T. Bootsma
Hanmi	Minister Boo Hwan Kwak Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other Shin In Chul	Minister _____ Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other _____
Heartland	Minister Mark T. Klompier Elder Henry W. Kramer Deacon Michael V. Krommendyk Other Aldon L. Kuiper	Minister Kevin J. Muyskens Elder Corwin J. Slagter Deacon _____ Other Andrew Vanden Akker
Holland	Minister John R. DeVries Elder Richard J. Mulder Deacon Jeffrey D. Vikstrom Other Lee Khang	Minister John T. Kim Elder Calvin J. Hoogstra Deacon _____ Other Chad M. Steenwyk
Hudson	Minister Christian R. Pedersen Elder Sylvia DeVries Deacon Miles Kuperus III Other Jeremy Mulder	Minister Joel D. Vande Werken Elder Steven B. Eichorn Deacon _____ Other Melvin J. Van Essendelft
Huron	Minister John C. Medendorp Elder Albert Hovingh Deacon Mary Blydorp Other Marguerite E. Ridder	Minister Vicki Verhulst Cok Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other Kevin J. teBrake
Iakota	Minister Gideon E. Wamala Elder Jan van Vliet Deacon _____ Other Matthew A. Haan	Minister John R. Lee Elder Terry D. Veldhouse Deacon _____ Other Cory Van Sloten
Illiana	Minister Laryn G. Zoerhof Elder Keith E. Bruxvoort Deacon Shaun A. Buikema Other Jeffrey R. Bulthuis	Minister Joel W. Zuidema Elder Donald Dykstra Deacon Bart W. Miller Other Joel J. Sheeres

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Kalamazoo	Minister Simon A. Tuin Elder Roger Klok Deacon John A. Terpstra Other Kenneth A. Baker	Minister Philip D. Kok Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other Daniel S. Sarkipato
Ko-Am	Minister Jonathan J. Kim Elder Sang Won Park Deacon _____ Other Tae Jung Son	Minister _____ Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other _____
Lake Erie	Minister Robert A. Arbogast Elder Jim Nicholas Deacon Luanne England Other Matthew T. Ackerman	Minister Nathan D. Gritter Elder Vivian R. Louis Deacon _____ Other Nathan D. Gritter
Lake Superior	Minister Brady J. Mulder Elder Drew Ryder Deacon Mark Hubbard Other Albert Postma	Minister Jeffrey C. Vanderhooft Elder Doug Shank Deacon _____ Other Thyra D. Van Keeken
Minnkota	Minister Roger W. Sparks Elder Alvin Vis Deacon Charles De Berg Other Joseph Vanden Akker	Minister Timothy J. Brown Elder Roger D. Punt Deacon Roy W. Duinink Other _____
Muskegon	Minister Drew K. Sweetman Elder Fred M. Bultman Deacon Rosemary Geertsma Other Matthew J. Eenigenburg	Minister Cynthia R. de Jong Elder Jane H. DeGroot Deacon _____ Other Bruce T. Ballast
Niagara	Minister Christopher W. deWinter Elder Cora W. Vink Deacon Sylvia Prins Other Fred VanderBerg	Minister Steven J. deBoer Elder _____ Deacon Ted Van Geest Other Albertus Kleine Deters
Northcentral Iowa	Minister Russell W. Boersma Elder David Primus Deacon Greg A. De Haan Other Jonathan L. Spronk	Minister Kelly L. Vander Woude Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other Joel A. De Boer
Northern Illinois	Minister William B. Ipema Elder William Van Wyngaarden Deacon Jennie Hengeveld-Misner Other Philip Stel	Minister _____ Elder _____ Deacon Jackie Terpstra Other Manuel A. DeLosSantos
Northern Michigan	Minister Steven J. Datema Elder Keith A. Dick Deacon Kraig R. Van Houten Other Dirk Koetje	Minister Keith A. Mannes Elder David M. Dick Deacon _____ Other Jonathan W. Flikkema

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Pacific Northwest		
Minister	Mark A. Van Haitisma	Minister. Ben E. de Regt
Elder	Jonathan Assink	Elder Aaron J. De Boer
Deacon	Nathan Welford	Deacon _____
Other.	William G. Vis	Other. _____
Quinte		
Minister	Leonard T. Riemersma	Minister. John T. Wildeboer
Elder	Sharon L. Wildeboer	Elder James De Jong
Deacon	Martin Van Dyk	Deacon _____
Other.	Norman A. Sennema	Other. Michael W. Bootsma
Red Mesa		
Minister	Joseph M. Kamphuis	Minister. Lora A. Copley
Elder	Gail E. De Young	Elder Randy L. Freeland
Deacon	Autumn J. Yazzie-Newell	Deacon Sharon K. Jim
Other.	James Litson	Other. Max Benally
Rocky Mountain		
Minister	Gerald W. Vander Hoek	Minister. Andrew R. Sytsma
Elder	Eileen J. Howerzyl	Elder Gerald D. Reinsma
Deacon	Maria M. Rawlinson	Deacon Brice D. Hawley
Other.	Adrian R. deLange	Other. Thomas D. Draayer
Southeast U.S.		
Minister	Felix M. Fernandez	Minister. Gerrit Besteman
Elder	John E. Granada	Elder Gregory T. Rhodes
Deacon	Lourdes K. Altamirano	Deacon _____
Other.	Irma N. Rodriguez	Other. _____
Thornapple Valley		
Minister	David J. Bosscher	Minister. William C. Hensen
Elder	Steven H. VanderLeest	Elder _____
Deacon	Corrie J. Bakker	Deacon Joel W. Schaafsma
Other.	Paul R. DeVries	Other. Gary G. Ellens
Toronto		
Minister	Hendrik P. Bruinsma	Minister. Samuel Cooper
Elder	John Meiboom	Elder Jake Veenstra
Deacon	Effie Bierling	Deacon _____
Other.	Joan G. DeVries	Other. Peter Noteboom
Wisconsin		
Minister	Michael Winnowski	Minister. Mark J. Pluimer
Elder	Robert H. Buikema	Elder Glenn E. Meeusen
Deacon	Benjamin E. Li	Deacon Patrick A. McHugh
Other.	Christopher J. Ganski	Other. David J. Dykstra
Yellowstone		
Minister	Timothy B. Toeset	Minister. _____
Elder	Michael Santarosa	Elder _____
Deacon	Bori Ly	Deacon _____
Other.	Brian D. Tebben	Other. _____
Zeeland		
Minister	Vern D. Swieringa	Minister. Timothy Howerzyl
Elder	Henry A. Veenstra	Elder Glenn H. Kuyers
Deacon	Angie Ploegstra	Deacon Seth D. Christrup
Other.	John G. Aukema	Other. Aaron J. Vriesman

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

The Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (the Board, or BOT) presents this report as a summary of the activities carried out on behalf of synod during the interim between Synod 2015 and Synod 2016.

I. Introduction

A. General

Our Lord Jesus Christ, upon his ascension into heaven, entrusted the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to his disciples and commanded them to be his witnesses, teaching all nations to obey everything he had commanded.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the church corporately and each of its members individually, led by the Holy Spirit, are called to share this gospel of the kingdom within the fellowship of the church and with people throughout the world by proclaiming God's Word and giving God the worship and honor that are his due, in the confidence that Christ is building up the church and is establishing the kingdom.

To carry out this mission, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (hereinafter *synod*) has created the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and such agencies, committees, and institutions as are listed in its bylaws. These agencies, committees, and institutions function primarily within Canada and the United States, where the Christian Reformed Church is committed to being a binational denomination. Each organizational entity and each national expression of the Christian Reformed Church in North America makes its own unique contribution to God's mission in the world as the whole denomination strives to live the fullness of the gospel.

(Preamble, Constitution of the Board of Trustees)

The Board, a synodically elected and appointed governing body, whose members also serve as the directors of the CRCNA-Canada Corporation and the CRCNA-Michigan Corporation, has met two times since Synod 2015 (September 2015 and February 2016) and is scheduled to meet again in May 2016. The Board's agenda normally consists of agency matters (program review, personnel appointments, focus of the agency, and so forth), strategic planning (creation of a ministry plan to guide the CRC ministries), polity matters (study reports, board appointments, interim committee of synod concerns), as well as normal organizational matters that come up in a complex organization such as the CRCNA. In addition, the Board oversees the work of the executive director.

Nearly all the matters addressed by the Board affect the full CRCNA as a binational church, but, in compliance with Canadian regulations governing Canadian registered charities, the Canadian trustees review and approve all actions taken by the full Board and, as necessary, address any matters that relate directly to uniquely Canadian issues and matters of law. The Board, as synod's agent, is grateful for the opportunity to serve the entire church.

B. Membership

The members of the Board from the United States are Rev. Kenneth A. Baker (Region 10), Mr. David DeRidder (Region 7), Rev. Peter J. DeVries (Region 5), Mr. Randy L. Freeland (member-at-large), Dr. R. Scott Greenway (Region 11), Rev. Emmett A. Harrison (Region 11), Ms. Susan B. Hoekema (member-at-large), Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn (Region 8), Rev. Christian Y. Oh (member-at-large), Mr. Kyu Paek (Region 6), Ms. Elizabeth Rudenga (Region 9), Mr. José Tagle (Region 12), Pastor Angela Taylor Perry (Region 10), Mr. Chris Van Spronsen (Region 11), and Dr. Socorro Woodbury (Region 8).

The members of the Board from Canada are Rev. Darrell Bierman (Huron), Rev. Shawn R. Brix (Quinte), Mr. Peter DeBoer (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Mr. Andy deRuyter (B.C. North-West), Rev. Donald Draayer (Lake Superior), Mrs. Verney Kho (member-at-large), Mr. Ralph Luimes (member-at-large), Mr. Peter Noteboom (Toronto), Mr. Garry Sytsma (Classis Hamilton), Ms. Gavrielle Tran (B.C. South-East), Ms. Katherine M. Vandergrift (Eastern Canada), Rev. William C. Veenstra (member-at-large), Rev. Norman J. Visser (Chatham), and Mr. Michael Wevers (Alberta North). The Classis Niagara position is currently vacant.

Newly appointed by the Board of Trustees in September 2015 are two young adult representatives, serving as advisers (without vote) to the Board in its deliberations and committee work. Ms. Ashley Bootsma is from Canada, and Mrs. Youri Lee is from the United States.

The executive director (Dr. Steven R. Timmermans) serves *ex officio* as a corporate trustee of the CRCNA-Michigan Corporation and member of the Board of Trustees (without vote). The executive director and the Canadian ministries director for legal purposes serve as guests of the CRCNA-Canada Corporation.

Following are the officers of the Board and of respective corporations for the 2015-2016 term:

1. Board officers: Mrs. Katherine M. Vandergrift, president; Mr. Chris Van Spronsen, vice president; Dr. Steven R. Timmermans, secretary; Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn, vice-all.
2. Corporation officers
 - a. CRCNA-Canada Corporation: Ms. Katherine M. Vandergrift, president; Mr. Peter Noteboom, vice president; Mr. Michael Wevers, secretary.
 - b. CRCNA-Michigan Corporation: Mr. Chris Van Spronsen, president; Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn, vice president; Dr. Steven R. Timmermans, secretary; Dr. Socorro Woodbury, vice-all.
3. Executive Committee: Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn; Mr. Peter Noteboom; Ms. Katherine M. Vandergrift, chair; Mr. Chris Van Spronsen; Mr. Michael Wevers; and Dr. Socorro Woodbury. Dr. Steven R. Timmermans serves *ex officio*.

C. Salary disclosure

At the directive of synod, the Board reports the following salaries for senior denominational services staff directly employed by the Board of Trustees:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
20	1	1	0
19	2	1	1
18	1	1	0
17	5	1	4

Synod 2014 adopted a salary administration system that uses a salary range *target* and a minimum of 85 percent of that target. Salary ranges within which the agencies will be reporting actual compensation for the current fiscal year (unchanged from the 2014-2015 ranges) are as follows:

2015-2016 Salary Grade and Range Structure

Level	U.S. Range		Canadian Range	
	Minimum	Target	Minimum	Target
20	\$153,763	\$180,898		
19	\$138,976	\$163,501		
18	\$122,431	\$144,037	\$114,256	\$134,418
17	\$108,478	\$127,621	\$99,706	\$117,301
16	\$93,392	\$109,873	\$87,097	\$102,467
15	\$81,357	\$95,714	\$77,518	\$91,198
14	\$72,640	\$85,459	\$70,566	\$83,019
13	\$64,857	\$76,302	\$64,361	\$75,718

II. Activities of the Board

A. Polity matters

1. Proposal for a Synod Review Task Force

The Task Force to Review Structure and Culture (TFRSC), while conducting listening sessions with stakeholders at all levels, received questions about the role of synod for both the current and future contexts of ministry. In its final report to Synod 2015, the TFRSC recommended that a subsequent task force be commissioned to conduct a meaningful review of synod.

Synod 2015 responded positively to the recommendation and instructed the Board of Trustees “to bring to Synod 2016 a proposed mandate, parameters of composition, and a timeline for a task force to review the practices and functions of synod” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680). The proposal for such a task force is presented to synod for consideration in Appendix A.

2. Proposed guidelines for synodical study committees and task forces

Synod 2015, in response to Overture 15 from Classis Hudson (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 549-53), instructed the Board of Trustees “to clarify the role of *synodical task forces* and come back with suggested amendments to the Rules for Synodical Procedure for the Christian Reformed Church” (p. 681). The BOT presents to synod for adoption suggested guidelines as an amendment to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, section VI, D, 1, as found in Appendix B.

3. Guidelines for research methods for synodical study committees and task forces

In the past, the mandate of synodically appointed study committees has often been focused on scriptural interpretation to make recommendations for ecclesiastical positions and practice. However, more recently, the methods of social science have been called upon, as the scope of the tasks has broadened.

Surveys are conducted, case studies are elicited, and personal stories are recorded, all in the service of synodical study assignments.

Recognizing this broader scope of inquiry, it would be appropriate that synod adopt Research Methodology Guidelines for Synodical Committees and Task Forces as recommended by the Board in Appendix C.

4. *Banner* editor-in-chief search

The Board received a report from the *Banner* Editor-in-chief Search Committee in February. First-round interviews were conducted by the committee February 8-9, and second-round interviews are anticipated to take place in early March. The committee has been very pleased with the quality and diversity of candidates interviewed and hopes to present a nominee, Lord willing, to the Board of Trustees in May to be recommended to synod for appointment.

5. Interim appointments

On behalf of synod, the Board has ratified the following appointments made by classes:

Appointment	Classis	Member	Alternate	Term
Synodical Deputies	Chatham	Rev. William T. Koopmans		2018(1)
	Grand Rapids North	Rev. Terry D. Slachter		2018(1)
	lakota Illiana		Rev. Gideon E. Wamala Rev. Joel W. Zuidema	
	Muskegon Thornapple Valley Wisconsin	Rev. Fred M. Bultman	Rev. Thomas J. De Vries Rev. Mark J. Pluimer	2018(1)
World Renew	U.S. member at-large	Mr. John Apostol		2018(1)
	U.S. member at-large	Ms. Hyacynth Douglas Bailey*		2016(1)
	U.S. young adult at-large	Ms. Brianna Marie Enerson		2018(1)
	U.S. young adult at-large	Ms. Morgan Trotter		2018(1)

*Ms. Douglas Bailey was appointed by synod as a delegate from Classis Atlantic Northeast and has moved from the region. She is willing to continue serving on the World Renew Board of Delegates and Board of Directors (JMC).

6. Classes that have declared that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis

In accordance with the instructions of Synod 2007, the executive director keeps a list of those classes that, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis. Although some of these classes have developed their own regulations regarding the permissibility of women officebearers participating in classis meetings, some classes have adopted a decision to declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis. A list of these classes may be obtained by contacting the office of the executive director.

7. Transition to Council of Delegates

Synod 2015 directed “the current Board of Trustees to form a Transition Committee, under the leadership of the executive director, with agency and ministry representation, to facilitate the transition from the Board of Trustees to the Council of Delegates by Synod 2018 or sooner” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 679). At its September 2015 and February 2016 meetings, the BOT received reports from the Transition Committee on the its work and direction to date

and anticipates that a summary report will be provided to synod by way of the Board's supplemental report.

8. Board nominations

Whenever a new Board of Trustees member is needed from a region or when a member's first term is completed, each classis in the region is requested to submit or approve names for the position. Nominations are then prepared by the Board and are forwarded to synod for election. Generally, all first-term elections are from a slate of two nominees, and all second-term elections are from a slate of single nominees (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, VI, D, 2).

- a. The Board recommends the following slates of nominees from various geographic regions and classes for election to a first term:

Region 5

Dr. Gary D. Bos is an orthopedic surgeon in Washington state. He is a member of Faith Alive CRC in Yakima, Washington. He has served on numerous medical societies and associations. He is currently an elder at Faith Alive CRC and has served as an elder in other churches in the past.

Ms. Esther van Til Hayman is an instructional designer of e-learning courses and serves as a coach and consultant for her own company. She is a member of Bellevue CRC, Bellevue, Washington. She has served on the American Society of Women Accountants and the International Association of Business Communicators boards. Currently Esther is serving as reviewer of submissions for the 2016 annual conference of the Academy of Management. She is also an elder and a disability advocate for her church.

Region 10

Mr. Kevin TenBrink is in national sales and marketing for Thermofisher Scientific. He is a member of Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan. His experience includes serving on a 2015 CRC Church Visiting Pilot Project (with Rev. A.J. Gretz), and he has completed two terms as a deacon and one term as an elder at Third CRC.

Mr. Fronse W. Smith, Sr., is a member of Faith CRC in Holland, Michigan, and is retired. Fronse has served on the board of the Holland Community Health Center, as part of the Executive Classis – RCA, as a member of the Holland, Mich., Juneteenth Committee, and as an elder delegate to synod. He is currently serving on the Juneteenth Committee, the Diasporan Committee, and the All Africa Conference of Churches.

Region 11

Rev. Paul De Vries is the senior pastor at Brookside CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan. His previous experience includes serving on the Calvin Theological Seminary board of trustees, the Classis Thornapple Valley leadership team and student fund, and the Christian Healthcare Center board. At present he is serving on the board of Grand Rapids Christian Schools.

Rev. Jerome Burton is the pastor of Coit Community CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has served on the board of Christian Reformed Home Missions and as second clerk at Synod 2014. Jerome is currently serving Classis Grand Rapids North on its classical interim committee and Home Missions committee and as a church visitor. He also serves on the

Black and Reformed leadership board and is chair of the Coit Community Church council.

Classis Niagara

Rev. Steven deBoer is the lead pastor at Providence CRC in Beamsville, Ontario. He has served Classis Niagara on the Classical Ministry Leadership Team and as chair of its classical interim committee. He has also served as chair of the Shalom Manor Chaplaincy Committee. He has led Providence CRC through a time of developing a new ministry and leadership structure and becoming the parent church of The Bridge, a Niagara Falls church plant.

Rev. Chris deWinter is the pastor at Trinity CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario. He has served as a delegate to Synod 2012 (Creation Stewardship advisory committee) and as a regional interviewer for the Candidacy Committee in 2014. Currently Chris serves as chair of Classis Niagara's ministry leadership team and its Next Steps (visioning) team, as chair of Trinity CRC's worship committee, and as a team member of the Leaders Prayer Breakfast of St. Catharines.

Classis Toronto

Rev. Richard Bodini is the pastor at Holland Marsh CRC in Newmarket, Ontario. He has served on the classical interim and executive committees of Classes Alberta South/Saskatchewan and Toronto; the Canadian Catalytic Conversation planning team; The King's University College board of governors; and the Saint John's School of Alberta board of directors. Richard currently serves on the Classis Toronto Race Relations Committee and the Canadian National Gathering planning team. He also coaches basketball on Saturdays in the community and at the local Christian school.

Rev. Samuel Cooper is the pastor at Community of Meadowvale CRC in Mississauga, Ontario. He has served on the Classis Toronto Home Missions and Race Relations committees and on the Christian Reformed Home Missions board. He has served as a Classis Toronto delegate to synod (1999, 2010) and has been a member of the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry board. Currently Samuel is serving again on the Classis Toronto Home Missions committee, as a member of the Transformation Prayer Ministry board, as a member of the Cross-towne Community Church steering committee, and as a member of The Open Door (local outreach ministry) board.

Mr. Kyu Paek recently moved from Region 6, leaving a vacancy within the region. The Board recommends the following single nominee for appointment to a first term:

Region 6

Rev. Ronald Chu is a pastor at TtoKamsa Mission Church, Los Angeles, California. He has served on the Faith Alive Christian Resources board, the Youth Unlimited board, the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence advisory board, and the Leadership Exchange governing board, and he currently serves on the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program review team and on the Global Partners USA (mission

agency) board. Ron has also served on the West Coast Regional Ministry Team and as mission leader for Classis California South.

Subsequently the Board recommends that synod appoint Mr. Kyu Paek to fill out his second term (concluding June 30, 2017) as a U.S. at-large member (Rev. Christian Y. Oh is concluding service on the Board).

At this writing the Board is seeking nominees for the Classis Eastern Canada position and anticipates presenting a slate of names by way of the Board's supplemental report to synod.

- b. The Board recommends the following single nominee for the Canada at-large position for election to a first term:

Canada at-large

Ms. Aaltje (Aalie) Van Grootheest, a member of Victoria CRC in Victoria, British Columbia, has completed a career in law and has served as an elder and as chair of her local church council. She previously served as a board member of a local Christian newspaper. Ms. Van Grootheest recently completed service on The King's University board of governors as a member of its executive committee and as chair of its student life committee.

- c. The Board recommends the following nominees for election (ratification) to a second term: Mr. David De Ridder (Region 7), Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn (Region 8), Mrs. Verney Kho (Canada at-large), and Mr. Garry Sytsma (Hamilton).

9. National and binational gatherings

In the implementation of Pathway 1 in the BOT's 2014 Binationality Report, a Canadian national gathering—"Keeping in Step with the Spirit"—is scheduled to take place in Waterloo, Ontario, in May 2016. In addition, three regional gatherings are being planned in the United States, with the first to take place in June 2016 preceding synod. The theme of this event is "Engage 2016—A Multiethnic Gathering." A second event is being planned for fall 2016 on the east coast of the United States, and a third is planned for January 2017 on the west coast of the United States.

The BOT instructed the executive director and the executive leadership team to plan a binational gathering to stimulate conversations around the mission God has entrusted to us, exploring and discerning how that mission can be implemented most fruitfully and effectively in our respective contexts and in our shared North American context. These conversations should inform and shape our mission locally and nationally and guide the development of a denominational strategic plan. A denominational gathering is planned for summer 2017. All CRC churches will be invited to participate and join in on an opportunity for sharing and learning at a denominational event. More details will be available at the time of synod!

10. Annual report on gender and ethnic diversity on denominational boards

Data for the board diversity (women and people of color) report for the 2015-2016 year is gathered from the denominational boards (Board of Trustees, Back to God Ministries International, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, and World Renew). The World Renew Joint Ministry

Council (JMC), in addition to the World Renew Board of Delegates, has been included in the diversity report for the second consecutive year.

There are presently 185 denominationally appointed board members (without the JMC count); the JMC, elected from the World Renew Board of Delegates, has 15 members for a reporting total of 200 board members reflected in the following. Of the 200 members, 65 (33%) are women and 36 (18%) are people of color. The data received from the boards for the 2015-2016 board term reflects an increase of 1 percent for women and a decrease of 0.5 percent for people of color over the 2014-2015 reporting year.

11. Annual report on denominational efforts to address ethnic diversity and racial justice

Synod 2010 requested that the BOT report to synod each year on the status of denominational efforts to address ethnic diversity and racial justice. Following the decision of Synod 2013, a team of denominational staff were proactive in advancing the diversity in leadership value. Mr. Colin P. Watson, Sr., provided leadership to this team, known as the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group.

The working group completed its mandate in January 2016 and presents its final report and recommendations to synod for action (Appendix D).

At the instruction of Synod 2013, each CRC agency, Calvin College, and Calvin Theological Seminary are asked to submit to the ED, as part of their strategic plan, diversity goals and timelines in their leadership, administrative, and regional ministry teams. This annual report was shared with the Board in February. In addition, the director of synodical services regularly encourages stated clerks and agency boards to seek ethnic diversity in nominating people to serve on denominational boards and as delegates to synod.

12. Ethnic advisers to synod

Synod 2014 approved the appointment of up to seven and no less than two (determined by a three-year average of ethnic representation of delegates to synod) ethnic advisers to synod each year in order to reflect the diversity of CRC membership (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 537-38, 576). The BOT has appointed the following persons to serve as ethnic advisers to Synod 2016 (* indicates service as an ethnic adviser in 2015):

* Mr. John Saa Lendein	Ms. Shelia D. Johnson
Ms. Darleen Litson	

13. Women advisers to synod

Synod 2015 adopted the practice of reinstating the practice of women *advisers* to synod. The BOT has appointed the following persons to serve as women advisers to Synod 2016:

Ms. Jenny Douma	Mrs. Sarah van Breda
Mrs. Karen Knip	Ms. Melissa A. Van Dyk
Mrs. Linda G. Ryks	Mrs. Elaine J. VanLaare
Ms. Emily B. Ulmer	

14. Young adult representatives to synod

In an effort to engage youth and young adults (18- to 26-year-olds) in the current issues faced by our denomination and to help raise up leadership within the church from among our young adults, young adult

representatives will participate in the deliberations of synod. These individuals bring a valuable and unique perspective to the issues we face as a denomination by listening, engaging delegates during advisory committee meetings, and offering input on matters that arise in plenary. The BOT has appointed the following persons to serve as young adult representatives to Synod 2016 (* indicates service as a young adult representative in 2015):

* Ms. Ashley G. Bootsma	Ms. Onelee A. Sneller
Mr. Joshua W. Chen	Ms. Laura A. Vander Horst
Ms. Chelsea L. Dost	Mr. Brandon L. Vander Stoep
* Mr. Aren T. Plante	

15. Agency presentations at synod

Synod 1995 adopted a three-year rotation cycle for agency presentations at synod. The following roster for agency presentations is scheduled for Synod 2016:

- Calvin College
- Congregational Services Ministries

16. Responding to the recent rise in Church Order Article 17 ministerial releases

In 2012 synod took note of the sharp rise in Article 17 ministerial releases in the preceding decade. As a result, the Board of Trustees charged Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) with the task of discovering how the Christian Reformed Church could be more proactive in avoiding such separations, rather than being in a reactive mode. As part of the response, PCR created the Better Together Delivery Team to work with classis functionaries to explore some of the underlying issues and to uncover possible interventions for reducing and preventing the types of conflicts that can lead to Article 17 releases. The study by the team has prompted some changes outlined in a summary of the Better Together report (Appendix E).

17. Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee hears appeals from a decision made by a council, a classis, or an agency of the Christian Reformed Church if it is alleged that an action violates the Church Order or the agency's mandate. The procedures followed by the Judicial Code Committee are set forth in Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c. The committee's members from both Canada and the United States include people with legal expertise, clergy, and nonclergy.

The BOT, on behalf of the Judicial Code Committee, asks that synod appoint one *clergy* member and one *layperson without background in law* to a first term for membership on the Judicial Code Committee from the following:

a. *Clergy position* (appoint the following single nominee)

Rev. Henry Jonker is currently retired. Rev. Jonker received a B.A. (philosophy/Greek) from Calvin College and a B.D. from Calvin Theological Seminary and has had several Regent College sabbaticals, including Exegeting Popular Culture and an independent study on the Sermon on the Mount. He has served at seven synods and has been the chair of synod advisory committees (2004, 2006). He has also served several terms as a synodical deputy and seven years on the denomination's Candidacy Committee (with three years as chair). In addition, he served on

the committee to develop a mandate for the council of CRCs in Canada, on the Classis Ministries Committee (several occasions as chair), and on the in-vitro fertilization study committee for Classis B.C. North-West. Rev. Jonker has served four congregations in Canada over a period of 37 years. He is currently part of the Classis Ministerial Leadership team, a Safe Church Ministry evaluator, and an alternate synodical deputy (B.C. North-West).

- b. *Layperson without background in law position* (appoint one member from the following slate of nominees)

Dr. Duane Bajema is a professor of agriculture at Dordt College and currently is a member of Covenant CRC, Sioux Center, Iowa. He has served on the World Renew board, including a period as its vice president. Dr. Bajema recently concluded an eight-year term as vice president of the board at Western Christian High School, Hull, Iowa, and currently serves on the Sioux County Cattlemen's Executive Committee. Dr. Bajema has served two terms as a deacon and two terms as an elder.

Ms. Ellen Hamilton is currently a member of Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC. She has served on the Back to God Ministries International board, on the ministry leadership team at Elmhurst CRC, and as Coffee Break director/leader at Elmhurst CRC and at River Terrace CRC, East Lansing, Michigan. Ms. Hamilton is currently on the Berkshire Condo Association board, serving as secretary. She is a mentor with LINK at her church (working with homeless families through Bridge Communities) and is also involved with the Luke Society Partnership Ministry Team (serving in Rivne, Ukraine).

The Board recommends the following nominees for election (ratification) to a second term on the Judicial Code Committee: Ms. Rita Buitendorp, Mr. Ron Nightingale, and Mr. Joel D. Vos.

18. Doctrine of Discovery Task Force

The report of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force was presented to the Board of Trustees in September 2015, which decided to commend the report to synod "as a faithful fulfilment of the task force's mandate."

Out of pastoral concern for one of the "storytellers" within the report, the Board of Trustees also decided the following:

- A. To gratefully receive a story included in section VI, A of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force report as critical to the important message of the report but, out of pastoral sensitivity for the dignity and justice of all the parties involved, to instruct the executive director to pursue the content of the story through other appropriate and pastoral channels.
- B. To remove the above-mentioned story in section VI, A from the report, according to section V, B, 9 of the Rules for Synodical Procedure.
- C. To process the revised report according to synodical guidelines and to distribute it to the churches by November 1.

Grounds:

1. The Board has a pastoral duty to address the individual story.
2. This is consistent with the fiduciary and legal responsibilities of the Board.

(BOT Minute 5454)

This action was taken in light of a number of specific synodical practices—namely, in reference to the Rules for Synodical Procedure (section V, B, 9), which states that “the Board of Trustees, upon recommendation of the executive director, may, for good cause, determine not to print an item or to print an abbreviated version.” The rules go on to state that the full, original document is to be brought to the appropriate synodical advisory committee.

Take note that the executive director has been instructed “to pursue the content of the story through other appropriate and pastoral channels.” While it is premature to describe how the story’s message will surface through other channels at this time, we fully expect that our efforts to utilize other channels will be explained at synod, whether such activities will be partially or fully implemented.

The Board’s actions are consistent with the mandate of the task force—that is, that the task force reports to synod by way of the Board of Trustees.

19. Revised affiliation process

Synod 2006 approved guidelines for use by the classes when assisting a congregation and its pastor in affiliating with the Christian Reformed Church. These guidelines were in need of updates to reflect decisions of synod since 2006 and to provide clarity for the process. Although not believed to be substantive in nature, the Board believes it appropriate for synod to take note and provide endorsement of the updated guidelines found in Appendix F.

20. Planting churches outside of North America

Today’s complex global-local dynamics pose deep and important questions regarding our missional strategy, institutional structure, and definition of “communal life.” At the grassroots, as local congregations become more diverse, so do their ministry strategies, with our members developing increasingly more ties to communities worldwide. These pose both opportunities and risks. Taking this into consideration, the Board of Trustees has received the report and recommendations of an ad hoc task force and now forwards the report in Appendix G for address by synod.

21. Publications and services

a. *Yearbook*

The *Yearbook*, published annually, serves as a denominational directory and as a resource for statistical information. The 2016 *Yearbook* transitioned into a leaner print directory of the CRC classes, churches, ministers, commissioned pastors, and denominational offices and personnel. Much of what previously was included in previous versions of the *Yearbook* is now accessible at crca.org/Yearbook—updated continuously as new information is received by the *Yearbook* office. Denominational statistics, church service times and locations, and membership information are found in the online version of the *Yearbook*. Minister service history, special days to be observed in the church calendar, and denominational ministry share information are all linked via the online *Yearbook*.

The print *Yearbook* is published near the beginning of each calendar year and reflects denominational and local-church information up to approximately August 31 of the calendar year preceding publication.

Among some of the statistics made available in the online *Yearbook* are the total number of members (baptized and confessing) in a local congregation, number of families, number of professing members over eighteen years of age, total number of professing members, total number of baptized members, and total number of members received from other CRCs, through evangelism, and from other denominations. This data continues to present a historical record of our church and ministry together through the years.

The *Yearbook* directory is available in print and digital versions through Faith Alive Christian Resources (www.faithaliveresources.org).

b. *Church Order and Its Supplements and Rules for Synodical Procedure*

The *Church Order and Its Supplements 2015* reflects the updates adopted by Synod 2015. The latest version, published by the Office of Synodical Services, was made available to the churches in early fall 2015. The *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, also updated following the decisions of Synod 2015, is available in electronic format *only*. Both the *Church Order* and the *Rules for Synodical Procedure* are available on the Synod Resources webpage at www.crcna.org/SynodResources.

c. *Agenda for Synod and Acts of Synod*

The publication of the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* is the responsibility of the director of synodical services under the direction of the executive director. From time to time some decisions need to be made by the ED about which material properly belongs in the *Agenda for Synod*. Erring on the side of grace seems more appropriate than erring on the side of rigid regulation. Synod itself will finally decide in all cases whether material is properly on its agenda.

d. *Manual for Synodical Deputies*

The *Manual for Synodical Deputies* is distributed to synodical deputies, their alternates, and the stated clerks of classes. A revision of the manual was completed in summer 2015 by the Office of Synodical Services, reflecting the decisions of Synod 2015. Anyone desiring to access or download a copy of this tool for the classes may do so by going to the stated clerk webpage at www.crcna.org/StatedClerks.

B. *Program matters*

A large part of the Board of Trustees' work relates to the ministry programs, personnel, and finances of the denomination. The program and personnel details are reported to synod by way of the reports of the agencies and this section of the BOT's report in this agenda. Additional information regarding financial matters is contained in Appendix I to this Board of Trustees Report as well as in the *Agenda for Synod 2016—Financial and Business Supplement* that is distributed at synod. The final budget and the ministry share request will be presented to synod by way of synod's financial matters advisory committee.

The BOT provides denominational oversight on behalf of synod throughout the year. The office of the executive director serves as the primary link between the BOT and the denomination's ministries. Serving within the office of the ED are the director of ministries and administration (DMA), the Canadian ministries director (CMD), the director of finance and operations (DFO), the director of synodical services (DSS), and the director of communications (DC).

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC), convened by the executive director of the CRCNA, has responsibility for implementation of the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church, the collaboration of the ministries, and the review of program matters. The membership of the MLC is made up of executive leadership, directors of the agencies, presidents of the educational institutions (or their designees), and others representative of specific offices and functions. The Canadian Ministries Team, convened by the Canadian ministries director, functions as a subcommittee of the MLC to provide leadership to the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada.

The program and financial matters processed by the Board from July through February are presented to synod as information. Any matters that require action by synod are identified within the body of this report.

1. Our Journey 2020 – The Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church

The Board of Trustees is mandated by synod to lead in developing and implementing the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church that provides strategic direction for the agencies and institutions of the Christian Reformed Church. The plan provides a framework for the Board's supervision of the management of the agencies; the planning, coordinating, and integrating of their work; and the integration of the respective missions of the denomination's educational institutions into the denominational ministry program.

After listening carefully to members and leaders of Christian Reformed churches across North America, the Board has identified a set of mutually desired futures. These desired futures, endorsed by Synod 2015 and included below, provide a focus for what we, as the Christian Reformed Church, together believe God is calling us to be and to do, resulting in a plan—*Our Journey 2020*—that will assist congregations in developing strategies and accessing resources appropriate to their unique ministry contexts and opportunities.

Desired Future 1: Church and Community

We want to participate with each other, and with the people in the communities where we live and work, to discover where God's Spirit is already active and to bear witness to Christ in a way that invites others to accept him and become part of his family.

Our Goals

- Our congregations will find the places where God is working in churches and communities and will joyfully join in the Spirit's work of renewal and transformation.
- Ministry leaders, both lay and ordained, will discover how God is working in cities, towns, and neighborhoods, bringing people to faith in Christ and resulting in the birth of new churches and discipling communities.

Desired Future 2: Discipleship

Our congregations will be vibrant communities, shaped by grace, that proclaim the gospel and are engaged in evangelism and lifelong discipleship with people of all generations.

Our Goals

- Our congregations will
 - be experienced as communities shaped by grace.

- be places where people of all generations and of “every nation, tribe and tongue” find a spiritual home and grow in Christlikeness together.
- discover and use evangelism and discipleship practices and resources that extend and deepen their ministries and also reflect their unique identities and contexts.
- engage children, youth, and young adults in the full life of the church.
- be characterized by vibrant worship that engages people of all ages.

Desired Future 3: Leadership

Our congregations and ministries at all levels – local, regional, and denominational – will be places where leaders, both ordained and lay, are identified, equipped, and empowered to serve effectively in today’s diverse and challenging world.

Our Goals

Our congregations and ministries will

- identify, understand, and respond to leadership needs in ways that are appropriate to their unique identities and contexts.
- be led by Spirit-filled people who have the skills and training to be effective servant leaders in the places to which God has called them.
- work together with partners throughout the world to identify and develop servant leaders in response to local needs.
- display an understanding that all members – regardless of gender, age, ability, and racial or ethnic origin – are collaborators in the kingdom by helping them to discover, develop, and use the leadership gifts that God has given them.

Desired Future 4: Identity

We will understand deeply, embrace fully, and express freely what it means to be the Christian Reformed Church in North America in this time and place.

Our Goals

- Our congregations and ministries will develop ways to clearly understand, express, and explain our uniquely Christian Reformed identity.
- Our congregations and ministries will understand and embrace our role in Christ’s church worldwide.
- Our congregations and ministries will embrace and embody the goal of becoming a diverse church in which everyone is welcome, regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, or language.
- Our members, congregations, and ministries will respond eagerly to God’s call to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” with him.

Desired Future 5: Collaboration

We will work together – locally, regionally, nationally, and binationally – to live out our fivefold calling in ways that are effective, efficient, responsive, cross-culturally competent, accessible, and sustainable.

Our Goals

- Our congregations and ministries will discover and develop ways of working together that are responsive to local needs and opportunities.
- Our denominational agencies and ministries will develop ways of connecting churches with services and resources that are appropriate to their contexts, as well as opportunities to participate in mission outreach and

evangelism in ways that make the best use of our various callings, gifts, and resources.

2. “Our Calling”

Proposed by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to Synod 2014, the term *Five Streams* became a focus of the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in its collaboration, programs, and reporting. Synod 2015 adopted the following:

That synod endorse the Five Streams functions as ministry priorities to strategically focus and adaptively organize the work of the Christian Reformed Church in North America while respecting and building on our previous mission efforts, history, and legacy of relationships and member support.

(*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680)

The Board of Trustees in February endorsed changing the name “Five Streams” to “Our Calling,” primarily because this term is more recognizable. Following are the five themes of Our Calling for the Christian Reformed Church:

Faith Formation

As a community of believers, we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to nurture their faith through all ages and stages of life.

Servant Leadership

Understanding that the lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish, we identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God.

Global Mission

Called to be witnesses of Christ’s kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world.

Mercy and Justice

Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God.

Gospel Proclamation and Worship

Believing that faith comes through the hearing of God’s Word, we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and seek to worship him in all that we do.

3. CRC agency, institution, and congregational services (formerly specialized ministries) reports

Each year the Board of Trustees submits a *unified* report to synod composed of individual parts provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The individual reports of the CRC ministries appear in the following pages of this *Agenda for Synod*.

These reports portray the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church at home and around the world. As you read the material, we invite you to praise God for ministry opportunities.

4. Unification of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions

The boards of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions received approval from Synod 2015 to form a single unified

mission agency. The unified ministry will create an organization that would enhance and increase ministry capability. The Board of Trustees received regular updates from the boards of Home Missions and World Missions on the unification plan and strategies in September 2015 and February 2016. It is anticipated that synod will receive a report and recommendations for the unification by way of the synod supplemental reports in May.

5. Liturgical Forms Committee report

Over the past years denominational staff have received requests for various liturgical forms that represent the current ministry context. New forms to meet these needs have been developed by a committee formed by Worship Ministries. Following a mailing to the churches for suggested improvements/edits to the proposed forms, they are now being presented to synod for approval (see Appendix H).

6. Name change for the Office of Pastor-Church Relations

The Board of Trustees recommends that synod approve a name change for the Office of Pastor-Church Relations to Pastor Church Resources (PCR).

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.

7. Office of Disability Concerns

a. Disability Awareness Week

Each year, CRC Disability Concerns asks the Board of Trustees to recommend that synod designate a specific week, coinciding with the Deacons' Offering Calendar, for churches, classes, and educational institutions to highlight the importance of engaging people with disabilities in ministry. The following recommendation is made in coordination with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) Disability Concerns Ministry.

That synod encourage CRC churches, classes, and educational institutions to sponsor events to celebrate Disability Awareness Week, October 10-16, 2016.

Grounds:

- 1) 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).
- 2) 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.
- 3) The dates of Disability Week coincide with the CRC denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
- 4) 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.

b. Classis regional disability advocate

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.

Grounds:

- 1) 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.

- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.

C. *Financial matters*

In order to assure that synod has the most up-to-date and accurate information, detailed financial data will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2016—Business and Financial Supplement* that will be made available to the delegates at the time synod convenes. This supplement will include financial disclosure information, agency budgets for fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017), and the recommended ministry-share amount for calendar year 2017. In addition, synod will be asked to approve a schedule for one or more above-ministry-share offerings for the ministries of the denomination, a quarterly offering for World Renew (in lieu of ministry-share support), and a listing of new requests for accredited agency status for recommendation to the churches. Additional financial information and/or recommendations will also be included in the Board of Trustees Supplement report due out in late May.

The Board in February received an update report from the Task Force on Financial Sustainability. The task force, given the following mandate in 2015, hopes to present a comprehensive report to the BOT at its May meeting.

To understand the multiple financial means by which the ministries of the CRCNA are provided (as well as to better understand financial paradigms used by other denominations), gather and assess multiple-year data and trends, and provide recommendations to the BOT Finance Committee and the full BOT with possible strategies and policies, presenting specific focus (e.g., estate gifts) as well as comprehensive implications to move toward a sustainable paradigm for the next generation. (*Note: The results may require subsequent recommendations to synod.*)

D. *Christian Reformed Church Foundation*

The Christian Reformed Church Foundation began in the early 1990s, when several Christian Reformed Church members and the CRCNA executive director of ministries began the Fellowship Fund to support uniquely denominational programs and needs. Synod 1996 approved a binational Christian Reformed Church Foundation, now a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization in the United States. Its counterpart is the tax-exempt registered charity Christian Reformed Church in North America–Canada Foundation.

Since the Foundation's inception, it has distributed the funds received to various offices and agencies of the CRCNA. Most recently, funds were designated to initiate a new pilot youth ministry effort in the Canadian classes and for the production of videos focused on Our Journey 2020.

The Foundation board of directors is committed to strengthening the ministries of the CRC. The Foundation seeks financial support for new ideas and programs that fall outside the mandates of the denominational agencies and are not funded through budgets of synod, classes, or agencies.

The Christian Reformed Church Foundation does not offer estate planning services but partners with Barnabas Foundation in the United States and with Christian Stewardship Services in Canada to help families make planned gifts and develop estate plans.

III. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Ms. Katherine M. Vandergrift, chair of the Board of Trustees; Dr. Steven R. Timmermans, executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Board of Trustees are discussed.

B. That synod grant all requests for privilege of the floor by the BOT, agencies, educational institutions, standing committees, and study committees of synod contained within the reports to Synod 2016.

C. 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 2016.

D. That synod adopt the mandate for a Synod Review Task Force as proposed in Appendix A (II, A, 1).

E. That synod adopt the following proposed guidelines (changes indicated in italics) for the Rules for Synodical Procedure to provide clarity regarding the function, scope, and reporting of synodical study committees and task forces (Appendix B and section II, A, 2):

Proposed Section VI, D, 1: Rules for Appointments to Boards and Committees

All study committees *and task forces* shall be appointed by synod from a nomination made by the advisory committee which drafted the mandate, with the advice of the officers of synod. Delegates to synod will be given opportunity to suggest nominees to the advisory committee, but no new nominees will be accepted from the floor when a committee is recommended. The reporter of the advisory committee shall present the nominations on the floor of synod. If additional time is necessary to complete the appointment of a study committee, a two-week extension will be granted and responsibility to do so will be entrusted to the officers of synod, the chair and reporter of the advisory committee, and one additional person chosen by the advisory committee from among its members.

The advisory committee shall recommend to synod the scope of the mandate and include in their recommendation one of the following designations:

a. *Synodical study committee*

A study committee typically includes a broad representation of the churches in its membership, has a membership of 9-12 persons, is appointed by synod per the above rules, is mandated to conduct a broad study of the matter in question, reports to synod three years after being appointed, may report to synod in the interim if instructed, and presents its final report by September 15 for distribution to the churches by November 1 preceding the synod to which it is scheduled to report.

b. *Synodical task force*

A synodical task force is typically more limited in membership and mandate, has a membership of 7-10 persons, is appointed by synod per the above rules, has a more specific mandate limited in scope, often reports to synod two or three years after being appointed, and may report to synod in the interim if instructed. Synod should indicate whether the mandate is considered to be substantial, requiring the task force to submit its final report by September 15 for distribution to the churches by November 1 preceding the synod to which it is scheduled to report, or whether a February 15 deadline is sufficient for inclusion in the Agenda for Synod.

By way of exception to these rules, synod may mandate a task force to report through the Board of Trustees to synod, particularly if the matter in question involves the ministries of the CRCNA and if reporting through the BOT will help the work of the task force by providing frequent input/feedback. The Board of Trustees may offer comment (such as agreement with a report) or may serve synod with advice by way of its report to synod with regard to the recommendations of a synodical study committee or task force if any matters reported by such committee or task force relate to programmatic ministry matters falling under the mandate of the BOT.

F. That synod adopt the proposed Research Methodology Guidelines for Synodical Committees and Task Forces as presented in Appendix C (II, A, 3).

G. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the Board for synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies (II, A, 5), as well as to the agency boards as needed.

H. That synod by way of the ballot elect members for the Board of Trustees from the slates of nominees presented and elect the single nominees for Region 6 and Canada at-large as presented (II, A, 8, a-b).

I. That synod appoint Mr. Kyu Paek to fill out his second term as the U.S. at-large member due to a move from Region 6 (II, A, 8, a).

J. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint to a second term members for the Board of Trustees from the slate of nominees presented (II, A, 8, c).

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

1. 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.

2. 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:
 - a. Human Resources procedures to ensure diversity in hiring and promoting.
 - b. Communication plans that reflect cultural sensitivity and appropriate representation of ethnic groups.
 - c. Acceptance of the voluntary input of minority and ethnic networks¹ into the life and work of the CRCNA.
 - d. Support of procedures to ensure a safe, healthy, and supportive workplace in all CRCNA locations.²
 - e. 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.
3. 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).
4. 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.
5. 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 above [in Appendix D]). It is anticipated that these meetings will take place no more than three times per year.
6. 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.

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.

L. That synod take note of the Better Together Summary report in response to a request of Synod 2012 to address the recent rise in Church Order Article 17 ministerial releases (Appendix E and II, A, 16).

M. That synod by way of the ballot elect to a first term members for the Judicial Code Committee from the lists of nominees presented (II, A, 17).

N. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint to a second term members for the Judicial Code Committee from the slate of nominees presented (II, A, 17).

O. That synod take note that (1) the Board commends the report of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force to synod "as a faithful fulfillment of the task force's mandate" and (2) the BOT took action to remove a story from within the report, instructing the executive director "to pursue the content of the story through other appropriate and pastoral channels" (II, A, 18).

P. That synod endorse the revised Affiliation Process as found in Appendix F (II, A, 19).

Q. That synod receive the report regarding planting churches outside of North America and adopt the following recommendations contained within (Appendix G and II, A, 20):

1. That synod declare that classes and congregations considering planting churches under the CRCNA name outside of North America and/or considering the affiliation of congregations outside of North America should do so only with utmost caution and care, keeping in mind the following principles and covenants:
 - a. The guiding principle and practice in church planting outside of North America must be to enable any new group to affiliate with other Christian groups in their home nation.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.
 - d. 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.
 - 1) The guidelines of Church Order Article 38 are relevant to this advice, and set definite expectations for any planted or affiliating congregation outside of North America to join the CRCNA officially.
 - 2) 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.

2. That synod instruct the executive director to task an ad hoc committee with this mandate:

To consider creation of a new category of affiliation by which a (non-North American) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA. Composition should include members of the EIRC and staff of the new unified mission agency.

In addition, if the committee would recommend allowance of such affiliations, their mandate should also include consideration of the role of Church Order Articles 49, 50, 73, and 76.

Grounds:

- a. Such a new category may be a hospitable option for such congregations and ministries potentially unable to meet current requirements for affiliation or for whom those described in Recommendation 1 above are culturally inappropriate.
 - b. Such a relationship could bless both the associating congregation and the CRCNA in ways beyond our anticipation, including a sense of accountability for currently independent congregations and appreciation of global relationships for CRC congregations in North America. This would therefore provide a forum in which global partners and those in the CRC could discuss matters challenging their ministries and assist one another in applying the calls of Scripture.
 - c. Such an exploration is consistent with the CRC Ministry Plan as follows: ecumenical relationships, when appropriate, give rise to the presence of the CRCNA (or a new category of CRC-partner denominations) in countries other than Canada and the United States.
3. That synod instruct the executive director to task an ad hoc committee with the following mandate:

To investigate potential areas of collaborative partnership in ministry with Koreans in Korea. Composition should include members of the Korean Relations Team, EIRC, our educational institutions, and staff of the unified mission agency.

Grounds:

- a. The current contributions of the president of Calvin Theological Seminary and of Calvin College staff have produced many fruitful relationships in Korea. Yet these programs are not coordinated by or inclusive of other CRC ministries. A team to consider such coordination and to maximize efforts would bless all parties involved.
- b. There are great opportunities for the CRCNA to learn about missions from Korean churches that claim a strong missional and prayer-filled history and identity. The CRCNA can grow in prayer in partnership with

such churches. These opportunities to partner in ministry initiatives and in a learning community are beyond the mandate of the EIRC.

R. That synod set aside ten minutes in its schedule to receive a presentation on Our Journey 2020 and Our Calling (II, B, 1-2).

S. That synod take note that the Board of Trustees endorsed changing the name “Five Streams” to “Our Calling” to refer to the five ministry priorities of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (II, B, 2).

T. That synod adopt the following recommendations of the Liturgical Forms Committee (Appendix H and II, B, 5):

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Joyce Borger, Rev. Kathy Smith, and Rev. Len Vander Zee when matters pertaining to the Liturgical Forms Committee are discussed.
2. That synod approve the following forms and introductions printed in the Addendum of the Liturgical Forms Committee report (Appendix H):
 - a. Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion
 - b. A Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion
 - c. Introduction to the Communion for the Sick and Homebound
 - d. Service of Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound
 - e. Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism
 - f. Form for the Holy Baptism of Infants and Young Children
 - g. Form for the Holy Baptism and Profession of Faith of Older Children and Adults
 - h. Introduction to the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth
 - i. Form for the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth
 - j. Form for the Welcome of New Members
 - k. Form for the Ordination of Commissioned Pastors
 - l. Form for the Ordination/Installation of Chaplains
 - m. Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons
3. That synod instruct the ED to ensure that Worship Ministries consults with the Translations Team to provide the forms in Spanish and Korean and other languages as requested.
4. That synod instruct the ED to ensure that Worship Ministries works with Ministry Support Services in finding the most efficient and financially feasible way to present these forms online in a user-friendly format.

Grounds:

- a. These forms are consistent with scriptural teaching and with the Reformed confessions.
- b. These forms reflect and address changes to our polity and structure and strengthen our existing set of explicitly approved forms.
- c. 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.
- d. These forms ought to be available to congregations worshipping in Spanish, Korean, and bilingually.

- e. These forms ought to be easily accessible online and in a format that makes the portion to be used easily copied or printed.

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

Grounds:

1. 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.
2. The name Pastor-Church Relations has acquired some unintended negative consequences. Some of these are as follows:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
3. 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.

V. 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:

1. 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).
2. 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.

3. The dates of Disability Week coincide with the CRC denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
4. 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.

W. 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

X. That synod receive as information the condensed financial statements of the agencies and educational institutions (Appendix I).

Board of Trustees of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Steven R. Timmermans, executive director

Appendix A

Proposed Mandate for Synod Review Task Force

I. Introduction

Synod 2011 mandated the Task Force to Review Structure and Culture (TFRSC) to review “the organization, culture, and leadership within the CRC-NA” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 864) from the standpoint of effectiveness in ministry. While the task force has concentrated on the Board of Trustees, agencies, and

staff, early listening sessions with stakeholders at all levels also raised questions about the role of synod for both the current and future contexts of ministry.

The TFRSC submitted its final report to Synod 2015 and recommended that a subsequent task force be commissioned to conduct a meaningful review of synod.

Synod 2015 responded positively to the recommendation and instructed “the Board of Trustees to bring to Synod 2016 a proposed mandate, parameters of composition, and a timeline for a task force to review the practices and functions of synod” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680). What follows are draft terms of reference for such a task force.

II. Mandate for a Synod Review Task Force

The mandate of the Synod Review Task Force is to research, examine, and review the principles, practices, and functions of synod; recommend changes and improvements that do not require amendments to the Church Order for implementation; and propose any Church Order changes for study and adoption by a subsequent synod.

III. Parameters of composition and membership of the Synod Review Task Force

It is recommended that synod appoint eight to ten members of roughly equal representation from the United States and Canada and reflecting the diversity of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (ethnicity, gender, age, ability). Synod should also take into consideration the following when appointing the task force:

- At least one-half of its members have experience serving as delegates to, officers of, or advisers to synod.
- At least one-third of its members are ordained clergy.
- At least one member is ordained as an elder, and at least one member is ordained as a deacon.
- At least one member is a trustee on the Board of Trustees.
- The task force membership should include the following:
 - polity adviser Rev. Kathy Smith (seminary faculty)
 - one member of the executive leadership team to serve as staff representative
 - the director of Synodical Services

Note: Synod may also wish to consider including a member with technological expertise or recommend that the committee consult with information technology specialists.

IV. Possible topics of study by the Synod Review Task Force

The following list of possible topics is largely gleaned from the TFRSC report and is not intended to be exhaustive (background from the TFRSC report is provided in the Addendum):

- the role and purpose of synod
- leadership and governance of synod
- membership, representation, and participation in synod
- duration and frequency of synod

- locations of synod
- relationships of synod with other bodies
- functions and agenda of synod
- how synod meets and deliberates
- how synod is financed

V. Ways of working

A. Participatory and broadly consultative

The task force will consult widely throughout the church, provide regular updates to church members, engage classes and denominational educational institutions and agencies, and deliberate with delegates to Synods 2017 and 2018.

B. Collaborative

For example, both the Synod Review Task Force and the Council of Delegates Transition Committee are mandated with considering the relationship between synod and the Council of Delegates. It will be essential that these two teams collaborate and communicate with each other in their work to present a unified understanding and proposal.

C. Learning from others

The task force will study and learn from the experiences of other churches in the Reformed tradition and beyond through ecumenical and interchurch dialogue.

D. Reflective

The task force will facilitate bringing into the 21st century the heritage, insights, and commitments of God’s church into a contemporary testimony, as living letters, of God’s work in the world.

VI. Timeline

June 2016	Committee appointed by synod
September 15, 2016	Committee convenes
February 15, 2017	Interim report to Synod 2017 due
February 15, 2018	Interim report to Synod 2018 due
September 15, 2018	Final report to Synod 2019 due to ED office
November 1, 2018	Report distributed to the churches and classes
June 2019	Synod 2019 considers committee report and recommendations

Note: Recommendations regarding changes to the Church Order are considered by synod for proposal to a subsequent synod unless the changes are judged by synod not to be substantial.

VII. Budget

It is anticipated that much of the work of the task force can be conducted primarily by video conference, thus incurring minimal cost for meetings. At least one meeting annually should be held face-to-face to build a strong working relationship within the task force. Typically synodical study committees or task forces are provided with an annual budget of \$11,000 for travel, logistics, and consultant fees (if applicable) by the Office of Synodical Services.

VIII. Communications

Communications regarding the work and progress of the task force will be through normal channels—regular information, updates, and engagement with members of the CRCNA.

Addendum

Relevant Excerpts from the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture Report as found in the *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 368-71

Review of synod's role in governance of the CRC

The TFRSC was mandated to review “the organization, culture, and leadership within the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 864) from the standpoint of effectiveness in ministry. While the task force has concentrated on the Board of Trustees, agencies, and staff, early listening sessions with stakeholders at all levels also raised questions about the role of synod, for both the current and future context of ministry.

Thus far, the TFRSC has not conducted a review of synod for possible changes to enhance its role in the governance or structure of the CRC. Synod is the broad, annual gathering that brings together representation from each classis, the agencies, the BOT, and selected other representatives to deal with a broad array of issues, strategic direction, agency direction, and ecclesiastical questions. Given the importance of synod in CRC governance, recent changes in technology, and expectations of CRC members, the TFRSC believes that a thorough review of synod's practices and relationships with the BOT and agencies would be very desirable.

A key additional factor that also needs to be weighed during a review of synod is the adopted recommendations regarding the Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force report and recommendations of the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon if adopted by Synod 2015. Any additional study would also be helpful in identifying how the Five Streams or other overall framing of ministry affects the agenda of synod.

Such a study would be timely, considering that the TFRSC report and whatever action is taken in response by synod should provide a useful backdrop for a review of synod and of its intersection points with the BOT, agencies, and staff.

The TFRSC is completing its work in time for Synod 2015, but in view of the number of items that are still unfolding and unresolved, we believe that the commission of a subsequent task force would be appropriate in order to conduct a meaningful review of synod.

A. Overview of synod

Synod generally meets for one week each June. There are four representatives from each classis, usually two ordained pastors and two elders. A large agenda is prepared and available prior to the gathering, with many topics and issues vetted by an advisory committee before consideration by the body of synod. The turnover of synod delegates is very high—very few delegates serve more than one consecutive year. Under Reformed polity, synod functions with authority as delegated by the individual churches and classes. It then follows that the BOT, full-time executive leadership (through the BOT), and agencies and other CRC-related ministries report to synod.

B. Suggested matters for discussion

During its work on the issues and functions of the BOT, agencies, and staff, the TFRSC encountered questions centered on relationships with and responsibilities to synod. Just as the task force was charged with seeking improvements in the ministry delivery and functioning of the work of the BOT, agencies, and staff, it seems appropriate that these relationships and responsibilities be reviewed from the vantage point of synod. It is very clear that synod is very important to the life and operation of the CRC, thus an occasional review of synod seems appropriate. Changes in technology, the means of communication, and the education of CRC members offer opportunities not previously available.

The TFRSC does not wish to restrict an agenda for a potential study and review of synod; however, it feels that some questions could be helpful in considering whether a review committee would be useful. Clearly it would be up to synod to ensure a proper mandate for a review committee. In the course of its work, the task force has discovered some items that might be considered for review:

- What is the role of synod in enhancing vision, mission, and purpose for the CRC today?
- What is the role of synod in the governance structure of the CRC today?
- What are the implications of the Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force report and the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon?
- Is there a way to deal with governance and vision in the same gathering, or should there be different venues or gatherings?
- What possible additions or deletions to the functions of synod should be considered?
- Are there viable options to streamline the full synod agenda or the time devoted to certain functions, such as greater use of advisory committees?
- What are the options for the number of delegates to synod?
- Consider how delegates are chosen.
- What options are available regarding the length of synod? (Many younger members cannot take a week away from their family or business.)
- What relationship and communication should exist between synod and the BOT?
- Should the BOT and synod use technology to have a meeting between on-site meetings of synod so that the BOT can inform synod of progress (for example, at the midpoint of the fiscal year)?
- Should synod require the BOT to report to the leadership of synod on an interim basis?
- What assurance is there that delegates to synod will include diversity and a range of needed skill sets?
- Should delegates serve a two- or three-year term to provide greater continuity?
- Should delegates to synod receive periodic reports from the BOT during their term?
- What is the relevance of synod to young people as part of the church today?
- What is the role of synod as a thoughtful, discerning body with regard to issues the church is facing?

C. *Suggested information to be obtained for review*

Given the importance of any review of synod in the CRC, it is critical that a committee have quality information to consider and to form recommendations. The knowledge and views of synod are likely to vary, considering the many different delegates and individuals who participate in the governance of the CRC. Just as the TFRSC benefited from an array of input, we suggest that it is important to solicit input from a variety of sources and to review the polity of higher assemblies of other denominations. An initial list of items to be considered for information may include the following:

- A review of the agendas of at least three recent synods.
- A list of all critical items that synod must act upon each year.
- Discussion of facets of work to be reviewed and information that should be assembled with those who have experienced attendance at synod.
- Interviews and/or questionnaires of recent officers of synod and of personnel in the denomination responsible for organizing synod.
- Interviews and/or questionnaires of recent synodical delegates, including ethnic and faculty advisers and young adult representatives.
- Information from the groups of individuals named above (e.g., officers of synod, staff to synod, advisers and delegates to synod) about what is working well and what changes they might suggest.
- Interviews of BOT officers about their view of the Board's relationship with synod and changes they might suggest for synod or the BOT.
- Suggestions for improvement in the way BOT officers are considered at synod or by subcommittees.
- A compilation of views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the current size of synod.
- On the basis of the preceding compilation, a discussion regarding the length of synod and what would need to change to reduce its length.
- Research regarding options for selecting participants, especially to ascertain that all needed skill sets are present at each synod.
- A compilation of information on how to involve younger members as delegates.
- A compilation of information from other denominations about the relationship between their equivalent of the CRC synod and their equivalent to the CRC Board of Trustees.

Appendix B

Proposed Guidelines for Synodical Study Committees and Synodical Task Forces

Synod 2015, in response to Overture 15 from Classis Hudson (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 549-53), instructed the Board of Trustees "to clarify the role of *synodical task forces* and come back with suggested amendments to the Rules for Synodical Procedure for the Christian Reformed Church." Grounds for this decision follow:

- a. The Rules for Synodical Procedure for the Christian Reformed Church do not include mandates for *synodical task forces*.
- b. It would be beneficial for task forces to issue final reports in the same time frame normally assigned to study committees.

(*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 681)

In recent years synod has appointed, or has asked the BOT to appoint, on behalf of synod, committees or task forces that report their findings and recommendations *to synod* for consideration, or, in some cases, *through the BOT*. This situation can create confusion if the committees or task forces are not clearly mandated and if reasons for reporting to the BOT rather than to synod are not provided.

In addition, synod at times has instructed the BOT to follow up with the appointment of the membership of synodical committees because synod itself has only a few days of meetings for making and confirming appointments. Recognizing the challenge of creating a concise and clear mandate for, as well as the challenge of appointing qualified and willing persons to synodical committees/task forces, Synod 2014 adopted the following guidelines for appointment of study committees. These guidelines provide opportunity for representatives of synod to appoint study committees within the weeks that follow synod's adjournment.

Current Section VI, D, 1: Rules for Appointments to Boards and Committees

All study committees shall be appointed by synod from a nomination made by the advisory committee which drafted the mandate, with the advice of the officers of synod. Delegates to synod will be given opportunity to suggest nominees to the advisory committee, but no new nominees will be accepted from the floor when a committee is recommended. The reporter of the advisory committee shall present the nominations on the floor of synod. If additional time is necessary to complete the appointment of a study committee, a two-week extension will be granted and responsibility to do so will be entrusted to the officers of synod, the chair and reporter of the advisory committee, and one additional person chosen by the advisory committee from among its members.

(Acts of Synod 1979, p. 15; 1980, p. 21; 1997, p. 634; 2014, p. 540)

In addition, the following section from the Rules for Synodical Procedure provides the reporting time frame for study committees. Confusion with regard to reporting deadlines has resulted at times when synod gave some committees the title of *task force*.

Current Section V, B, 9: The Printed Agenda and Study Committee Reports

Study committee reports shall be filed with the executive director on or before September 15, and the executive director shall distribute them to the churches no later than November 1.

It is our hope that the following proposed guidelines (with changes indicated in *italics*) for the Rules for Synodical Procedure will provide clarity regarding the function, scope, and reporting of synodical study committees and task forces.

Proposed Section VI, D, 1: Rules for Appointments to Boards and Committees

All study committees *and task forces* shall be appointed by synod from a nomination made by the advisory committee which drafted the mandate, with the advice of the officers of synod. Delegates to synod will be given opportunity to suggest nominees to the advisory committee, but no new nominees will be accepted from the floor when a committee or task force is recommended. The reporter of the advisory committee shall present the nominations on the floor of synod. If additional time is necessary to complete the appointment of a study committee or task force, a two-week extension will be granted and responsibility to do so will be entrusted to the officers of synod, the chair and reporter

of the advisory committee, and one additional person chosen by the advisory committee from among its members.

The advisory committee shall recommend to synod the scope of the mandate and include in their recommendation one of the following designations:

a. **Synodical study committee**

A study committee typically includes a broad representation of the churches in its membership, has a membership of 9-12 persons, is appointed by synod per the above rules, is mandated to conduct a broad study of the matter in question, reports to synod three years after being appointed, may report to synod in the interim if instructed, and presents its final report by September 15 for distribution to the churches by November 1 preceding the synod to which it is scheduled to report.

b. **Synodical task force**

A synodical task force is typically more limited in membership and mandate, has a membership of 7-10 persons, is appointed by synod per the above rules, has a more specific mandate limited in scope, often reports to synod two or three years after being appointed, and may report to synod in the interim if instructed. Synod should indicate whether the mandate is considered to be substantial, requiring the task force to submit its final report by September 15 for distribution to the churches by November 1 preceding the synod to which it is scheduled to report, or whether a February 15 deadline is sufficient for inclusion in the Agenda for Synod.

By way of exception to these rules, synod may mandate a task force to report through the Board of Trustees to synod, particularly if the matter in question involves the ministries of the CRCNA and if reporting through the BOT will help the work of the task force by providing frequent input/feedback. The Board of Trustees may offer comment (such as agreement with a report) or may serve synod with advice by way of its report to synod with regard to the recommendations of a synodical study committee or task force if any matters reported by such committee or task force relate to programmatic ministry matters falling under the mandate of the BOT.

Appendix C

Proposed Research Methodology Guidelines for Synodical Committees and Task Forces

I. Background: research methods

The debate about quantitative versus qualitative research has been going on for some time. Long gone are the days of quantitative supremacy, with conclusions drawn only after sample sizes have been proven to be representative, experimental and control groups carefully selected, and the degree of statistical significance set by predetermination of the desired criterion.

Qualitative methods include approaches such as case studies, ethnography, and narrative research. Barbara Czarniawska provides the following definition of narrative research: "Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text

giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected.”¹

She goes on to explain that such research usually involves focusing on one or two individuals, collecting their stories, describing their experiences, and ordering the meaning of the experiences.

Case studies are often used as well, particularly when wanting to address an issue and its context. Robert K. Yin has explained that persons using case study methods seek to address contextual issues because they are likely to be quite relevant to the area of study.²

However, novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlights the danger of the single story, observing the following in her landmark TED talk: “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. . . . The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity.”³

Regardless of the specific qualitative approach, researchers believe that informed consent is needed with qualitative approaches as it is with quantitative methods. Informed consent is described as follows:

Informed consent is an essential part of all research endeavors that involve human participants. The human rights of research participants must be protected. It is incumbent upon the qualitative researcher to provide a dynamic informed consent when study outcomes change. The violation of privacy is more apt to occur with in-depth interviews, which has implications for researchers to protect human rights throughout data collection, analysis, and dissemination.⁴

The format used to seek and secure the informed consent of participants in qualitative research can vary, and researchers vary on the way to address challenges that arise. Consider the following approach by Ruthellen Josselson:

To have two “informed consent” forms—one at the beginning of the interview agreeing to participate, to be taped, and acknowledging that the participant has a right to withdraw at any time. The second form would be presented at the end of the interview with the agreements about how the material will be managed from that point on. If this occurs at the end of the interview, at least the interviewee knows what has been recorded and has the opportunity to specify certain sections of the material that he or she would not want shown to others or published.⁵

Josselson notes that people who are institutionalized or vulnerable may agree to participate, but we need to question how freely that agreement has been given.

As a matter of good research practice, as well as ethics, researchers must always be thinking about what motives lead a person to participate in our studies. . . . And even when people consent, the researcher must be aware of vulnerabilities and consequences that participants may not recognize.⁶

¹ Czarniawska, Barbara. *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London: Sage Publications, 2004, p. 17.

² Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Third edition. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 13.

³ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Our Lives, Our Cultures, Are Composed of Many Overlapping Stories.” www.ted.com, 2009.

⁴ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11565159. Byrne, M. (2001). The concept of informed consent in qualitative research. *AORN J*, 74(3) 401-403.

⁵ Josselson, Ruthellen. “The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research,” in D.J. Clandinin (ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007, p. 544.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

Finally, the potential for harm must be confronted. Josselson mentions that most university Institutional Review Boards require the consent form to indicate that if the person being interviewed becomes upset as he or she talks about their own experiences, the opportunity for therapy or counseling must be identified for the interviewee.

Citing the work of other experts, Josselson also deals with the issue of potential harm

when participants are drawn from the same subcommunity (and could therefore be recognized by other members of that subcommunity, no matter how well we “disguise” them) or [when] “snowballing” techniques of finding participants are used such that participants know the identity of the other participants. . . . Researchers [should] . . . be ready to rescind any material the participant feels might be injurious to others or to their relationships with others.⁷

II. Recommendation

Nearly every year synod appoints study committees and task forces. In the past, the mandate of such committees has often been focused on scriptural interpretation to make recommendations for ecclesiastical positions and practice. However, more recently, the methods of social science have been called upon, as the scope of tasks has broadened. Surveys are conducted, case studies are elicited, and personal stories are recorded—all in service of synodical study assignments.

Recognizing this broader scope of inquiry, it would be appropriate that synod adopt the following Research Methodology Guidelines for Synodical Committees and Task Forces:

1. If it is likely that the methods of social science are to be used in a study committee’s research, membership on the study committee should include persons with advanced degrees and research knowledge in the area of potential study.
2. Study committees engaging in research methodologies of the social sciences should be encouraged to obtain the services of consultants, especially if research competencies are not held by the committee members.
3. Because it would be difficult for the CRCNA to set up Institutional Review Boards, Human Subject Review Committees, and the like, study committees should identify institutional connections (e.g., the Center for Social Research at Calvin College) that would offer guidelines, forms, and protocols available for their use with compliance ensured by the office of the executive director.

Ground: Whether with regard to quantitative or qualitative methods, we will better be able to ensure that participants are fully informed about their involvement and kept safe from potential harm.

⁷ Ibid., p. 554.

Appendix D

Diversity in Leadership Planning Group (DLPG) Implementation of Synodical Directives¹ Final Report of the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG)— February 2016

I. Introduction

Synod 2013 directed the office of the executive director of the CRCNA to implement diversity goals as detailed in the *Acts of Synod 2013* (pp. 628-32). This report represents a final update to synod on steps taken to implement this directive. It is important to note that though this is a final report to synod, the steps and initiatives referenced herein continue as an ongoing and integral part of the day-to-day operations of the ministries in the CRCNA.

The following is an updated timeline of events²:

- August 8, 2013, Rev. Joel Boot, then executive director of the CRCNA, convenes a team to address the mandate of Synod 2013 (Diversity in Leadership Planning Group steering and implementation team).
- Diversity champions are engaged by the executive director to implement the mandate, and a project plan is developed.
- Project plan presented to the BOT in February 2014.
- Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) is created to direct and oversee all phases of this project. Colin Watson, diversity champion, is charged with overseeing the project.
- DIWG is accountable to Dr. Steven Timmermans, newly appointed executive director.
- Colin Watson, hired as director of ministries and administration (DMA), assumes responsibility for DIWG implementation in April 2015 as part of the new DMA responsibilities.

The DIWG report to Synod 2015 recommended that a final report be presented to Synod 2016, but acknowledged that the diversity initiative is never fully complete. Our activities focus on putting an infrastructure in place that will become part of standard operating practices within the denomination.

Contrary to viewing diversity as a problem to be managed, the team recognizes that diversity and inclusion can present opportunities to benefit ministry. The report to Synod 2015 therefore also noted that as we acknowledge the benefits of diversity, we must focus on leveraging our differences—starting with race and ethnicity, then extending more broadly to other categories on diversity and inclusion, consistent with our beliefs and values for the benefit of our witness and ministry.

II. Summary of work done to date

Various activities critical to the implementation of the synodical directives were accomplished since the convening of DIWG (see *Agenda for Synod 2014*, p. 46, and *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 84-86 for additional activities).

¹ *Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 628-32.

² See *Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 81.

DIWG has continued to meet as a group as well as in subteams described in the *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 84-86. Highlights of the subteams' work since the last report include the following:

1. Policy review – Regular review of all written personnel policies and practices has been established as a recurring task led by the Human Resources department. These reviews focus on denominational and agency policies and do not address policies used in individual congregations.
2. Training – The subteam has systematized the training requirements of all employees at the denominational offices. A menu of training opportunities has been created, and each employee is required to participate in them on an ongoing basis. Human Resources monitors our compliance in this area.
3. Database development – An initial database containing diversity champions and potential nominees for future positions (e.g., employment, boards, committees, etc.) has been developed. Strategies for reaching out to leaders across the CRCNA (and beyond), and to continue to populate and enhance the database are being implemented. We are heartened by the fact that the database has already been used for the benefit of several agencies and ministries.
4. Regional gatherings – Significant progress has been made in this area. The need for regional gatherings is referenced in the *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 441 (Board of Trustees Supplement, Appendix B, section IV, Strategic ways to cultivate binationality, Pathway 1). This denominational need plus the fact that a similar need was articulated by our diversity efforts are both coming to fruition as we plan regional gatherings in the United States and a national gathering in Canada in 2016. In the United States, the first gathering, titled *Engage 2016: A Multicultural Gathering*, is also being integrated with the Multiethnic Conference usually convened by the Office of Race Relations. We believe that this integration is a wise use of resources and better addresses our efforts to achieve our multiple goals. As mentioned in the report to Synod 2015 (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 85-86), the gatherings will
 - include leaders and potential leaders from many races and cultures (including the majority group).
 - give opportunity for dialog on the critical issues facing the denomination.
 - focus on unity in the midst of diversity.
 - disseminate and receive information with the local leaders (e.g., discuss local “best practices”).
 - include much time for prayer and mutual encouragement and motivation.
5. Communications – The communications team is implementing an overall strategy developed on behalf of DIWG. The team is using all media in communications (traditional, electronic, and social) and is integrating the diversity message into general communications across the denomination.

³ Though congregations are not included in the policy review, the Human Resources and Communications departments will consider ways to communicate what we are doing and to encourage similar actions on the part of regional or local parties. There may also be the possibility of learning from local initiatives.

⁴ Regional and national gatherings have established teams that include DIWG members.

6. Measurement and metrics – Each agency and institution develops an annual diversity report. These reports are always referenced by the executive director’s report to the BOT. In addition, the Human Resources department produces annual diversity metrics, which are also shared with the BOT. The Office of Synodical Services also tracks the levels of diversity on agency boards; these data are also shared with the BOT.

III. Mapping of DLPG Project Plan to DIWG subteams

Since the implementation activities of the DIWG arose because of synodical directives in the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group (DLPG II) report, we offer the following chart to demonstrate the alignment between DIWG activities and DLPG synodical directives. This chart is a reproduction of that used in our report to Synod 2015 (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 86).

All of the tasks referenced by Synod 2013 (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 628-32) and in the DLPG report to the BOT in February 2014 are being or have been addressed by the DIWG and its subteams, as well as through day-to-day operations of various CRCNA ministries and departments.

DIWG and Subteams	DLPG Project Plan (BOT Report 2/2014)	Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 628-32
DIWG (entire team)	1.1, 1.2, 1.4-1.6, 1.12, 2.5	7, 1-b-1
Policy review	4.1, 4.2, 2.2, 5	3, 4
Training	3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6	2, 2-a-1, 2-a-2, 2-d
Database development	1.8, 1.9, 2.3, 2.4	1-a-1, 1-a-2
Develop and execute recruitment plan ⁵	2.1	1
Nominations and appointments to boards and committees (churches, classes, synod)	6.3-6.7	5-b, 5-c, 5-d, 5-e-1, 5-f
Fund internships	2.7	1-b-3
Regional gatherings	1.3, 1.7, 1.10, 1.11, 2.6, 3.4, 3.5	2-b, 2-c
Communications	6.1, 6.2, 2.6	5, 5-a, 1-b-2
Measurement and metrics	1.1, 4.3, 2.8	1-c

IV. DIWG timeline from Synod 2015 report

The following timeline was contained in the DIWG report to Synod 2015:

1. Update to BOT in February 2015, as report to Synod 2015.
2. Request that a final report be submitted to Synod 2016.
3. Final report to BOT in February 2016, as report to Synod 2016.
 - a. Initiative never fully complete, but ongoing infrastructure put in place.
 - b. Focus is on leveraging difference—start with race and culture, then extend to other categories on Diversity and Inclusion more broadly.

⁵ Recruitment plan development and related work will be taken up by the Database Team and will begin after the database is deployed.

- c. Diversity and Inclusion presents opportunities to be leveraged rather than problems to be managed.

(Agenda for Synod 2015, p. 90)

This report is a fulfillment of that commitment.

V. Continuing Work of the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG)

Though it was initially understood that the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) would be disbanded after the final report to Synod 2016, the team is recommending that this group remain as a voluntary, information-sharing team, with a new goal of periodically monitoring our commitment to and progress in the plan and concepts contained in this report (see recommendation E in section VI below). The following are the proposed continuing purpose, goals, and responsibilities of this team.

A. A new purpose and a new name

To recognize the completion of this phase of the work, we propose that the team to continue the follow-up work begun by the DIWG be called the Collaborative for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI), made up of a group of volunteer leaders who serve as diversity and inclusion champions in their agencies, ministries, or offices. CDI membership will reflect the vision of diversity articulated in the CRCNA 1996 synodical report, *God's Diverse and Unified Family*. Membership will be by invitation of the entire group. CDI will model the behavior and, whenever possible, demonstrate the benefits of achieving a fully diverse and inclusive denomination. The team will be a collaborative group focused on sharing best practices and highlighting the benefits of uniting the CRCNA around a shared vision of full inclusion. CDI will not advocate on behalf of any person or persons.

The convener role of CDI will ordinarily be rotated among the members. The following organizational leaders will always be invited to participate in CDI meetings:

- The director of Race Relations (see recommendation C in section VI)
- The director of Human Resources (see recommendation B, 1 in section VI)
- A representative from the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy (JIMA) working group (see recommendation D in section VI)
- The Calvin College executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion
- The Calvin Theological Seminary dean of students
- The director of ministries and administration

It is anticipated that CDI will meet no more than three times per year. Notes emanating from these meetings will be shared with the Ministries Leadership Council of the CRCNA.

B. New goal for the Collaborative for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI)

In addition to the mutual sharing of information and best practices, the new team (CDI) will have a goal to ensure that every agency and institution produces an annual diversity report that is submitted to the executive director at the end of each calendar year.

VI. Recommendations

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 networks⁶ into the life and work of the CRCNA.
4. Support of procedures to ensure a safe, healthy, and supportive workplace in all CRCNA locations.⁷
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 above). It is anticipated that these meetings will take place no more than three times per year.

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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.

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.

Diversity and Inclusion Working Group
Carol Bremer-Bennett—World Renew
Michelle DeBie—Human Resources
Henry Hess—Communications
Shannon Jammal-Hollemans—Justice, Inclusion,
Mercy, and Advocacy (JIMA)
Steve Kabetu—Christian Reformed World Missions
Jeanne Kallemeyn—Pastor-Church Relations
Charles Kim—Christian Reformed Home Missions
David Koll—Candidacy
Michelle Loyd-Paige—Calvin College
Esteban Lugo—Race Relations
Denise Posie—Pastor-Church Relations
Dee Recker—Synodical Services
Jeff Sajdak—Calvin Theological Seminary
Nalini Van Den Bosch—Christian Reformed
World Missions
Colin Watson—Denominational Office

Appendix E

Better Together Project Executive Summary

I. Background and purpose

In 2012, synod took note of the sharp rise in Article 17 ministerial releases over the past decade. As a result, the Board of Trustees charged Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) with the task of discovering how the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) could be more proactive in avoiding such separations, rather than being in a reactive mode. As part of the response, PCR created the Better Together Delivery Team to work with classis functionaries to explore some of the underlying issues and to uncover possible interventions for reducing and preventing the types of conflicts that can lead to Article 17 releases.

II. Participants and procedure

Over a period of three years, the Better Together Delivery Team methodically connected with and listened to the experiences and advice of classis functionaries in most of the classes, including stated clerks, regional pastors, church visitors, mentors, and classis counselors. These connections were made via questionnaires, interviews, and gatherings of functionaries from clusters of classes. Themes and issues were extracted from those conversations and presented to sample classes for validation. Recommendations were then developed and presented to PCR and others.

III. Results

What has amassed is a treasure trove of stories of wisdom, pain, hope, weariness, love for the church, and a collection of what are hoped to be promising practices. Great ideas and recommendations have accumulated regarding how

better to support classis functionaries, who often find themselves on the front lines when congregations and their pastors experience stress and conflict. Pastors are stressed, as trending challenges in the denomination and the wider culture result in more and more expectations on them. Councils and congregations face tough issues. Lay leaders are stressed as they get involved in more and more complex issues and conflicts and don't know how to work the system in healthy ways. As a result of wonderful growth in the diversity of leadership, leaders who have not grown up with the mental map of CRC Church Order can come in with expectations that contrast with the expectations of seasoned CRC leaders and congregations. It has been discovered that the Church Order is not well known and often is not used well by those who do know it. Further, encouragement and training have been identified as priorities for virtually all classis functionaries. Healthier relationships are urgently needed throughout the system if today's challenges are to be met in Christlike ways.

IV. Next steps

- Many recommendations have been referred to the Office of Pastor-Church Relations. Implementation has begun and will expand.
- PCR will report extensively to the Board of Trustees on this project and at Synod 2016.
- Conversations about ways to strengthen the mentoring program have taken place with Calvin Theological Seminary. The hope is that mentoring will be coordinated with training for classis functionaries.
- Several pilot projects are under way to strengthen classes as they work to support congregations in both mission and governance.
- The CRC's director of ministries and administration serves as convener of the Classis Renewal Group, which is mandated to coordinate and nurture efforts to strengthen classes for better support of congregations.

V. Better Together project report outcomes

A. Regional pastors

In an effort to better support and strengthen the work of regional pastors, in response to the recommendations made by the Better Together Delivery Team, PCR created an electronic repository site as an initial step for the sharing of helpful resources and maintaining regional pastors' contact information and mentor assignments. A grassroots approach is being used for building relationships among regional pastors and to promote an ongoing effort to clarify the role and authority of the regional pastor.

B. Church visitors

Synod 2015 assigned PCR with a responsibility to resource classis church visitors, and the Better Together project identified a large number of potential enhancements to the practice of church visiting. This is significantly influencing PCR's work, and we will now be devoting considerable attention to church visiting. Having a new staff person working on classis renewal and on the Better Together recommendations will help to achieve the desired objectives in this area.

C. Mentors

PCR continues to advance the work of mentoring new pastors. Mentoring, beginning in seminary and continuing throughout a pastor's ministry, is seen as

a crucial area of pastoral growth and accountability. PCR provides mentors and mentees with *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*, a guide that gives shape to the mentoring conversation and relationship. Plans are under way to review and update this guide.

D. Counselors

Congregations approaching a pastor vacancy are on the verge of both significant opportunity and significant temptation. Possibilities for either development or disorientation are accentuated during such a time of transition. Having a well-appointed, informed, and supported church counselor can be very helpful to congregations at such a time. Having a “rubber stamp” church counselor misses an opportunity for the larger church community to bless key conversations and thoughtful discernment. Supporting the ministry of classical church counselors is one of the priorities for PCR in the coming year.

VI. Implementation and monitoring

Synod 2015 mandated the creation of a Classis Renewal Group (CRG) charged with “examination of the nature, scope, and purpose of classes, with the objective of boldly exploring and innovatively addressing revisions to structures and to the Church Order that will enable classes to flourish” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680). In order to execute this mandate, the Classis Renewal Group has been formed, and a classis renewal coordinator is in the process of being hired. This coordinator will function as staff of the CRG but will also be tasked with the implementation of the Better Together initiatives.

In addition to the development of milestones and metrics for each of the projects that affect classes, we will be tracking the number of Church Order Article 17 ministerial releases on an annual basis. We have tallied a baseline average of seventeen per year over the past six years. We will also be looking for regional and classical trends for these data.

Appendix F

Process for Affiliation of Congregations and Their Pastors with the Christian Reformed Church in North America

In the past year the offices of the executive director, synodical services, and candidacy have received a number of requests from CRC leaders and congregations, as well as from groups of Christians, requesting information about the process of affiliation with the CRCNA. The most recent document of affiliation guidelines was approved by Synod 2006 and is in need of updating to reflect decisions of synod since 2006 and to provide clarity for the process. The proposed guidelines that follow provide such updates. Although we do not believe these updates are substantive in nature, we believe it appropriate for synod to take note of the updated guidelines and to endorse them. The guidelines are directed especially to classis leaders who are integral partners in the affiliation of a congregation. The document will soon be supplemented with a brochure offering a brief overview of the process for distribution to inquiring groups, and with sample documents referred to in the following guidelines.

Note: The following information, based on a report adopted by Synod 2006 (see *Agenda for Synod 2006*, pp. 64-70; *Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 680), is presented to assist

in the affiliation process of congregations and their pastors with the CRCNA, as described in Church Order Article 38-c and its Supplement.



I. Introduction

Contact between congregations and ministries outside of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and members and ministries within the CRCNA has become normal in the 21st century. Such contact and relationship show our ability in the CRC to navigate the broader world of North America in a much more pronounced way than we did a century ago. Such contact and relationship also sometimes result in discovering the desire of a non-CRC congregation to become affiliated with the CRC.

This document serves as a brief guide to discerning when and how an inquiring non-CRC congregation and pastor can become affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The hope is that this document will facilitate a hospitable, respectful, and wise implementation of denominational policy. The CRC recognizes that receiving such congregations and pastors hospitably and sensitively will enrich the denomination and benefit the affiliating congregation.

II. Receiving congregations and their pastors into the CRC

A. Preface

It is imperative that there be ample opportunity for inquiring groups and for representatives of the CRC to become well acquainted with each other before making any commitments. This process is expected to entail three phases:

1. Getting acquainted
2. Mentoring and orientation
3. Affiliation

It is important that the integrity of both the inquiring group and the CRC representatives (from the local CRC classis) be respected in both the developing relationship and the formal process. Throughout the developing relationship, there needs to be a spirit of mutuality, adequate flexibility, and willingness to exercise adaptability to the specific situation. It should also be clearly understood that the process of affiliation can be terminated at the initiative of the inquiring group or the CRC representatives (classis). The phases described below are designed to provide for a growing relationship. The amount of time required in each phase may vary with each situation. Time frames at any point may be extended as both parties decide together.

While the process described here assumes that the affiliation process is about receiving both a group of believers and a pastor, we recognize that there may well be times when a group will seek affiliation without a pastor.

B. Phase 1: Getting acquainted

1. Often this phase begins with personal and even casual contact between a member or leader of the CRC and their counterpart in the inquiring group. An initial contact may lead to a more formal exploratory discussion between the interested group or congregation and the CRC person(s) facilitating the conversation. Such exploratory discussion might include a preliminary study

of each other's history, theology, and polity—and perhaps attendance at one or more worship services.

2. If this phase goes beyond initial contact and preliminary discussions, the local CRC classis should appoint one of its members to be an official counselor/ liaison to represent the classis in further conversations. The goal in this entire phase is to determine whether the group wants to proceed to a deeper phase of meaningful fellowship with a view toward joining the CRCNA denomination, and whether the CRC classis wants to receive the congregation (and its pastor, if applicable) into the CRC. The getting-acquainted phase will typically take from three to six months to complete.
3. Tools available for this phase include denominational materials and brochures, descriptions of CRC polity, and copies of the Church Order and the CRC creeds and confessions. These tools are available in printed and electronic formats in English, and they are also available electronically in various languages (Korean, Chinese, Spanish, and some others) on the denominational website (www.crcna.org, search “other languages”).
4. Toward the end of this phase, the inquiring group/congregation and their pastor (if applicable) will gather a variety of documents, with the help of the appointed classis liaison. Note that assistance and advice regarding these matters are available from the CRC denomination through its Candidacy Committee (see www.crcna.org/Candidacy).
 - a. A letter of interest regarding affiliation from the inquiring group's leadership—this letter should specify whether the affiliating group/congregation is a governmentally registered nonprofit organization. If the group is to be received as an organized congregation, a copy of the bylaws needs to be attached to the letter.
 - b. A group/congregation profile and ministry plan including a description of the group's ministries, programs, and vision.
 - c. Financial documents (budget, actual expenses, pastor's compensation [salary, benefits, pension, and so forth, if applicable]).
 - d. A description of the group's current state of commitment to a Reformed biblical, confessional, and theological identity, and its current awareness of and readiness to function within CRC polity.
5. An initial request for affiliation by a non-CRC minister seeking to be received into the CRC (as provided via Church Order Article 8-c) must be processed according to the requirements of the Candidacy Committee and the “Journey Toward Ordination” process. Sometime during the “getting acquainted” phase the classis-appointed liaison and/or the inquiring pastor should contact the director of candidacy, Rev. David Koll (dkoll@crcna.org).
6. This initial phase moves toward a conversation between the leaders of the inquiring group/congregation and the designated leaders of the CRC classis to determine in greater detail the course forward. The material described in item B, 4 above should be reviewed and considered. An eventual motion to continue the process should be formulated by the classis and would then need to be adopted by both the potentially affiliating group/congregation and the classis.

If the request involves a minister seeking affiliation, the motion must include a “declaration of need” completed in consultation with the Candidacy Committee, which serves as an agent of the denomination (see item B, 5 above).

7. If both the potentially affiliating congregation and classis adopt such an initial motion to continue the process, then the general orientation of affiliating leaders begins under the guidance of a classis-appointed mentor. (The mentor may or may not be the same person who functions as the contact/liaison.)

C. *Phase 2: Mentoring and orientation*

1. In this phase, the leaders and members of the new group will receive orientation more fully with regard to the confessions, theology, polity, and practices of the CRC. At the same time the classis will acquaint itself more fully with the background, values, beliefs, and vision of the group seeking affiliation. It is desirable that both parties in their joining together may enrich their respective ministries as they serve God together, and this phase allows for such discernment. This phase will normally take not less than six months to complete.
2. The mentoring and orientation phase includes the following orientation items for the affiliating group or congregation in a plan to be formulated by both the classis representative/mentor and the affiliating group leaders.
 - a. In-depth orientation and/or training of congregational leaders (elders, deacons, church school and youth ministry leaders, adult group leaders, and so forth) through a series of meetings, a full-day retreat, or a strategy combining both. Material to be considered includes the following:
 - CRC polity and Church Order
 - Distinctive features of the Reformed faith
 - CRC doctrinal and ethical decisions
 - Financial rights, obligations, and practices for the group as a congregation, including church budgeting and accountability, ministry shares, pastoral salary, insurance, pension, and so forth, as may apply
 - CRC history—both origins and the era of development to the present, with appropriate recognition of any unique contextual connections between the affiliating group and the CRC’s story.

Note that this material and suggested outlines for presenting and interacting with the material are available from the office of the director of candidacy.

- b. Orientation of the whole group/congregation (many of the same topics introduced to leaders will also be covered with the whole group/congregation).
 - c. Expected outcome: The congregation and its leaders pass a motion affirming continuation of the affiliation process, which will lead into “Phase 3: Affiliation.”
3. Protocol for pastoral orientation
 - a. In-depth orientation of an affiliating pastor takes place in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The standards used by the Candidacy Committee for affiliating a pastor already ordained in another denomination

include creating an individualized learning plan to be formed in consultation with the pastor, the classis representative, and the Candidacy Committee. The plan involves a designated mentor as a guide and includes the following requirements:

- Trace and review the spiritual formation of the pastor
- Study or review Reformed theology and confessions, including all of the distinctive features of the Reformed faith
- Study CRC polity and Church Order
- Review significant synodical decisions on doctrinal and ethical matters
- Understand financial rights and obligations (insurance, pension, loan fund, ministry shares, salary, and so forth), as well as options for bivocational situations
- Understand the relationship of a local church to its classis and of the classis to synod
- Understand the decision-making process in the CRC, including overtures and the route of appeals

b. Exposure to the broader life of the CRC begins under the encouraging guidance of the mentor, and the following are suggested:

- Attendance at denominational events, when possible
- Introduction to CRC ministries and to the function of denominational boards and committees, including a visit to the CRCNA offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S., and/or the offices in Burlington, Ontario, Canada. A strategy for this is described in the contracted individualized learning plan. A sample is available from the office of the director of candidacy.
- Attendance at classis meetings as guests and observers

4. The conclusion of phase 2 occurs when the orientation of the congregation and its leadership and the learning plan for the pastor (if applicable) are completed.

D. Phase 3: Affiliation

1. The final phase, "Affiliation," involves a formal decision by the classis, in response to the announced decision of the congregation (and pastor, if applicable) seeking affiliation (see item C, 2, c above).
2. A formal determination regarding the status of the congregation as either *organized* or *emerging* should be made in conversation between the leadership of the affiliating group and the leadership of the classis (see the guidelines of Church Order Art. 38-c and its Supplements). If a congregation is to be designated as "emerging," a "mother church" must be designated.
3. The following documents are prepared for presentation to the classis, along with a motion that this group of believers be admitted to the CRCNA and accepted into the life of the classis (note that sample documents are available from the office of the director of candidacy):
 - a. A letter from the affiliating congregation's leadership addressed to the classis and reaffirming the desire to affiliate with the CRC.

- b. A report from the mentor/liaison appointed by the classis for orientation of the affiliating congregation and its leaders.
 - c. A formal covenant, signed by both the leaders of the affiliating congregation and the classis, stipulating a willingness to participate in classis life by sending delegates to the classis meetings, and to participate in the life of the classis and denomination through a level of financial support appropriate to the current situation of the congregation, in view of understandings expressed through ministry share expectations.
4. A letter is presented to the classis from the Candidacy Committee endorsing the affiliation request of the pastor (if applicable) and confirming that all the required elements for the Article 8 pastoral affiliation process have been properly addressed.
 5. As the motion to receive the congregation as an organized or emerging body (see item D, 2 above) is acted upon, a suitable time of rejoicing at classis should take place. Also, the classis should appoint a counselor to mark the reception of the congregation in a worship service, and to walk alongside the pastor and congregation for a period of at least two years.
 6. The pastor (if applicable) is approved for affiliation by the classis following a colloquium doctum as described in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 5-6. The appointed counselor works with the pastor to determine an appropriate way to mark the new ordination affiliation of the pastor in the life of the congregation.
 7. The new congregation provides the classis with updated articles of incorporation and bylaws, as well as the appropriate information required by the Office of Synodical Services.

III. Conclusion

Affiliating with the CRCNA, to be mutually upbuilding and wholesome, must be based on a shared faith, common confessional commitments, and a mutual interest in the mission to which God has called us. A denominational fellowship is like a covenantal relationship. Each covenant has at least two parties, and it is critical to the process that all parties be honored in the growing relationship. The preceding phases are intended to facilitate that outcome. It is also important that the affiliation process be consistent throughout the denomination (see Church Order Supplement, Article 38-c).

Appendix G

CRCNA Church Planting and Affiliation Outside of North America

I. Introduction

Over the past few years Christian Reformed congregations and ministry agencies have seen great changes. Today's complex global-local dynamics pose deep and important questions regarding our missional strategy, institutional structure, and definition of "communal life." We see a telling example at the agency level in the unification process of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. We also see, at the grassroots level, that as local

congregations become more diverse, so do their ministry strategies, with our members developing increasingly more ties to communities worldwide. These pose opportunities and risks.

More specifically, Classis Pacific Northwest in recent years approved a church planting initiative in Seoul, South Korea. At least one congregation is functioning under the oversight of the classis by means of a special committee developed for such a purpose. This “experiment” has uncovered a number of challenges presented by such long-distance CRCNA church planting.

In response, the executive director appointed an ad hoc committee in October 2015 with the following mandate to provide advice:

That a team be formed to advise the Executive Director (ED) of the CRCNA on matters related to the Church Order and denominational polity relevant to planting churches and affiliating congregations outside of North America, and that this team report to the ED by February 2016.

The ad hoc committee was composed of six members: Dr. Gary Bekker, director of Christian Reformed World Missions; Rev. Andrew Beunk, pastor in Burnaby, British Columbia, and member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee; Rev. Jim Dekker, retired pastor from St. Catharines, Ontario; Rev. Joy Engelsman, pastor from Denver, Colorado, and a member of the Christian Reformed World Missions board; Rev. Daniel Munchul Kim, pastor in El Cerrito, California, and member of the Korean Relations Team; and Rev. David Koll, director of the Candidacy Committee.

The ED is grateful for and presents the following material based primarily on the work of this team.

II. Initial observations

The team uncovered some negative elements of our “Reformed legacy.” Jet Den Hollander says, “We have become increasingly aware that what characterizes the Reformed family is not only a beautiful diversity but also, at times, a diversity that is made absolute to the extent that it leads to division and disunity. Rather than functioning as a family, to a considerable extent we are a collection of individually operating entities which often do not know each other, do not work together, sometimes even compete with one another, and have a rather high rate of splitting and multiplying” (“Ecclesiology and Mission: A Reformed Perspective,” *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 90, Issue 358, pp. 253-59, July 2001).

Another article, “Leadership in Mission: The Reformed System of Church Governance in an Age of Mission” (Stephen Paas, *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 50, pp. 110-25, 2015), helped us understand the challenges that Reformed churches have always faced and that continue to be relevant to the questions before us: “There has always been the need for ‘movement structures’ alongside ‘stability structures’ to have itineracy alongside the parish.” The team aspired to helping the denomination offer a balance between being the “stability structure” and the “movement structure” that is needed for congregational life and mission in this new century. The team observed that the various ways for congregations to affiliate, support, and connect beyond national boundaries fascinated and challenged their thinking to fit with today’s global-local reality.

III. Dimensions to consider

A. *Consideration of relevant Church Order statements regarding CRC congregations and classes in North America who want to plant churches affiliated with the CRC outside of North America, and of potential requests from congregations outside of North America that seek to affiliate with the CRCNA*

The team consulted Dr. Henry De Moor, Rev. Kathy Smith, and Dr. James De Jong, who are informed in both polity issues as well as historical precedents. Each provided reflections and helpful suggestions. The team reviewed the Church Order as well and offers these findings:

No Church Order article directly addresses either the issue of congregations affiliating from outside North America or of planting congregations outside of North America that would lodge in the CRCNA. However, various Church Order articles speak indirectly:

1. Church Order Article 12-c may be “stretched” to apply to allowing a minister of the Word to do congregational ministry outside of North America.

Article 12-c

A minister of the Word may also serve the church in other work which relates directly to the calling of a minister, but only after the calling church has demonstrated to the satisfaction of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, that said work is consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word. [The Supplement to Article 12-c provides regulations.]

2. Church Order Article 13-c allows CRCNA ministers to be “on loan” anywhere in the world.

Article 13-c

A minister of the Word may be loaned temporarily by the calling church to serve as pastor of a congregation outside of the Christian Reformed Church, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with the synodical regulations. Although the specific duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of doctrine and life rests with the calling church. [The Supplement to Article 13-c provides regulations.]

3. Church Order Article 38-c speaks of a synodically approved affiliation process for congregations entering official relationship with the CRCNA. This process ensures the creation of an active relationship and partnership between the affiliating congregation and the CRCNA, through the classis.

Article 38-c

When a non-Christian Reformed congregation wishes to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church, including the transfer of its pastor and other ministry staff, the procedure and regulations established by synod shall be followed. [The Supplement to Article 38-c provides more information about the procedure and regulations.]

4. Church Order Article 39 states that the “redistricting of classes” would require the approval of synod. This implies that an affiliation far outside of the geographic boundaries of a current classis would likely require synodical approval.

Article 39

A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organizing of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod. [The Supplement to Article 39 provides additional information.]

B. Consideration of historical precedent or ecumenical implications for church planting outside of North America, or any historical practice that could shed light

1. The early Reformed Church in America was attached to a classis in the Netherlands (according to Henry De Moor). But this arrangement was abandoned because of difficulty in maintaining relationship and cross-cultural understanding across the Atlantic Ocean.
2. The practice and eventually the vocabulary of *comity* became a major principle of North Atlantic Protestant missions. Thus Protestants sought to cooperate in missions and, in some cases, to unite efforts in building a single national church. This principle, among many other factors, led to the creation of the International Missionary Council and eventually to the World Council of Churches (paraphrased from Gary Bekker, unpublished paper “Current CRWM Strategy in the Planting of Churches,” December 2015, p. 3).
3. The *Three-Self Formula* was widely accepted in North Atlantic Protestant church and mission circles. Missionary effort was to focus on developing churches that were *self-governing*, *self-supporting*, and *self-propagating*. Eventually this formula was associated with the idea of *indigenous* churches. The formula was developed at the same time, reportedly independently, by two missions administrators, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, and later significantly developed by John L. Nevius (missionary to China) in *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Shanghai: Presbyterian Press, 1886; pp. 2-3).
4. CRC growth in Canada is a story of reaching across a border, and this has brought great blessing to members of the CRC in both nations and has helped our binational identity to flourish.
5. Without going into detail, we note that the frequently changing denominational leadership in Korea creates complexity and makes continuity difficult for international relationships. As well, significant cultural differences in ecclesial structure and the expectations of leadership are complex and difficult to compare to CRCNA practices and thus not easily adaptable.
6. Balancing such potential difficulties, many deep and continuing personal and organizational relationships with Korean pastors and churches have developed through the ministry of Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin College, and the great number of Korean congregations in the CRCNA.
7. CRCNA pastors have been respected leaders in “independent congregations” outside of North America. Such congregations may begin trusting and valuing denominational affiliation in which the CRCNA can be of service. For example, the Chalan Pago Ordot congregation in Guam affiliated with the CRCNA through Classis Greater Los Angeles in 2004 after a CRC pastor served that congregation for more than a decade.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod declare that classes and congregations considering planting churches under the CRCNA name outside of North America and/or considering the affiliation of congregations outside of North America 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 North America 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 North America 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.

B. That synod instruct the executive director to task an ad hoc committee with this mandate:

To consider creation of a new category of affiliation by which a (non-North American) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA. Composition should include members of the EIRC and staff of the new unified mission agency.

In addition, if the committee would recommend allowance of such affiliations, their mandate should also include consideration of the role of Church Order Articles 49, 50, 73, and 76.

Grounds:

1. Such a new category may be a hospitable option for such congregations and ministries potentially unable to meet current requirements for

affiliation or for whom those described in Recommendation A above are culturally inappropriate.

2. Such a relationship could bless both the associating congregation and the CRCNA in ways beyond our anticipation, including a sense of accountability for currently independent congregations and appreciation of global relationships for CRC congregations in North America. This would therefore provide a forum in which global partners and those in the CRC could discuss matters challenging their ministries and assist one another in applying the calls of Scripture.
3. Such an exploration is consistent with the CRC Ministry Plan as follows: ecumenical relationships, when appropriate, give rise to the presence of the CRCNA (or a new category of CRC-partner denominations) in countries other than Canada and the United States.

C. That synod instruct the executive director to task an ad hoc committee with the following mandate:

To investigate potential areas of collaborative partnership in ministry with Koreans in Korea. Composition should include members of the Korean Relations Team, EIRC, our educational institutions, and staff of the unified mission agency.

Grounds:

1. The current contributions of the president of Calvin Theological Seminary and of Calvin College staff have produced many fruitful relationships in Korea. Yet these programs are not coordinated by or inclusive of other CRC ministries. A team to consider such coordination and to maximize efforts would bless all parties involved.
2. There are great opportunities for the CRCNA to learn about missions from Korean churches that claim a strong missional and prayer-filled history and identity. The CRCNA can grow in prayer in partnership with such churches. These opportunities to partner in ministry initiatives and in a learning community are beyond the mandate of the EIRC.

Appendix H

Liturgical Forms Committee

I. Summary

Over the past years previous employees of Faith Alive Christian Resources, professors at Calvin Theological Seminary, staff of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and others have received requests for various liturgical forms that represent the current ministry context. While it is understood that many churches no longer read forms verbatim, some do, and many more depend on them as templates from which to lead. A proposal for developing some new forms to meet these needs was presented by Worship Ministries to the Board of Trustees and approved.

A committee formed, and work began in February 2015. Committee members, in addition to Worship Ministries staff, include Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Rev. Sheila Holmes, Mrs. Eunice Kim, Rev. José Rayas, Dr. David Schuringa, Rev. Kathy Smith, Dr. Mary Vanden Berg, Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, and Rev. David

Vroege. The *Agenda for Synod 2015* included a brief report from this committee outlining plans to send the forms for review to the churches before they were presented to Synod 2016 for approval. Synod 2015 also requested this same group to do some additional work on the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 669).

In fall 2015 churches received a copy of the forms (minus the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, which they had seen and responded to in advance of Synod 2015) along with a request from Dr. Steven Timmermans, executive director, to review them and send feedback to the committee prior to November 15, 2015. The committee was pleased with the spirit of the feedback received and with the opportunities for dialogue regarding the forms.

In response to the feedback received, the committee reconvened in person and via video to further develop and edit the forms. The resulting versions of the forms are now presented to Synod 2016.

Given the diversity of our denomination, it is impossible to create one-size-fits-all forms, but the committee has done its best to create forms that can be easily adapted. You will find the forms proposed, along with those already approved, at crcna.org/worship (search for “liturgical resources”). The proposed forms are also presented in the following Addendum.

II. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Joyce Borger, Rev. Kathy Smith, and Rev. Len Vander Zee when matters pertaining to the Liturgical Forms Committee are discussed.

B. That synod approve the following forms and introductions as found in the following Addendum:

1. Introduction to the Celebration of Holy Communion
2. A Brief Form for the Celebration of Holy Communion
3. Introduction to the Communion for the Sick and Homebound
4. Service of Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound
5. Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism
6. Form for the Holy Baptism of Infants and Young Children
7. Form for the Holy Baptism and Profession of Faith of Older Children and Adults
8. Introduction to the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth
9. Form for the Public Profession of Faith of Baptized Youth
10. Form for the Welcome of New Members
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

C. That synod instruct the ED to ensure that Worship Ministries consults with the Translations Team to provide the forms in Spanish and Korean and other languages as requested.

D. That synod instruct the ED to ensure that Worship Ministries works with Ministry Support Services in finding the most efficient and financially feasible way to present these forms online in a user-friendly format.

Grounds:

1. These forms are consistent with scriptural teaching and with the Reformed confessions.
2. These forms reflect and address changes to our polity and structure and strengthen our existing set of explicitly approved forms.
3. 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.
4. These forms ought to be available to congregations worshiping in Spanish, Korean, and bilingually.
5. These forms ought to be easily accessible online and in a format that makes the portion to be used easily copied or printed.

Addendum

Proposed Liturgical Forms

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

What Does This Sacrament Mean?

In order to properly integrate the Lord’s Supper in worship, it’s important for worship leaders and the congregation to have a clear understanding of the CRC’s confessional stance on this sacrament. This is especially important because other, less confessionally based understandings have made inroads in the CRC. Also, a proper understanding of the Lord’s Supper will serve to increase the desire for believers to participate in it and the benefits they derive from it.

Broadly speaking, the main issue is whether the Lord’s Supper is merely a memorial of Christ’s death on the cross, or whether, in and through the sacrament, Christ actually communicates his risen and ascended life to believers. Do we receive Christ in the sacrament, or do we just remember what he has done for us?

While we “do this in remembrance” of the Lord, more is happening at the table than a mere remembering of what he has done for us. While no one can claim to fully understand the mystery of participation in Christ through this meal, the Belgic Confession (Art. 35) gives a thorough theological understanding of what the Lord’s Supper means for the life of the believer. A few key quotations:

“We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those who are already regenerated and ingrafted into his family, which is his church. . . .

“Thus, to support the physical and earthly life, God has prescribed for us appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all people as life itself. But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers, God has sent a living bread that came down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten—that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith.

“To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread, Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood. He did this to testify to us that just as truly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouths,

by which our life is then sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Savior. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls. . . .

“Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood—but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith. . . .

“Finally, with humility and reverence we receive the holy sacrament in the gathering of God’s people, as we engage together, with thanksgiving, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, and as we thus confess our faith and Christian religion.”

In addition, the Scriptures indicate that the Lord’s Supper is a meal that symbolizes and effects the unity of believers in the congregation and at all times and places (1 Cor. 10:14-17). It also causes us to anticipate the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:26).

It is clear, then, that in this meal we receive Christ and all his benefits through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. This understanding of the sacrament should prompt us to celebrate it often (perhaps weekly, as John Calvin desired), and with appropriate joy, reverence, and faith.

How Should This Sacrament Be Celebrated?

1. Some communities find it beneficial to prepare for the Lord’s Supper the Sunday before its celebration. This may be done as part of the confession and assurance, as a focus of the sermon or its application, or in the use of the preparatory form available in the back of the *Psalter Hymnal* or online at crna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources.
2. Synod 1994 of the CRC (*Acts of Synod 1994*, pp. 493-94) decided that the “prescribed forms” for celebrating the sacrament need not be used on every occasion of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. However, any celebration of this sacrament should include at least the following elements:
 - Thanksgiving for the great acts of God in our salvation.
 - The Words of Institution from Scripture with the breaking of the bread and pouring of the cup.
 - An invocation (*epiclesis*) for the Holy Spirit to feed us with the body and blood of the Lord.
 - Sharing the meal together.
3. It is also meaningful to include the preface (*Sursum Corda*) to the Lord’s Supper, which dates back to the early church:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

This widely used preface helps the congregation to sense their oneness with the universal church. Its regular use also gives the congregation an easily remembered and familiar set of words to signal their entry into this sacred meal.

4. The Lord's Supper is the "visible word" (Calvin) and should be a part of a liturgy of Word and sacrament. It therefore should follow the sermon with perhaps an intervening prayer and offering (including the presentation of the elements). In this way, the sacrament seals the spoken Word and assures us of its grace.
5. While the CRC has a tradition of less frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper, synod has encouraged more frequent celebrations. In many congregations monthly (and, increasingly, weekly) celebrations have resulted in a deeper appreciation of the sacrament, and this is more in line with biblical and early church practice.
6. The manner of participation may vary widely, and neither the Bible nor the church has set a norm for this, except that it should normally be celebrated in a public worship service.

Some of the common ways congregations receive communion are as follows:

- Receiving the elements while seated in the congregation.
 - Receiving the elements at the front of the worship area, given individually by intinction by the pastor and elders.
 - Receiving the elements in a circle around the table and passed one to another with the words "the body of Christ for you" and "the blood of Christ for you."
 - Receiving the elements while seated together at the table.
 - Receiving the elements with some personal movement involved (coming to the front or gathering in a circle) adds the advantage of a physical action that mirrors and symbolizes a coming to Christ, or, as one writer put it, a Reformed altar call.
7. In the Lord's Supper, Christ communicates his grace and salvation to us in the form of physical bread and wine (grape juice). It is fitting, therefore, that these material elements should be readily visible and tangible. Actual loaves of bread, pitchers of wine or grape juice, and substantial vessels can enhance the experience and meaning of the sacrament.
 8. The Lord's Supper can be too much centered on Christ's death on the cross, calling for a somber mood. While the cross is certainly in view, so are the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. We commune not with a dying Savior but with the Savior who lives and reigns. The Lord's Supper is often called the "joyful feast of the Lord," so a mood of joy and celebration should always be present as well.

2. A BRIEF FORM FOR THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

This form contains the essential elements for celebrating the sacrament as prescribed by the CRC, as well as some options and alternative prayers for seasonal or topical use. Rubrics, alternatives, and options are presented in *italics*.

The Invitation

Welcome to the feast of the Lord. All who are baptized and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are invited to join in this meal. *Or other words that bring forward the theme of the sermon of the day.*

Since many congregations may benefit from learning more about the Lord's Supper, people may find it helpful if the minister uses various brief additional words of invitation that accent different aspects of the meaning of the sacrament. The following are suggestions.

- 1. Christ invites all his baptized people to his table, where he will feed them with himself by the Holy Spirit. Come to receive all the benefits and blessings of his atoning death, his life-giving resurrection, and his ascended lordship.*
- 2. We come to the table not just as individuals but as a community. By sharing the loaf and the cup, Christ makes us one with him and with each other.*
- 3. Just as we are nourished by the food we eat, Christ nourishes us spiritually at this table with the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation.*
- 4. This is the joyful feast of the Lord, for the elements we receive symbolize not just the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord but the life-giving flesh and blood of the risen and ascended Lord.*
- 5. As we come to the table as repentant sinners, Christ wants to assure us of his forgiveness. As we come with our struggles, Christ wants to assure us of his living presence. As we come with our doubts, Christ wants to touch us with the flesh and blood reality of his life.*
- 6. At the Lord's Supper we look back, remembering the whole story of our salvation; we look around, seeing that we are together members of the body of Christ; we look forward to the great banquet in God's coming kingdom; and we look up to our ascended Lord, who promises to feed us with his body and blood by the Holy Spirit.*
- 7. Congregation of Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him as Lord, are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.*

The Thanksgiving

[The people stand.]

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right for us to give thanks and praise.

Minister:

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who by his life, death, and resurrection
opened to us the way of everlasting life.

Therefore we join our voices

with all the saints and angels and the whole creation
to proclaim the glory of your name.

[The minister may offer in his or her own words a prayer of thanksgiving for the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.]

[This may be spoken or sung using one of the many "Holy, Holy, Holy" hymns.]

People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Alternative Prayers of Thanksgiving

[Or, the minister may offer one of these seasonal prayers ending with the Hymn of Praise.]

[for Advent or Christ's return]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
whose coming opened to us the way of salvation
and whose triumphant return we eagerly await.

Therefore . . .

[for Christmas or incarnation]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who came among us as the Word made flesh
to show us your glory, full of grace and truth.

Therefore . . .

[for (or after) Epiphany or missions]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who came as the light of the world
to show us your way of truth in parables and miracles.

Therefore . . .

[for Lent or repentance]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
by whose grace we may triumph over temptation,
be more fervent in prayer, and be more generous in love.

Therefore . . .

[for Holy Week and Lamb of God]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who became the true Paschal Lamb
that was sacrificed for our salvation.

Therefore . . .

[for Easter or new life]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who by his glorious resurrection
overcame the power of sin and gave us new life.

Therefore . . .

[for Ascension, the celebration of Christ's reign]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who was exalted as King of the universe,
that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

Therefore . . .

[for Pentecost and the celebration of the Holy Spirit]

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
and for the pouring forth of your Holy Spirit,
who equips us for service and leads us into your truth.

Therefore . . .

[Adapted from the Contemporary Testimony]

Minister: We thank you, our Lord, for the hope this meal gives us, that Jesus will return as triumphant King, that the dead will be raised, and that all people will stand before his judgment. We face that day without fear, for you, our Judge, are our Savior. May our daily lives of service aim for the moment when the Son will present his people to the Father and God will be shown to be true, holy, and gracious.

People (optional): With the whole creation we wait for the purifying fire of judgment. For then we will see you face to face. You will heal our hurts, end our wars, and make the crooked straight. Then we will join in the new song to the Lamb without blemish, who made us a kingdom and priests. You, our God, will be all

in all, righteousness and peace will flourish, everything will be made new, and every eye will see at last that our world belongs to God! Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Words of Institution

Minister: We give thanks to God the Father that our Savior, Jesus Christ, before he suffered, gave us this memorial of his sacrifice, until he comes again. At his last supper, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it [*here the minister breaks the bread*] and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup after supper [*here the minister pours the wine*] and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me." For whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

[The following may be added:]

Therefore we proclaim our faith as signed and sealed in this sacrament:

People: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

The Prayer of Consecration

Minister: Lord, our God, send your Holy Spirit so that this bread and cup may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we and all your saints be united with Christ and remain faithful in hope and love. Gather your whole church, O Lord, into the glory of your kingdom.

[The following may be added:]

We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray,

All: "Our Father in heaven . . . Amen."

The Communion

[During the distribution, communion hymns may be sung, or the minister may read an appropriate passage of Scripture.]

Minister: Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Take, drink, remember, and believe that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Or

Take, eat! Remember and believe that the body of Christ is the bread of heaven for us.

Take, drink! Remember and believe that the blood of Christ is the cup of our salvation.

Or

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Or

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (John 6:54-55).

Thanksgiving

[The sacrament may conclude with a song of thanksgiving or another appropriate expression of thanksgiving. Psalm 103 is widely used here in the Reformed tradition.]

And/Or

Prayer after Communion

All: Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the sacrament of his body and blood.

Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart.
Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNION FOR THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

Introduction

1. When we bring the Lord's Supper to the sick and homebound, it is not a private communion but an extension of the table fellowship of the congregation to those who cannot be present. This benefits the sick or homebound in several ways:
 - The tangible and material gifts of bread and wine may be especially meaningful for times of weakness of body or mind.
 - The visible tie to the gathered congregation demonstrates the sick and homebound's unity with the community with which they cannot gather for a time. This should always be expressed in words, and, if possible, through the presence of several other members of the community.
 - The familiar words and actions of the sacrament are easily communicated and understood, sometimes even by those suffering from dementia.
2. Often, due to the weakness of the recipient, the communion form must be shortened, and the responses minimized. But if the person is not so weak and is mentally alert, it is quite useful to bring a printed form along, for their full participation.
3. The following preparations are important:
 - If certain people are designated to bring the sacrament to the sick and homebound in the week after the celebration in public worship, a special prayer for them might be said at the end of the liturgy in the worship service.
 - Think and pray about the spiritual, emotional, and physical condition of the recipient and plan accordingly.

- Make sure the elements are available and easily handled. Small, portable communion kits are readily available online. Make sure that they are available to other communion visitors.
- Taking a communion utensil (cup, plate, or other object) from the church may enhance the recipient's sense of communion with the larger congregation.
- Keep the elements small for ease of handling and receiving. (You might consider using gluten free bread exclusively since an increasing number of people are sensitive to gluten.)
- Be sensitive to others who may be present during your visit, and be prepared to invite them to participate if appropriate.
- If you judge that the recipient may benefit from more involvement, have a brief print form available.
- Any visit can be tiring to a person who is sick, so be sensitive to the amount of time your visit will take.

4. SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SICK OR HOMEBOUND

Greeting from the Congregation

A Brief Reading from Scripture

Suggested readings: John 6:46-51, Romans 8:31-39, Psalm 36:5-9, or other appropriate readings, or perhaps the text from the Sunday sermon.

[This may be followed by a brief personal meditation.]

Invitation to Communion

[One of the following or another appropriate invitation:]

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him. —from Psalm 34

Or

Jesus said, "Come to me,
all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls." —from Matthew 11:28-29

Or

[Name], or, Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the gospels tell us that on the first day of the week,
the day on which our Lord rose from the dead,
he appeared to some of his disciples
and was made known to them
in the breaking of bread.
Come, then, to the joyful feast of our Lord.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who by his life, death, and resurrection
opened to us the way of everlasting life. Amen.

Or an extemporaneous prayer of thanksgiving.

The Words of Institution

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, before he suffered, gave us this memorial of his sacrifice, until he comes again. At his last supper, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it [*here the minister breaks the bread*] and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup after supper [*here the minister pours the wine*] and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me."

Prayer of Consecration

Lord, our God, send your Holy Spirit so that this bread and cup may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we and all your saints be united with Christ and remain faithful in hope and love, and may this, the bread of life, bring healing of body, mind, and spirit. Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

[Where appropriate, conclude with the Lord's Prayer spoken together.]

The Communion

Take, eat! Remember and believe that the body of Christ is the bread of heaven for us.

Take, drink! Remember and believe that the blood of Christ is the cup of our salvation.

Or

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Thanksgiving

Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the sacrament of his body and blood.

May Christ's love live in our hearts each day
and his victorious life sustain us in our weakness.

Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Blessing

[The following or another appropriate blessing may be said—and, where appropriate, with laying on of hands.]

The blessing of almighty God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—be with you now, and remain with you forever. Amen.

*[When appropriate, the following **print liturgy** may be used for full participation by the recipient.]*

Liturgy for Holy Communion

Greeting from the Congregation

A Brief Reading from Scripture

Invitation to Communion

Leader: *[Name]*, or, Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the gospels tell us that on the first day of the week,
the day on which our Lord rose from the dead,
he appeared to some of his disciples
and was made known to them
in the breaking of bread.
Come, then, to the joyful feast of our Lord.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right for us to give thanks and praise.

Minister:

With joy we praise you, gracious Father,
for you have created heaven and earth

Therefore we join our voices
with all the saints and angels and the whole creation
to proclaim the glory of your name.

People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

The Words of Institution

Prayer of Consecration

[. . . concluding with the Lord's Prayer spoken together]

The Communion

Thanksgiving

All:

Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the sacrament of his body and blood.

May Christ's love live in our hearts each day
and his victorious life sustain us in our weakness.
Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Blessing

The blessing of almighty God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—
be with you now and remain with you forever. Amen.

5. INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

What Does This Sacrament Mean?

As with the Lord's Supper, in the Reformed tradition, this sacrament is much more than a mere symbol of being united with Christ, or a testimony of one's personal faith, or the dedication of a child to God. The water of baptism signifies that God claims us as his own, unites us to his Son, Jesus Christ, washes away our sins, and sets the seal of the Holy Spirit on us.

While we make some distinction between the baptism of infants and young children, and the baptism of older children and adults, especially in the vows taken in the baptismal covenant, there is but one baptism, which offers the same blessing and assurance.

God's *action* in baptism is highlighted in our confessions, as the following selections from the Belgic Confession (Art. 34) demonstrate:

"By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may wholly belong to him whose mark and sign we bear. Baptism also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious Father, will be our God forever. . . .

"In this way God signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the bodies of those who are baptized when it is sprinkled on them, so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit.

"It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

"Our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us with the 'new self' and stripping off the 'old self with its practices.' . . .

"We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

"And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.

"Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them. . . ."

Baptism was instituted by Christ after his victorious resurrection. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). In this command, Christ himself makes baptism the universal entrance into his church, and the mark of our discipleship.

1. Baptism unites us to Christ in his death and resurrection.

In Romans 6:1-11, Paul identifies baptism as our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (vv. 3-4, NRSV). Baptism is a kind of drowning, in which the old self dies and a new self in Christ comes to life, just as the children of Israel were led through the Red Sea and into the promised land.

2. Baptism brings us into the new society, the body of Christ. This society lives by the norms of the kingdom of God. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . slave or free . . . male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28, NRSV). We become members of Christ and members of each other in the one body.

3. Baptism signifies the washing away of our sins. Peter announced at Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Paul argued that the Corinthians were to abandon their pagan ways of life because in baptism they were "washed" and "sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11).

4. In baptism we are adopted into the trinitarian family through Christ. Being baptized "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" declares that we have a new name because we have been adopted through the Son into the family of God, at the heart of which is the blessed Trinity itself. Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan River by John also demonstrates what our baptism means. Taking his place as the new human alongside sinners, Jesus receives the Spirit's empowerment and hears the Father's voice: "This is my beloved Son." So our baptism marks our adoption into the trinitarian family through Christ.

5. **In baptism we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.** After Peter calls people to repentance and baptism on Pentecost, he adds this promise: “And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

6. **Our children should also be baptized, for all the promises of baptism are for them as well as for us (Acts 2:39).** We are to teach our children that they have been baptized and prayerfully encourage them to affirm the promises of their baptism by professing their faith in Jesus Christ.

7. **All these blessings of baptism become ours through faith.** “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God *through faith*. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27, NRSV). While our faith is in Christ alone, the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 69) teaches that baptism assures us that Christ’s salvation is personally ours. We do not believe in our baptism, as though it automatically applies Christ’s blessings to us, but we believe in the salvation of Christ through our baptism as a visible sign and seal of God’s grace.

How Should Baptism Be Celebrated?

1. Synod 1994 prescribed the **minimal elements** necessary for the celebration of baptism: the scriptural words of institution, the baptismal covenant (including God’s promises and our promises), the act of baptism with water and in the name of the Trinity, and prayers.
2. Since baptism is often celebrated less frequently than the Lord’s Supper, and because it marks one’s entrance into the church, the church has most often included a brief **instruction** to remind those being baptized, their parents, and the baptized community of its meaning.
3. The **Prayer of Thanksgiving**, which includes an invocation of the Holy Spirit and the biblical story of God’s salvation through water, has been a feature of baptism from the time of the early church and has been prominent in the Reformed churches from the time of John Calvin. This prayer also highlights baptism as a sacrament alongside the Lord’s Supper and seeks the Holy Spirit’s blessing to bring new life through the waters of baptism.
4. Since baptism is a covenantal act, it requires **faith and commitment** on the part of those being baptized or their covenant representatives (parents). For adults, this requires a profession of faith, and for infants, the faith of the parents and the congregation, and their commitment to nurture the faith of the child toward a mature profession of faith.
5. Some approved forms for baptism in the CRC also include the ancient **renunciations** that come from the earliest days of the church. The renunciation of Satan and of the powers of evil alongside the profession of faith in Christ displays the radical nature of the baptismal covenant. This is appropriate for infant baptism, since the parents are making a covenant commitment to raise their children in the Christian faith and in the covenant community of the Christian church.
6. Because it is a sacrament in which an earthly element is a sacred sign and seal of spiritual reality, **water should be heard and seen** in the celebration of baptism, and the baptized should get wet. The trend toward larger fonts,

or vessels that accommodate immersion, are helping congregations better express the material reality of the sacrament.

7. In many churches, the **name given at baptism** is the “Christian name,” or the first and second names, of those baptized, leaving off the surname or “family name.” The practice signifies that in baptism one becomes a member of the family of God, and is, in effect, “renamed” into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
8. In some churches, an elder presents the candidate, or the parents and child, for baptism before the church. This further emphasizes that baptism is a **church sacrament** and not a family event.
9. Another subtle but powerful expression of the **new identity and citizenship** of the baptized (infant) involves having the officiant rather than a parent hold the child for baptism, thus symbolizing further the child’s adoption into the trinitarian family of the church.
10. In some churches, ministers also make a **sign of the cross** with a finger on the forehead of the baptized as they say, “You are sealed with the Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever,” or similar words.
11. After baptism, as an expression of welcome into the church of Christ, a baptized child may be **carried into the congregation** and shown to all while a hymn is sung.

6. FORM FOR THE HOLY BAPTISM OF INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Outline

Introduction

The Covenant of Baptism

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Baptism

The Declaration

Introduction

[Option 1]

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

the sacrament of baptism reminds and assures us that we share in the death and resurrection of Christ, and are incorporated into Christ’s holy church.

Baptism proclaims the faith of the church.

By the sign of water God promises to cleanse us from sin, renews life, and prefigures the reconciliation of all things promised in Christ.

In baptism we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit as a pledge of this reconciliation.

The same Spirit binds us to each other and joins us to Christ’s ministry of love, peace, and justice.

[Option 2]

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always,

to the end of the age.” (from Matt. 28:18-20)

[Option 3]

In baptism God seals the promises he gave when he made his covenant with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him in obedience and love. God graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). Jesus himself embraced little children and blessed them (Mark 10:16), and the apostle Paul said that children of believers are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). So, just as children of the old covenant received the sign of circumcision, our children are given the sign of baptism. We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children.

Hear also these words from holy Scripture:

“All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (from Rom. 6:3-4)

Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s promises to this covenant people.

In baptism God promises by grace alone

to forgive our sins,

to adopt us into the body of Christ, the church,

to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and

to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

[Water may be poured into the font at this time or during the Prayer of Thanksgiving.]

Water cleanses,

purifies,

refreshes,

sustains;

Jesus Christ is living water.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:

to love and trust God completely,

to forsake the evil of the world, and

to live a new and holy life.

Yet, when we fall into sin,

we must not despair of God’s mercy,

nor continue in sin,

for baptism is the sign and seal

of God’s eternal covenant of grace with us.

The Covenant of Baptism

Minister: [*Name/s of parent/s,*] Since you have presented [*name/s of child/ren*] for baptism, we ask you the following questions before God and his people.

[The minister addresses the parent/s:]

[Renunciations option 1]

Beloved of God,

I ask you before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,
to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and
to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

We/I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my/our Lord and Savior.

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, and,
through worship and service,
seek to advance God's purposes
here and throughout the world?

We/I will, God helping us/me.

Do you profess your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and affirm the promises of God made to you and your children in his Word?

We/I do, God helping us/me.

[Renunciations option 2]

Beloved of God,

I ask you before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,
to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and
to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

We/I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my/our Lord and Savior.

[Vows option 1]

Do you promise

to instruct *these children/this child*
in the truth of God's Word,
in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;
to pray for *them*, to teach *them* to pray, and
to train *them* in Christ's way by your example,
through worship, and
in the nurture of the church?

We/I do, God helping us/me.

[Vows option 2]

Do you believe that your children, though sinful by nature, are received by God in Christ as members of his covenant, and therefore ought to be baptized? And do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct these children in the Christian faith and to lead them by your example into the life of Christian discipleship?

We/I do, God helping us/me.

[The congregation is asked to rise in order to make their promises. The minister, or an elder, addresses the members of the congregation:]

Do you promise to love, encourage, and support
these brothers and sisters

by teaching the gospel of God's love,
by being an example of Christian faith and character, and
by giving the strong support of God's family
in fellowship, prayer, and service?

We do.

[The minister may invite the congregation to join the parents in reciting the Apostles' Creed.]

Let us join with the whole baptized church of God in professing the faith of the church and renewing our own baptismal covenant.

[The questions may be omitted.]

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.**

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: *And also with you.*

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks,
O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.

In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.

In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.

You led the children of Israel through the sea
into the freedom of the promised land.

In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord,
and your Spirit anointed him.

By his death and resurrection

Jesus Christ, the living water,

forgives us,

frees us from sin and death,

and opens the way to life everlasting.

We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.

In this water you confirm to us

that we are buried with Christ in his death,

are raised to share in his resurrection,

are being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and

are united to Christ in mission.

[The minister may pour or touch the water.]

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray,

upon *these* here baptized *[minister may prefer to use the names of the candidates]*,
that this water may be a spring gushing up to eternal life.

Wash away *their* sin,

raise *them* to new life, and

graft *them* to the body of Christ.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon *them*, that *they* may have

wisdom to discern *their* gifts,

strength to obey your will,

and joy in answering your call.

To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God,

be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

The Baptism

[The minister may ask the parent/s of each child:]

What is the name of this child?

[The parents shall give the given or first name; the minister may hold infants or small children, addressing each:]

[Name], for you Jesus came into the world;

for you he died and conquered death;

all this he did for you, little one,

though you know nothing of it as yet.

We love because God first loved us.

[The minister shall immerse the child or pour/sprinkle water visibly and generously at the declaration of each name of the three persons of the Trinity, saying:]

[Name],

I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil, saying to each:]

[Name],

child of the covenant,
in baptism you are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God's own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission. Amen.

[The minister may offer this or a similar prayer:]

Gracious Lord,
look with kindness upon these parents.
May they ever rejoice in the gift you have given them.
Grant them the presence of your Holy Spirit,
that they may bring up *these children*
to know you, to love you, and to serve you. Amen.

The Declaration

[The minister shall make the following declaration concerning those just baptized:]

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the church,
[Name/s] is/are now
received into the membership of the holy catholic church,
engaged to confess Christ and
to be God's faithful *servant/s* until life's end.

7. FORM FOR THE HOLY BAPTISM AND PROFESSION OF FAITH OF OLDER CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Outline

Introduction
The Covenant of Baptism
The Prayer of Thanksgiving
The Baptism
The Declaration

Introduction

[Option 1]

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the sacrament of baptism reminds and assures us that
we share in the death and resurrection of Christ
and are incorporated into Christ's holy church.
Baptism proclaims the faith of the church.
By the sign of water God promises to cleanse us from sin,

renews life, and prefigures the reconciliation of all things promised in Christ.
In baptism we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit as a pledge of this reconciliation.
The same Spirit binds us to each other and joins us to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice.

[Option 2]

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (from Matt. 28:18-20)

Hear also these words from holy Scripture:
"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (from Rom. 6:3-4)

Baptism is the sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people. In baptism God promises by grace alone
to forgive our sins,
to adopt us into the body of Christ, the church,
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and
to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

[Water may be poured into the font at this time or during the Prayer of Thanksgiving.]

Water cleanses,
purifies,
refreshes,
sustains;

Jesus Christ is living water.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:
to love and trust God completely,
to forsake the evil of the world, and
to live a new and holy life.

Yet, when we fall into sin,
we must not despair of God's mercy,
nor continue in sin,
for baptism is the sign and seal
of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

The Covenant of Baptism

[Name/s]

come/s before us to make public profession of *their* faith and to receive the sacrament of baptism.

[The minister addresses the candidate/s:]

Beloved of God,

I ask you before God and Christ's church

to reject evil,

to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and

to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil in your life and in the world?

We/I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is our/my Lord and Savior.

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation,

and, through worship and service,

seek to advance God's kingdom

here and throughout the world?

We/I will, and we/I ask God to help us/me.

Do you promise

to accept the spiritual guidance of the church,

to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation, and

to seek those things that make for unity, purity, and peace?

We/I do, God helping us/me.

[The minister may invite the congregation to join the candidate in reciting the Apostles' Creed.]

Let us join with those who are to be baptized in professing the faith of the church and renewing our own baptismal covenant.

[The questions may be omitted.]

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

and born of the virgin Mary.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;**

he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks,

O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.

In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.

In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.

You led the children of Israel through the sea
into the freedom of the promised land.

In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord,
and your Spirit anointed him.

By his death and resurrection

Jesus Christ, the Living Water,

forgives us,

frees us from sin and death,

and opens the way to life everlasting.

We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.

In this water you confirm to us

that we are buried with Christ in his death,

are raised to share in his resurrection,

are being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and

are united to Christ in mission.

[The minister may pour or touch the water.]

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray,

upon *these* here baptized *[minister may prefer to use the names of the candidates]*,
that this water may be a spring gushing up to eternal life.

Wash away *their* sin,

raise *them* to new life, and

graft *them* to the body of Christ.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon *them*, that *they* may have

wisdom to discern *their* gifts,

strength to obey your will,

and joy in answering your call.

To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God,

be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

The Baptism

[Standing at the font, the minister addresses the person professing faith. If the person is able, she or he is invited to kneel. The minister then immerses the individual or pours/sprinkles water visibly and generously on the individual at the declaration of each name of the three persons of the Trinity, saying:]

[Name],

I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil, saying to each:]

[Name],

in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God's own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission. Amen.

[The minister may offer this or a similar prayer:]

Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake,
stir up in *[name/s]*,
the gift of your Holy Spirit.
Confirm *their* faith,
Guide *their* life,
Empower *their* serving,
Give *them* patience in suffering,
And bring *them* to everlasting life
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Declaration

[The minister shall make the following declaration concerning those just baptized:]

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the church,
[Name/s] are now
received into the membership of the holy catholic church,
engaged to confess Christ and
to be God's faithful *servant/s* until life's end.

8. INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH OF BAPTIZED YOUTH

Public Profession of Faith (PPF) is primarily the personal response of faith to God's promises made in baptism. God accepts us as his adopted children in Jesus Christ in our baptism, and in PPF we respond by declaring our personal faith and commitment as baptized members in Christ. This has always been the central meaning of PPF.

However, the exact nature of what was expected and what was conferred by PPF has changed somewhat in the CRC over the past few decades. In the past, a primary result of PPF was that it provided a gateway to the table of the Lord in celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Later, there was a growing

emphasis on the presence of younger children at the Lord's Supper, but PPF was still required. Hence a simpler form for PPF was devised. More recently synod declared that all baptized members may be welcome at the table apart from PPF. As a result, some questions now asked are "What then becomes of PPF as a milestone of faith?" and "Why should we expect or require it?"

When infants or young children are baptized, they, of course, have no personal understanding of what baptism means; nor do they personally declare their faith in Christ. Rather, they are baptized in recognition of the covenant promises of God to parents and their children (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39). The historic role of PPF (or Confirmation, as it is called in other traditions) is that it gives an opportunity for the baptized to publicly declare their personal faith in Christ and take their place within the church community. The older forms for PPF therefore welcomed professing members not only to the table but also to "all the privileges and responsibilities of full communion."

Paul says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10). Thus, while baptism declares that one is united with Christ in his death and resurrection, the church expects that at some point baptized persons will publicly declare their own faith in Christ. When infants or young children are baptized, their parents declare their faith on their behalf, and promise, with the support of the whole congregation, to raise their children to know and love the Lord. This points inevitably to the expectation and necessity of PPF. It is a personal profession of faith of the baptized person, and it is public because being a member of the church requires a public ("confess with your mouth") recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord.

With this understanding, the church will establish the expectation that baptized members will want to profess their faith before the congregation. PPF marks a passage into mature and fully participating membership. The professing member will then begin to participate more fully in congregational life, such as attendance (and voting, depending on the bylaws of the congregation) at congregational meetings, participation in committees, and otherwise contributing to the life and mission of the congregation.

At what age should a baptized person make PPF? In the past, PPF was often made in the teenage years. Later, when there was a movement for younger children to come to the Lord's table but PPF was still required, congregations were encouraged to invite younger children to make PPF in a simpler form. Still, no age requirement was ever stipulated. Today, when baptized children are invited to the Lord's table apart from PPF, it may be wise to move the general age expectation for PPF up again to the teenage years, when a more mature, knowledgeable, and thoughtful profession can be made. Thus, for example, congregations may offer PPF preparation classes to certain age groups (such as 12- to 14-year-olds and/or 15- to 18-year-olds). Still, no specific age should be stipulated for PPF that might limit the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of a baptized member.

Recently the CRC Faith Formation Committee also emphasized that PPF is more than a one-time event. It is one important milestone that should be followed by

others in which one's faith is professed—for example, church office, marriage, baptism of children, and other church commitments.

With this robust understanding of PPF, congregations should be sure to make it an occasion of great joy and celebration. Attention should be given to the preparation for PPF, with the pastor(s), elders, and other members deeply involved. Within the worship service the connection with baptism should be emphasized by the presence and recognition of water in the font. Those making PPF can be given an opportunity to present their own testimony of faith in some form, and some tokens of this important day in the life of the young person and the church community may be given.

9. FORM FOR THE PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH OF BAPTIZED YOUTH

Introduction

[The minister will invite those making Public Profession of Faith to approach the baptismal font.]

In the sacrament of holy baptism we are adopted as God's own children in Jesus Christ and made members of the body of Christ. In our baptism we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection and are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our baptism also calls us to personally respond to God's promises by publicly declaring our faith in Jesus Christ and promising to live wholeheartedly for him. The apostle Paul declares, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Public profession of faith is a significant milestone of faith in our lives. We profess our faith in every worship service and in every step of faith and commitment we take in our walk with God. Today *[name/s]* are taking another step by publicly declaring their faith and becoming full participants in the life and mission of this congregation.

[Name/s], when you were baptized, you were united with Jesus Christ and his church by God's gracious covenant promises. We rejoice that you have now decided to respond to your baptism by publicly professing your faith in Jesus Christ.

With your Public Profession of Faith today you will take your place as a full participant in the life and mission of this congregation.

The Vows

[Moving to a more visible place, if necessary.]

[Name/s], we ask you now to profess your faith in Jesus Christ by answering the following questions:

[Option 1]

Beloved child of God,
I ask you before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,

to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and
to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

I renounce them.

Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in baptism, and do
you affirm your union with Christ and his church, which your baptism signifies?

I do, with God's help.

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation,
accept its teaching,
and participate in its worship, fellowship, and mission?

I will.

Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church and to walk in the
spirit of Christian love with this congregation?

I do.

[Option 2]

[Name/s], we ask you now to profess your faith in Jesus Christ by answering the
following questions:

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world;
do you love and trust him as the one who saves you from sin; and do you,
with repentance and joy, embrace him as the Lord of your life?

I do, with God's help.

2. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his re-
demption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revela-
tion?

I do, with God's help.

3. Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism,
and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church, which your baptism
signifies?

I do, with God's help.

4. Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church in a spirit of
Christian love and participate in its worship, fellowship, and mission?

I do, with God's help.

*[The congregation is asked to rise in order to make their promises. The minister or elder
addresses the members of the congregation:]*

Do you promise to love and support *[name/s]*
with your prayers, encouragement, and example?

We do.

The Apostles' Creed

[The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing their faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. The questions may be omitted.]

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Blessing and Welcome

[The minister may continue by laying hands on the heads of all those being received, offering the following or a similar prayer of blessing. The elders may join in the laying on of hands.]

Defend, O Lord, this your servant, *[name]*,
with your heavenly grace, that *he/she* may continue to be yours forever and
may daily increase in your Spirit, until *he/she* comes to your eternal kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen.**

[The minister invites the congregation to stand.]

By the Holy Spirit, all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and serve those with whom they live and work.
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.

We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.
Let us welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Joyfully we receive you.

***Join with us as we give witness in the world to the good news,
for we are all one in Christ Jesus.***

Alleluia.

[The following blessing may be said:]

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen. (from Num. 6:24-26)

10. FORM FOR THE WELCOME OF NEW MEMBERS

Introduction

It is always a joy for a congregation to welcome new members into its fellowship. They may come from other CRC congregations by way of a transfer of membership, or they may come from other denominations. Often the welcome is done informally by introducing them to the congregation. This form recognizes the welcome of new members as an opportunity for them to affirm their profession of faith within the context of a new congregation. It is also an opportunity to emphasize the expectation of their willing commitment to the life and mission of their new congregation.

Welcome

[The new members are invited to stand before the congregation, and a brief, informal introduction can be given by the minister or elder.]

[Addressing the new members:]

[Name/s], in your baptism, you became members of the one church of Jesus Christ. It is our joy to welcome you today as members of this congregation. We believe that the Holy Spirit has led you to this congregation at this time for your own good and the good of this congregation. We invite you now to affirm your faith in Christ and express your commitment to the life of this church and mission God has given to us.

Vows

Do you affirm once again, that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, that the Bible is God's Word revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the teachings of this church reflect this revelation?

[We/I do.]

Do you promise to join with us, sharing your gifts, in our worship and fellowship, and in the mission God has given us in the world?

[We/I do.]

[Asking the congregation to rise in body or spirit:]

Do you promise to receive *[name/s]* in love as your brothers and sisters in Christ, support them with your fellowship and prayers, and, recognizing their gifts, invite them into the life and mission of our congregation?

[We do.]

[Together with the new members, the congregation may now recite the Apostles' Creed.]

11. FORM FOR THE ORDINATION OF COMMISSIONED PASTORS

The following form for the ordination of commissioned pastors aims to recognize the diversity of calls and positions included within the designation of commissioned pastor.

Sections A-F correspond to the following categories:

- A. Word and Sacraments
- B. Worship
- C. Youth
- D. Faith Formation
- E. Pastoral Care
- F. Evangelism

You will need to decide which categories apply to the call of the commissioned pastor in your congregation. This form serves as a template that you can adapt to fit your particular setting.

The Announcement

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

Today we rejoice in Christ's special care and love for his church because we have the privilege of ordaining [*name*] as a commissioned pastor [*or: for a special ministry of this church*]. Because [*name*] has accepted the call of the congregation, we shall now proceed with the ordination.

The Introduction

From its beginning the entire New Testament church has been called to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the whole world: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). It soon became apparent that the task committed to the church was vast and complex and that "there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Therefore the church, under the guidance of the apostles, instituted distinct ministries to ensure that the work would be done well (Acts 6:1-6). Those engaged in these ministries were to function with Christ's power and authority, a power and authority rooted in obedience to his Word and expressed in loving service.

These ministries are therefore to be distinguished from the more general ones given by Christ to all believers. The office of commissioned pastor is one of these distinct ministries.

The Instruction

In varying ways every commissioned pastor is a servant both of Christ and of the church, a steward in the household of God, a teacher to explain the mystery of the gospel, a shepherd who cares for the flock, and an ambassador and a herald of our King, proclaiming the message of reconciliation. As [*job title*] at [*name of congregation or institution*], you have also received a specific call.

[Use one or more of the following paragraphs as they apply to the call of the commissioned pastor, or adapt these or write your own.]

A. As a commissioned pastor you have been called to preach. The preaching of the Word must faithfully reflect the Word of God and relate it to the needs of the listeners. Paul stressed this demand when he wrote, "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage . . ." (2 Tim. 4:2). And because the sacraments are closely related to the preaching of the Word, the commissioned pastor has the privilege of administering holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

B. As a commissioned pastor you are being called to lead God's people in worship. Begin all your ministry efforts with the conviction that the Lord is "great . . . and most worthy of praise" (Ps. 48:1); "how good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!" (Ps. 147:1). Always remember that Christ calls us to worship him "in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) and that God calls us to meet together (Heb. 10:25). All your leadership efforts must be charged with the conviction that "to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). Care well for your own spirit and heart so that your leadership comes from a heart and mind fixed on the Lord. Stir our hearts, knowing that our worship is preparation for joining the heavenly chorus.

C. As a commissioned pastor you are called to teach and form the faith of our youth. When Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15), he entrusted his followers with special care for the young. The commissioned pastor must instruct baptized members of the congregation and others in our community in the way of salvation, and encourage and assist those who teach alongside (2 Tim. 2:2). "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer. Be a shepherd of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (from Acts 20:28). Be a friend and Christlike example to our youth. Give clear and cheerful guidance. By word and example, bear up God's people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Be compassionate. Know the Scriptures, which are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Pray continually for the church. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

D. As a commissioned pastor you are called to the specific task of forming the faith of our community through worship, education, and service opportunities. The apostle Paul has taught us in Ephesians 4:11-13 that Jesus "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." In order that every person following Jesus Christ may attain these goals, you are called to assist this church as it promotes a vital program of education and faith formation.

E. As a commissioned pastor you are called to visit the members of the congregation and broader community, calling on the sick and suffering, comforting those who mourn, encouraging the weak, admonishing those who stray, and counseling those in need of guidance, holding in trust those matters confided in counsel or confession. The commissioned pastor rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

F. A commissioned pastor is called not only to serve those who already are members of the church of Christ, but also to engage in and to promote the work of evangelism. As a true disciple of our Master, the commissioned pastor should show that the church exists also for the world and that the missionary task of the church forms an essential part of its calling.

As a servant of Christ, the commissioned pastor must help and encourage the people of God as they care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (Matt. 25:31-46).

In all this work, the commissioned pastor proclaims, explains, and applies holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ. For this work, the pastor must be devoted to the ministry of prayer, joining all Christians in confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

The Questions

[Name], in order that all God's people assembled here may witness that you, in the strength of the Lord, accept the responsibilities of this office, you are requested to stand and answer the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation God calls you to this holy ministry?

Do you believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you subscribe to the doctrinal standards of this church, rejecting all teaching that contradicts them?

Do you promise to be a faithful servant, to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of your calling, and to submit to the government and discipline of the church?

[Name], what is your answer?

Answer: *I do, God helping me.*

[The officiating minister shall then say, with the laying on of hands:]

May God, who has called you to this great and glorious office, enlighten, strengthen, and govern you by the Word and Spirit so that you may serve faithfully and fruitfully in your ministry, to the glory of God's name and the coming of the kingdom of the Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[The members of the congregation are now requested to stand to make their vows. The officiating minister addresses them:]

Dear congregation of Christ, we ask that you respond to the following questions with "We do, God helping us."

1. Do you in the name of the Lord welcome [name] as your commissioned pastor?
2. *[Ask one or more of the following questions as they apply to the call.]*
 - A. Do you promise to take to heart the Word of God as [name] proclaims it?
 - B. Do you promise to support [name] in the priestly and pastoral task of worship planning and leading by your own full, conscious, and active participation?

- C. Do you promise to join *[name]* in ministering to the youth by your own service and prayer? And do you, the youth of this church, promise to accept *[name]* as a pastor among you?
 - D. Do you promise to join *[name]* on the lifelong journey of becoming more like Christ by participating in and supporting various opportunities for faith formation?
 - E. Do you promise to accept the ministry of Christ’s presence as embodied in *[name]* by sharing the mundane parts of life but especially your joys and sorrows with *him/her*?
 - F. Do you promise to support and join *[name]* in the task of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ?
3. Do you promise to pray for *[name]*, sharing in the work of this ministry, to encourage *[name]* in the exercise of these tasks, and to respond to this work with obedience, love, and respect?
 Congregation, what is your answer?
We do, God helping us.

The Charge

[The officiating minister (or whoever has been designated) shall then congratulate and encourage the pastor and the congregation in the following manner:]

Dear friend and fellow servant of Christ:

We rejoice with you on this day that, after much preparation, you have been ordained as a commissioned pastor. *[Or: We all rejoice with you on this day as you begin your ministry in this congregation.]*

May you experience much joy in fulfilling your calling. As you exercise the authority of the office entrusted to you, may you always remain a humble servant. Look faithfully after the whole flock—the old and the young, the faithful and the unfaithful, the healthy and the sick, the strong and the weak. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and suffer with those who suffer.

Use all your talents to the utmost of your ability, and do not neglect any of your gifts. And one day our chief Shepherd will give you the crown of glory, saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

And to you, dear fellow Christians, congratulations also. This is truly the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Keep your vows. Receive *[name]* as a gift of God. Listen to *[name]* with all the respect due this office. Encourage when needed, and pray for *[name]* daily.

May you as commissioned pastor and congregation live as the bride longing for the coming of our heavenly Bridegroom, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Let us now give thanks and ask the Lord to help us do what we have promised.

The Prayer

Thank you, Lord, on this day for your many blessings. Thank you for your church. Thank you for giving your church the task of calling others to your saving grace in Jesus Christ and to the fellowship of the covenant community.

Today we thank you in particular for giving the church the special office of commissioned pastor. We rejoice that we as a congregation have received a new pastor to work among us. We pray that you will bless *[name]* as a servant of Christ and the church.

[Add one or more of the following prayers as appropriate:]

A. Help *[name]* to be an inspired ambassador of our King, bringing the message of salvation and reconciliation to all. Bless *[name]* as a preacher and a teacher, as a pastor and a counselor proving to be a faithful steward in the household of God. Enable us, as a congregation, to listen gladly and attentively, recognizing in *[name's]* words the voice of our chief Shepherd.

B. Fill *[name]* with your Holy Spirit so that all of *his/her* planning, writing, and rehearsing may be so blessed that through the power of the Holy Spirit the words and actions of worship will unite us with Christ and usher us into your holy presence to give you glory. Help *[name]* to be so in tune with your Spirit and the people gathered that our worship may express not only our greatest joys but also our deepest laments and that we will better hear your Word and respond to your call on our lives.

C. May your Spirit fill *[name]* as *he/she* joins us in our ministry to youth, infusing *him/her* with creativity, energy, wisdom, and love. Provide ways for *[name]* to be rejuvenated emotionally and physically so that *he/she* can continue to do your will. May you grow in all of us a burden for our youth so that we may join in the work you are even now doing as you direct their path and draw them closer to you.

D. Holy God, help *[name]* to so reflect you that through *his/her* love, commitment, skills, and modeling, our faith may be nurtured, our relationships strengthened, and our faithful witness and service increase, so that we may live and grow in faith every day.

E. Spirit of comfort, be ever present in *[name]* so that *he/she* may be a source of comfort to many. Grant *him/her* wisdom to know when to speak and when to be quiet, when to sit alongside and when to embrace, when to encourage and when to rebuke. Help us to let *[name]* into our lives so that through *his/her* presence we may sense your presence in our joy and suffering.

F. Merciful and sovereign God, we praise and thank you for the good news of salvation and for your call to share it. Today we thank you especially for equipping and ordaining *[name]* for the work of evangelism as your ambassador and our collaborator and leader. Fill your servant with your Spirit of truth. Give *[name]* love and patience for those who do not yet know you or have turned away from you, and may we learn from *his/her* example. Bless this ministry so that many will come to call you Lord and Savior.

Strengthen *[name]* and all of us in the work of your church so that we may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Help us, congregation and pastor, to endure the heat of the day and the darkness of the night, sustained by your healing and guiding presence. Together may we rejoice in the calling you have given us as we serve in your name.

All this we ask with thankful hearts in the name of your dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

12. FORM FOR THE ORDINATION/INSTALLATION OF CHAPLAINS

The following form for the ordination/installation of chaplains aims to recognize the diversity of calls and positions included within the designation of chaplain. It is understood that chaplaincy is not a distinct office but rather falls under either the office of minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, and yet the role of a chaplain working outside of the organized church is unique enough to warrant its own form for ordination/installation.

Portions that begin with A-F correspond to the following categories:

- A. Word and Sacraments
- B. Worship
- C. Youth
- D. Faith Formation
- E. Pastoral Care
- F. Evangelism
- G. Military

You will need to decide which categories apply to the call of the chaplain to be ordained/installed in your congregation. Most chaplaincy work will focus particularly on E. Pastoral Care. This form serves as a template that you can adapt to your particular setting.

The Announcement

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

Today we rejoice in Christ's special care and love for his church because we have the privilege of ordaining/installing [name] as chaplain [or: for a special ministry of this church]. Because [name] has accepted the call of [name of ordaining/installing congregation and/or institution], we shall now proceed with the ordination.

The Introduction

From its beginning the entire New Testament church was called to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the whole world: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). It soon became apparent that the task committed to the church was vast and complex and that "there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Therefore the church, under the guidance of the apostles, instituted distinct ministries to ensure that the work would be done well (Acts 6:1-6). Those engaged in these ministries were to function with Christ's power and authority, a power and authority rooted in obedience to his Word and expressed in loving service.

These ministries are therefore to be distinguished from the more general ones given by Christ to all believers. The role of chaplain is one of these distinct ministries.

The Instruction

In varying ways every chaplain is a servant both of Christ and of the church, a steward in the household of God, a teacher to explain the mystery of the gospel, a shepherd who cares for the flock, and an ambassador and a herald of our King, proclaiming the message of reconciliation. As [job title] at [name of congregation and/or institution] you have also received a specific call.

[Use one or more of the following paragraphs as they apply to the calling of the chaplain. The focus of ministry for most chaplains will be E. Pastoral Care, but you may adapt these or write your own.]

A. As a chaplain you may be called to preach. The preaching of the Word must faithfully reflect the Word of God and relate it to the needs of the listeners. Paul stressed this demand when he wrote, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage . . ." (2 Tim. 4:2). And because the sacraments are closely related to the preaching of the Word, the chaplain may have the privilege of administering holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

B. As a chaplain you may be called to lead God's people in worship. Begin all your ministry efforts with the conviction that the Lord is "great . . . and most worthy of praise" (Ps. 48:1); "how good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!" (Ps. 147:1). Always remember that Christ calls us to worship him "in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) and that God calls to meet together (Heb. 10:25). All your leadership efforts must be charged with the conviction that "to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). Care well for your own spirit and heart so that your leadership comes from a heart and mind fixed on the Lord. Stir our hearts, knowing that our worship is preparation for joining the heavenly chorus.

C. As a chaplain you may be called to teach and form the faith of our youth. When Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15), he entrusted his followers with special care for the young. The chaplain must instruct baptized members of the congregation and others in our community in the way of salvation, and encourage and assist those who teach alongside (2 Tim. 2:2). "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer. Be a shepherd of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (from Acts 20:28). Be a friend and Christlike example to our youth. Give clear and cheerful guidance. By word and example, bear up God's people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Be compassionate. Know the Scriptures, which are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Pray continually for the church. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

D. As a chaplain you may be called for the specific task of forming the faith of our community through worship, education, and service opportunities. The apostle Paul has taught us in Ephesians 4:11-13 that Jesus "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining

to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” In order that every person following Jesus Christ may attain these goals, you may be called to assist this church as it promotes a vital program of education and faith formation.

E. As a chaplain you are called to visit those in crisis within the population that you serve [the members of the congregation and broader community], calling on the sick and suffering, comforting those who mourn, encouraging the weak, admonishing those who stray, and counseling those in need of guidance, holding in trust those matters confided in counsel or confession. The chaplain rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

F. A chaplain is called not only to serve those who already are members of the church of Christ, but also to serve and engage in conversation with those of other faiths or of no apparent faith. As a true disciple of our Master, the chaplain should show that the church exists also for the world and that the missionary task of the church forms an essential part of its calling.

G. As a military chaplain you are called to a ministry in which you not only serve those under your care but you also live among them, deploy with them, and represent Christ to them, at all times and in all manner of places. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer. Be a shepherd of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (from Acts 20:28). Be a friend and Christlike example to all. Give clear and cheerful guidance. By word and example, bear up God’s people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Care for the suffering, comfort those who mourn, encourage the weak, admonish those who stray, and counsel those in need of guidance. Preach the word, administer the sacraments, and lead God’s people in worship. Know the Scriptures, which are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Guard your heart and mind. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership to others you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:27).

As a servant of Christ, the chaplain must care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (Matt. 25:31-46).

In all this work, the chaplain proclaims, explains, and applies holy Scripture in word and deed to all within *his/her* care. For this work, the chaplain must be devoted to the ministry of prayer, joining all Christians in confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

The Questions

[Name], in order that all God’s people assembled here may witness that you, in the strength of the Lord, accept the responsibilities of this office, you are requested to stand and answer the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation [*and related institution*] God calls you to this holy ministry?

Do you believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you subscribe to the doctrinal standards of this church, rejecting all teaching that contradicts them?

Do you promise to be a faithful servant, to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of your calling, and to submit to the government and discipline of the church?

[Name], what is your answer?

Answer: *I do, God helping me.*

[The officiating minister shall then say with the laying on of hands:]

May God, who has called you to this great and glorious office, enlighten, strengthen, and govern you by the Word and Spirit so that you may serve faithfully and fruitfully in your ministry, to the glory of God's name and the coming of the kingdom of the Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[The members of the congregation are now requested to stand to make their vows. The officiating minister addresses them:]

Dear congregation of Christ, we ask that you respond to the following questions with "We do, God helping us."

Do you in the name of the Lord affirm *[welcome] [name]* as a chaplain called to serve *[name of congregation and/or institution]*?

Do you promise to pray for *[name]* as he/she carries out this work with obedience, love, and respect?

Congregation, what is your answer?

We do, God helping us.

[Option 1]

The Charge

[The officiating minister (or whoever has been designated) shall then congratulate and encourage the chaplain and the congregation in the following manner:]

Dear friend and fellow servant of Christ:

We rejoice with you on this day that, after much preparation, you have been ordained/installed as a chaplain. *[Or: We all rejoice with you on this day as you begin your ministry in (name of congregation and/or institution).]*

May you experience much joy in fulfilling your calling. As you exercise the authority of the office entrusted to you, may you always remain a humble servant. Look faithfully after those you are called to serve—the old and the young, the faithful and the unfaithful, the healthy and the sick, the strong and the weak. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and suffer with those who suffer.

Use all your talents to the utmost of your ability, and do not neglect any of your gifts. And one day our chief Shepherd will give you the crown of glory, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And to you, dear fellow Christians, pray for *[name]* daily.

May you as chaplain and supporting congregation live as the bride longing for the coming of our heavenly Bridegroom, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

Let us now give thanks and ask the Lord to help us do what we have promised.

The Prayer

Thank you, Lord, on this day for your many blessings. Thank you for your church. Thank you for giving your church the task of serving and calling others to your saving grace in Jesus Christ and to the fellowship of the covenant community.

Today we thank you in particular for those serving as chaplains on our behalf. We pray that you will bless *[name]* as a servant of Christ and the church.

Strengthen *[name]* and all of us all in the work of your church so that we may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Help *[name]* to endure the heat of the day and the darkness of the night, sustained by your healing and guiding presence. Together may we rejoice in the various callings you have given us as we serve in your name.

All this we ask with thankful hearts in the name of your dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Option 2]

The Charge

[The officiating minister (or whoever has been designated) shall then congratulate and encourage the chaplain and the congregation in the following manner:]

Brothers and sisters in Christ, joyfully support *[name of chaplain]* as your Associate Pastor *[or Commissioned Pastor]* serving as a Chaplain at *[name of institution]*. Encourage *[her/him]* as *[he/she]* ministers to individuals, families, and staff of *[institution]*. Pray for *[her/him]* as *[he/she]* represents the healing, guiding, and sustaining presence of God to those who experience themselves as wounded, vulnerable, or broken. Consider yourselves partners in *[her/his]* ministry, fulfilling God's calling to all of us to serve Christ gratefully as our King. Be living reminders yourselves of the presence of God and assist *[name of chaplain]* in sustaining a kingdom vision. May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us all with everything good for doing God's will, and may God work in us what is pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Prayer

Gracious God,

We thank you that through the ministry of your people empowered by your Holy Spirit you desire to extend the healing power of your grace to all.

We thank you for the gifts of this servant, sent to *[name of institution]* as an agent of your grace.

Fill *[him/her]* now with your Holy Spirit.

Enlighten *[her/his]* mind to know the truth of your Word.

Soften *[his/her]* heart to feel compassion for those *[he/she]* meets.

Guide *[his/her]* hands to work for the good of others and the glory of God.

Shape *[her/his]* character so that others can see Christ in *[her/him]*.

Give [her/him] speech to make known with sensitivity your deep compassion and restoring grace.

Endow [him/her] with wisdom to care for and guide the people to whom [he/she] ministers.

Give your servant courage to fulfill [his/her] calling against difficulties.

Help the individuals and staff of [name of institution] to see [her/him] as your servant. May they receive [him/her] as a pastor and trust [her/him] with their souls and life stories. Through [his/her] ministry may they deepen their trust in you and grow in faith, hope, and love.

We pray, O God, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven . . .

13. FORM FOR THE ORDINATION OF ELDERS AND DEACONS (2016)

Introduction

Congregation of Jesus Christ, today we celebrate God's gift of faithful leadership for his people. We joyfully thank him for elders and deacons who have served well and have completed their terms of office. And we praise him for providing their successors.

In the officebearers of the church we see the love of Christ for his people. As the Lord of the church he appoints leaders to govern in his name and to promote the spiritual well-being of his people. By his Spirit he equips these leaders so that believers may grow in faith, develop disciplined Christian living, serve others in selfless love, and share with all the good news of salvation. The apostle Paul stated this most clearly when he wrote to the church, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). And Jesus Christ taught us the spirit of true leadership when he said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).

Elders serve by exercising oversight of the church in Christ's name. The apostle Paul told the elders at Ephesus: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Elders must provide for the true preaching of the Word, instruction for faith formation for both youth and adults, regular celebration of the sacraments, and faithful counsel and discipline while keeping in confidence those matters entrusted to them. And they must promote fellowship and hospitality among believers, ensure good order in the church, and stimulate witness to all people.

Deacons serve by leading and equipping the church to minister to its members and the world in a rich diversity of ministries, awakening compassion, demonstrating mercy, seeking justice, and collaborating with God's Spirit for the transformation of persons and communities. In imitation of Christ's mercy, deacons teach us to love God, our neighbors, and the creation with acts of generous

sharing, joyful hospitality, thoughtful care, and wise stewardship of all of God's gifts. Deacons offer holistic responses that respect the dignity of all people, working to change exploitative structures and systems, equipping the church for ministries of reconciliation and peacemaking, and seeking opportunities for advocacy. To help them accomplish these tasks, deacons are to identify and develop gifts in both the church and community. By adding to all this words of encouragement and hope, deacons demonstrate in word and deed the care of the Lord himself.

The deacons and elders, together with the ministers, are responsible for the general administration of the church.

These tasks of elders and deacons call for believers who are Christlike, who are mature in the faith, and who exercise their offices with prayer, patience, and humility.

The Vows

Today we intend to ordain elders and deacons and to install them for terms of service in this congregation. Those appointed to the office of elder are [names]. Those appointed to the office of deacon are [names].

To express your acceptance of these offices, you are asked to stand, and here in the presence of God and his church, to answer the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation God himself is calling you to these holy offices?

Do you believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you subscribe to the doctrinal standards of this church, rejecting all teaching which contradicts them?

Do you promise to do the work of your offices faithfully, in a way worthy of your calling and in submission to the government and discipline of the church?

[The officiating minister then asks each delegate individually]:

[Name], what is your answer?

[Each delegate responds]: I do, God helping me.

The Ordination

[The officiating minister shall then pray the following or an alternate prayer of his/her choosing (the laying on of hands at this point is optional)]:

God, our heavenly Father, who has called you to these sacred offices, guide you by his Word, equip you with his Spirit, and so prosper your ministries that his church may increase and his name be praised.

Amen.

The Charge

[To the elders]

I charge you, elders, as shepherds of the flock, to "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [you] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). Be a friend and Christlike

example to children. Give clear and cheerful guidance to young people. By word and example, bear up God's people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Encourage the aged to persevere in God's promises. Be wise counselors who support and strengthen the pastor. Be compassionate, yet firm and consistent in rebuke and discipline.

Know the Scriptures, which are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Pray continually for the church. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

[To the deacons]

I charge you deacons, to inspire faithful ministries of service to one another, to the larger community, and to the world. Remind us that the Lord requires us "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Mic. 6:8). Teach us to be merciful and to seize new opportunities to worship God with offerings of wealth, time, and ability. Realize that benevolence is a quality of our life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance. Therefore, minister to rich and poor alike, both within and outside the church. Weigh our opportunities for giving and service and use the church's resources discerningly. Be compassionate to those in need and treat them with dignity and respect; hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Encourage with words that create hope in hearts and with deeds that bring joy into lives. Be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils. Let your lives be above reproach; live as examples of Christ Jesus; look to the interests of others. And in all your ministries help us participate in the renewing of all things even as we anticipate its completion when God's kingdom comes.

[To the congregation]

I charge you, people of God, to receive these officebearers as Christ's gift to the church.

Recognize in them the Lord's provision for healthy congregational life. Hold them in honor; take their counsel seriously; respond to them with obedience and respect; accept their help with thanks. Wholeheartedly participate in the ministries into which they lead you. Sustain them in prayer and encourage them with your support, especially when they feel the burden of their office. Acknowledge them as the Lord's servants among you.

Do you, congregation, pledge to receive them as you have been charged?

[Answer by the congregation in unison]: **We do, God helping us.**

Prayer

Our merciful Father in heaven, we thank you that you have provided faithful and gifted people to serve as elders and deacons. As these new officebearers assume their responsibilities, fill them with your Spirit, endow them with your wisdom, and grant them strength.

Make them faithful workers in your vineyard. Under their guidance may your church grow in every spiritual grace, in faith which is open and unashamed, and in the committed service that promotes your reign in the world. Help them to perform their duties with enthusiasm and humility. In their work, grant them

a sense of sustained awe that is rooted in daily adoration of you, their Lord.
Through them may your name be honored and your church be served.

Help us, your people, to accept them gladly, encourage them always, and respect them for the sake of your precious Son, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Appendix I Condensed Financial Statements of the Agencies and Institutions

Back to God Ministries International Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2015				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 1,166		157		1,323
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	3,040	-	897	99	4,036
Receivables & Advances	19	-	-	-	19
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	461	-	-	-	461
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	4,685	-	1,054	99	5,838
Accounts Payable	363	-	-	-	363
Notes/Loans Payable	285	-	-	-	285
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	527	-	-	-	527
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,175	-	-	-	1,175
Net Assets	\$ 3,510	-	1,054	99	4,663
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Isaac Jen endowment fund and Media Reach Fund.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Permanently restricted endowment funds.				

**Back to God Ministries International
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	3,346	\$	3,194
% of Total Income		35.4%		37.8%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	3,732	\$	3,585
Estate Gifts	\$	1,743	\$	1,394
Total Gift Income		5,475		4,979
% of Total Income		57.9%		59.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants-Animation	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	641	\$	273
Total Other Income		641		273
% of Total Income		6.8%		3.2%
TOTAL INCOME		9,462		8,446
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
English	\$	2,471	\$	2,419
FTEs		15		17
International	\$	4,470	\$	4,021
FTEs		17		17
Education	\$	161	\$	165
FTEs		2		2
<hr/>				
Total Program Service \$	\$	7,102	\$	6,605
Total Program Service FTEs		37		36
% of Total \$		74.4%		73.8%
% of Total FTEs		78.7%		78.3%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	848	\$	799
FTEs		4		4
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	1,595	\$	1,551
FTEs		6		6
Total Support Service \$		2,443		2,350
Total Support Service FTEs		10		10
% of Total \$		25.6%		26.2%
% of Total FTEs		21.3%		21.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	9,545	\$	8,955
TOTAL FTEs		44		46
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(83)	\$	(509)

**Calvin College
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 27,033	-	-	-	27,033
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	18,934	-	-	-	18,934
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	25,676	-	17,657	38,027	81,360
Equities	36,588	-	25,161	54,189	115,937
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	1,926	-	1,324	2,852	6,102
PP & E	211,889	-	-	-	211,889
Other	4,001	-	-	-	4,001
Total Assets	326,046	-	44,142	95,068	465,256
Accounts Payable	2,939	-	-	-	2,939
Notes/Loans Payable	89,437	-	-	-	89,437
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	6,282	-	-	-	6,282
Deferred Income	2,886	-	-	-	2,886
Other	70,674	-	-	-	70,674
Total Liabilities	172,218	-	-	-	172,218
Net Assets	\$ 153,828	-	44,142	95,068	293,038
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Over 1,381 accounts for instruction, scholarships, grants, research, public service, student services, etc., funded by outside sources.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Endowed gifts.				

**Calvin College
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 13-14 Actual	Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,451	\$ 2,389
% of Total Income	1.7%	1.6%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 3,252	\$ 3,443
Estate Gifts	\$ 18	\$ 53
Total Gift Income	<u>3,270</u>	<u>3,496</u>
% of Total Income	2.2%	2.3%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 136,051	\$ 139,086
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 3,854	\$ 3,940
Total Other Income	<u>139,905</u>	<u>143,026</u>
% of Total Income	96.1%	96.0%
TOTAL INCOME	<u><u>145,626</u></u>	<u><u>148,911</u></u>
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Education	\$ 127,020	\$ 129,426
FTEs	586	576
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
Total Program Service \$	<u>\$ 127,020</u>	<u>\$ 129,426</u>
Total Program Service FTEs	586	576
% of Total \$	87.2%	86.9%
% of Total FTEs	78.0%	77.7%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 7,245	\$ 8,019
FTEs	58	60
Plant Operations	\$ 7,976	\$ 8,319
FTEs	70	69
Fund-raising	\$ 3,385	\$ 3,147
FTEs	37	36
Total Support Service \$	<u>18,606</u>	<u>19,485</u>
Total Support Service FTEs	165	165
% of Total \$	12.8%	13.1%
% of Total FTEs	22.0%	22.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u><u>\$ 145,626</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 148,911</u></u>
TOTAL FTEs	<u><u>751</u></u>	<u><u>741</u></u>
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>

**Calvin Theological Seminary
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 2,725	-	1	-	2,726
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	106	-	1,974	-	2,080
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	28	-	-	-	28
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	8,404	-	8,404
Equities	-	-	15,116	12,405	27,521
Partnerships	-	-	-	5,034	5,034
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	1,000	1,000
PP & E	10,772	-	-	-	10,772
Other	1,361	-	-	-	1,361
Total Assets	14,992	-	25,495	18,439	58,926
Accounts Payable	1,645	-	-	-	1,645
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	45	-	-	-	45
Annuities Payable	-	-	171	-	171
Deferred Income	-	-	476	-	476
Other	-	-	1,783	-	1,783
Total Liabilities	1,690	-	2,430	-	4,120
Net Assets	\$ 13,302	-	23,065	18,439	54,806
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.	Office building in endowment - investment income.				
Note 2: List details of designations.	Accounts payable: Early retirement and post retirement liabilities. Notes/Loans Payable: Net student loan receivables and liabilities.				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Donor designated, program, scholarship, grants and construction pledges.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Calvin Theological Seminary
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,701	\$	2,567
% of Total Income		37.4%		33.5%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	830	\$	1,165
Estate Gifts	\$	52	\$	180
Total Gift Income		882		1,345
% of Total Income		12.2%		17.5%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	2,374	\$	2,408
Grants	\$	1,204	\$	1,272
Miscellaneous	\$	58	\$	73
Total Other Income		3,636		3,753
% of Total Income		50.4%		49.0%
TOTAL INCOME		7,219		7,665
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Instructional	\$	3,054	\$	3,049
FTEs		30		23
Public Service	\$	68	\$	96
FTEs		1		1
Academic Support	\$	1,190	\$	1,312
FTEs		5		5
Student Services	\$	612	\$	546
FTEs		5		5
Student Aid	\$	400	\$	363
FTEs		1		1
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	5,324	\$	5,366
Total Program Service FTEs		42		35
% of Total \$		66.0%		68.9%
% of Total FTEs		71.2%		67.3%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	1,096	\$	914
FTEs		9		9
Plant Operations	\$	1,002	\$	866
FTEs		2		2
Fund-raising	\$	650	\$	639
FTEs		6		6
Total Support Service \$		2,748		2,419
Total Support Service FTEs		17		17
% of Total \$		34.0%		31.1%
% of Total FTEs		28.8%		32.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	8,072	\$	7,785
TOTAL FTEs		59		52
Post-retirement benefit costs >		1,461		48
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	608	\$	(72)

**Congregational Services
Balance Sheet (000s)**

INCLUDED IN SYNODICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

**Congregational Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 13-14 Actual	Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 3,712	\$ 5,678
% of Total Income	83.5%	45.5%
Other Gift Income:		
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 434	\$ 725
Estate Gifts	\$ 87	-
Total Gift Income	521	725
% of Total Income	11.7%	5.8%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ -	\$ 5,777
Grants	\$ -	-
Services & Misc	\$ 213	\$ 309
Total Other Income	213	6,086
% of Total Income	4.8%	48.7%
TOTAL INCOME	4,446	12,489
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Lead-Chaplaincy Services	\$ 276	\$ 261
FTEs	2	2
Lead-Pastor-Church Relations/SCE/SPE	\$ 1,173	\$ 1,246
FTEs	6	6
Lead-Candidacy	\$ -	179
FTEs	-	2
Lead-Ecumenical Relations	\$ -	170
FTEs	-	-
Lead-Network/Healthy Church	90	26
FTEs	1	1
Justice-Race Relations	\$ 433	\$ 483
FTEs	4	4
Justice-Safe Church Ministry	\$ 228	\$ 206
FTEs	2	2
Justice-Disability Concerns	\$ 292	\$ 298
FTEs	2	2
Justice-Social & Restorative Justice	\$ 568	\$ 717
FTEs	5	5
Justice-Ministries in Canada	\$ 1,226	\$ 1,074
FTEs	5	5
Faith-Volunteer Services	\$ 182	\$ 168
FTEs	2	2
Faith-Church Resources (FA)	\$ -	385
FTEs	-	4
MSS-Agency services	\$ -	5,285
FTEs	-	24
MSS-Faith Alive (FA)	\$ -	1,293
FTEs	-	4
MSS-World Literature (FA)	\$ -	482
FTEs	-	3
MSS-Communications	\$ -	641
FTEs	-	3
Worship-Worship Resources (FA)	\$ -	380
FTEs	-	3
Grant Programs - Leadership Init. and Connections	\$ -	-
FTEs	-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 4,468	\$ 13,294
Total Program Service FTEs	29	72
% of Total \$	99.0%	99.7%
% of Total FTEs	96.7%	98.6%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ -	-
FTEs	-	-
D.D.M.	\$ -	-
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ 43	\$ 37
FTEs	1	1
Total Support Service \$	43	37
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	1.0%	0.3%
% of Total FTEs	3.3%	1.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 4,511	\$ 13,331
TOTAL FTEs	30	73
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (65)	\$ (842)

Employees' Retirement Plan - Canada (in Canadian \$)
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----December 31, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 197	-	-	-	197
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	532	-	-	-	532
Equities	3,757	-	-	-	3,757
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	214	-	-	-	214
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	4,700	-	-	-	4,700
Accounts Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Net Assets	\$ 4,700	-	-	-	4,700
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Employees' Retirement Plan - Canada (in Canadian \$)
Changes in Net Assets (000s)**

	2014 Actual	2015 Actual
ADDITIONS:		
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:		
Employer Contributions	\$ 408	\$ 443
Participant Contributions	\$ 63	\$ 55
Investment Earnings	\$ 400	\$ 69
Total Other Income	871	567
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	871	567
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Distributions	\$ 645	\$ 154
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
FTEs	-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 645	\$ 154
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-
% of Total \$	99.1%	95.1%
% of Total FTEs		
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 6	\$ 8
FTEs	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Total Support Service \$	6	8
Total Support Service FTEs	-	-
% of Total \$	0.9%	4.9%
% of Total FTEs		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 651	\$ 162
TOTAL FTEs	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 220	\$ 405

**Employees' Savings Plan United States
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----December 31, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ -	-	-	-	-
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	5,927	-	-	-	5,927
Equities	17,357	-	-	-	17,357
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	2,325	-	-	-	2,325
Diversified	5,032	-	-	-	5,032
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	30,641	-	-	-	30,641
Accounts Payable	8	-	-	-	8
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	8	-	-	-	8
Net Assets	\$ 30,633	-	-	-	30,633
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Employees' Savings Plan United States
Changes in Net Assets (000s)**

		2014 Actual		2015 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Income:				
Contributions	\$	2,179	\$	2,378
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	1,900	\$	8
Total Other Income		4,079		2,386
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		4,079		2,386
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$	2,520	\$	1,634
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	2,520	\$	1,634
Total Program Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$		95.0%		92.4%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%		0.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	133	\$	135
FTEs		1		1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		133		135
Total Support Service FTEs		1		1
% of Total \$		5.0%		7.6%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	2,653	\$	1,769
TOTAL FTEs		1		1
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	1,426	\$	617

**Home Missions
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 829	720	209	-	1,758
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities			-		-
Receivables & Advances	294	-	20	-	314
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	26	-	-	-	26
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	676	-	-	676
Equities	25	423	971	150	1,569
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	257	-	-	-	257
PP & E	9	-	-	-	9
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	1,440	1,819	1,200	150	4,609
Accounts Payable	261	-	-	-	261
Notes/Loans Payable	768	-	-	-	768
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	166	-	-	-	166
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,195	-	-	-	1,195
Net Assets	\$ 245	1,819	1,200	150	3,414
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Mission Trg Fund: \$385; Hawaii: \$1,208; Estate special proj: \$227				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	NA Trng: \$39; Can Legacy: \$194; CMI: \$69; Above budget \$299; Short-term Loan \$511; Other \$69				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Emerging Leader Trust: \$150				

**Home Missions
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	3,557	\$	3,398
% of Total Income		59.7%		56.7%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	1,660	\$	1,834
Estate Gifts	\$	95	\$	320
Total Gift Income		1,755		2,154
% of Total Income		29.5%		36.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	120
Grants	\$	353	\$	76
Miscellaneous	\$	292	\$	243
Total Other Income		645		439
% of Total Income		10.8%		7.3%
TOTAL INCOME		5,957		5,991
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Ministry Teams	\$	4,281	\$	3,703
FTEs		20		20
Ministry Devel & Planning	\$	827	\$	737
FTEs		6		6
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	5,108	\$	4,440
Total Program Service FTEs		26		26
% of Total \$		78.6%		74.9%
% of Total FTEs		78.8%		78.8%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	832	\$	895
FTEs		2		2
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	560	\$	589
FTEs		5		5
Total Support Service \$		1,392		1,484
Total Support Service FTEs		7		7
% of Total \$		21.4%		25.1%
% of Total FTEs		21.2%		21.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	6,500	\$	5,924
TOTAL FTEs		33		33
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(543)	\$	67

**Loan Fund
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	June 30, 2015				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 11,097	-	-	-	11,097
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	23,470	-	-	-	23,470
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	34,567	-	-	-	34,567
Accounts Payable	65	-	-	-	65
Notes/Loans Payable	27,041	-	-	-	27,041
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	27,106	-	-	-	27,106
Net Assets	\$ 7,461	-	-	-	7,461
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Loan Fund
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	1,016	\$	1,068
Total Other Income		1,016		1,068
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL INCOME		1,016		1,068
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Loan Interest	\$	555	\$	591
FTEs		1		1
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	555	\$	591
Total Program Service FTEs		1		1
% of Total \$		62.8%		66.6%
% of Total FTEs		33.3%		33.3%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	329	\$	297
FTEs		1		1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		329		297
Total Support Service FTEs		1		1
% of Total \$		37.2%		33.4%
% of Total FTEs		66.7%		66.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	884	\$	888
TOTAL FTEs		2		2
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	132	\$	180

**Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - Canada
Balance Sheet (000s) in Canadian \$**

	-----December 31, 2015-----				
	Pension	S.A.F			Total
Cash	\$ 1,144	223	-	-	1,367
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	56	10	-	-	66
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	10,427	-	-	-	10,427
Equities	37,572	-	-	-	37,572
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Real Estate (nonoperating)	2,659	-	-	-	2,659
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	51,858	233	-	-	52,091
Accounts Payable	123	-	-	-	123
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	123	-	-	-	123
Net Assets	\$ 51,735	233	-	-	51,968
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - Canada
Changes in Net Assets (000s) in Canadian \$

	MPF 2014 Actual	MPF 2015 Actual	SAF 2014 Actual	SAF 2015 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	9 \$	59
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	81.8%	96.7%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
Total Gift Income	-	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:				
Participant Assessments	\$ 3,750	\$ 3,553	\$ -	-
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
Investment Earnings/(Losses)	\$ 5,416	\$ 2,614	2 \$	2
Total Other Income	9,166	6,167	2	2
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	18.2%	3.3%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	9,166	6,167	11	61
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$ 2,587	\$ 2,768	\$ 22	14
FTEs	-	-	-	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 2,587	\$ 2,768	\$ 22	14
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
% of Total \$	78.1%	78.2%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total FTEs	0.0%	0.0%		
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 725	\$ 771	\$ -	-
FTEs	1	1	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Support Service \$	725	771	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	-	-
% of Total \$	21.9%	21.8%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Total FTEs	100.0%	100.0%		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 3,312	\$ 3,539	22 \$	14
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 5,854	\$ 2,628	(11) \$	47

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - United States
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----December 31, 2015-----			
	Pension	S.A.F		Total
Cash	\$ 2,758	96	-	2,854
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	158	-	-	158
Inventory	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):				
Bonds	16,624	-	-	16,624
Equities	57,618	-	-	57,618
Diversified / Alternative	13,622	-	-	13,622
Real Estate (nonoperating)	10,292	-	-	10,292
PP & E	330	-	-	330
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	\$ 101,402	96	-	101,498
Accounts Payable	41	9	-	50
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	41	9	-	50
Net Assets	\$ 101,361	87	-	101,448
Footnotes:				
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.				
Note 2: List details of designations.				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.				

**Synodical Administrative Services
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 4,628	-	144	-	4,772
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,127	-	-	-	1,127
Inventory	1,292	-	-	-	1,292
Prepays & Advances	169	-	-	-	169
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	21,026	-	-	-	21,026
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	7,430	-	-	-	7,430
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	35,672	-	144	-	35,816
Accounts Payable	4,369	-	-	-	4,369
Notes/Loans Payable	21,885	-	-	-	21,885
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	43	-	-	-	43
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	26,297	-	-	-	26,297
Net Assets	\$ 9,375	-	144	-	9,519
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property currently in use.	Canadian Cash Concentration and Netting for Interest Program.				
Note 2: List details of restrictions.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Includes: \$38,000 AOYC, \$76,000 DORR, \$25,000 DC, and \$5,000 other.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Synodical Administrative Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 13-14 Actual	Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,668	\$ 2,398
% of Total Income	75.3%	40.0%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 20	\$ 19
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	20	19
% of Total Income	0.6%	0.3%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ 75	\$ 75
Services & Misc	\$ 780	\$ 3,503
Total Other Income	855	3,578
% of Total Income	24.1%	59.7%
TOTAL INCOME	3,543	5,995
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Synodical Services & Grants	\$ 2,831	\$ 2,239
FTEs	5	5
Communications	\$ 626	
FTEs	4	
Sea to Sea expenses & grants	\$ 1,150	\$ 14
FTEs	-	
Leadership Programs	\$ 37	\$ 35
FTEs	-	-
Total Program Service \$	4,644	2,288
Total Program Service FTEs	9	5
% of Total \$	79.6%	62.2%
% of Total FTEs	56.3%	41.7%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 860	\$ 991
FTEs	4	4
D.M.A.	\$ 265	\$ 353
FTEs	2	2
Fund-raising (Foundation)	\$ 63	\$ 48
FTEs	1	1
Total Support Service \$	1,188	1,392
Total Support Service FTEs	7	7
% of Total \$	20.4%	37.8%
% of Total FTEs	43.8%	58.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	5,832	3,680
TOTAL FTEs	16	12
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	(2,289)	2,315

**Synodical Administrative Services (Agency Services)
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 13-14 Actual	Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 3,434	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Services & Misc	\$ 6,244	\$ 6,475
Total Other Income	9,678	6,475
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	9,678	6,475
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Advancement	\$ 819	\$ 1,008
FTEs	9	9
Finance & Payroll	\$ 2,217	\$ 2,250
FTEs	22	22
IT and Phones	\$ 1,612	\$ 1,617
FTEs	7	7
Human Resources	\$ 330	\$ 345
FTEs	2	2
Coordinated Services	\$ 192	\$ 176
FTEs	2	2
Proservices	\$ 3,445	-
FTEs	15	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 8,615	\$ 5,396
Total Program Service FTEs	57	42
% of Total \$	89.0%	83.3%
% of Total FTEs	96.6%	95.5%
Support Services:		
Management & General		
FTEs	-	-
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$ 1,063	\$ 1,079
FTEs	2	2
Fund-raising (Foundation)	-	-
FTEs	-	-
Total Support Service \$	1,063	1,079
Total Support Service FTEs	2	2
% of Total \$	11.0%	16.7%
% of Total FTEs	3.4%	4.5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	9,678	6,475
TOTAL FTEs	59	44
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ -	\$ -

**World Missions
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 2,387	-	72	-	2,459
CDs, Time Deposits					-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	658	658
Receivables & Advances	171	1	7	-	179
Inventory	4	-	-	-	4
Prepays & Advances	521	-	-	-	521
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	882	120	773	294	2,069
Equities	882	119	774	294	2,069
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	425	-	-	-	425
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	5,272	240	1,626	1,246	8,384
Accounts Payable	1,099	-	-	-	1,099
Notes/Loans Payable	31	-	-	-	31
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	138	-	-	-	138
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	1,112	-	-	-	1,112
Total Liabilities	2,380	-	-	-	2,380
Net Assets	\$ 2,892	240	1,626	1,246	6,004
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.	List supplied upon request (land/buildings overseas are off book).				
Note 2: List details of designations.	Board Designated Reserves \$239 Endowment/annuities \$ 0 - Other \$ 0				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Restricted Gifts, missionary support and program support.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Endowments.				

**World Missions
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	4,584	\$	4,382
% of Total Income		30.0%		29.2%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	8,969	\$	8,848
Estate Gifts	\$	593	\$	903
Total Gift Income		9,562		9,751
% of Total Income		62.5%		65.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	1,149	\$	868
Total Other Income		1,149		868
% of Total Income		7.5%		5.8%
TOTAL INCOME		15,295		15,001
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Africa	\$	3,666	\$	3,556
FTEs		24		24
Eurasia	\$	2,625	\$	2,772
FTEs		17		17
Latin America	\$	3,902	\$	4,079
FTEs		21		21
Global/other Int'l program	\$	1,684	\$	1,587
FTEs		21		15
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	11,877	\$	11,994
Total Program Service FTEs		83		77
% of Total \$		83.0%		83.0%
% of Total FTEs		85.6%		84.6%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	1,213	\$	1,242
FTEs		4		4
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	1,220	\$	1,215
FTEs		10		10
Total Support Service \$		2,433		2,457
Total Support Service FTEs		14		14
% of Total \$		17.0%		17.0%
% of Total FTEs		14.4%		15.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	14,310	\$	14,451
TOTAL FTEs		97		91
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	985	\$	550

**World Renew
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2015-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 5,102	2,096	5,889	-	13,087
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,774	1,000	-	-	2,774
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	1,464	-	-	-	1,464
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	25	-	-	25
Equities	3,433	3,775	1,450	23	8,681
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	189	-	155	-	344
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	11,962	6,896	7,494	23	26,375
Accounts Payable	1,232	-	-	-	1,232
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	209	-	-	-	209
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,441	-	-	-	1,441
Net Assets	\$ 10,521	6,896	7,494	23	24,934
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Term endowments as stipulated by board = \$4,556 Disaster relief gifts for specific sites = \$1,539, DFTD reserve \$801				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Mission home = \$106; Purpose-restricted gifts = \$6,406; Term endowments as stipulated by donors = \$982				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Pure endowments = \$23				

**World Renew
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 13-14 Actual		Fiscal 14-15 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		-		-
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	20,642	\$	19,786
Estate Gifts	\$	1,768	\$	2,254
Total Gift Income		22,410		22,040
% of Total Income		56.5%		61.6%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	16,082	\$	13,119
Miscellaneous	\$	1,145	\$	646
Total Other Income		17,227		13,765
% of Total Income		43.5%		38.4%
TOTAL INCOME		39,637		35,805
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Overseas programs	\$	11,248	\$	11,372
FTEs		41		40
North America programs	\$	580	\$	393
FTEs				
Disaster relief programs	\$	1,595	\$	1,524
FTEs		11		13
Above-budget relief costs	\$	15,711	\$	16,065
FTEs		5		4
Education	\$	1,323	\$	1,463
FTEs		10		12
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$		30,457		30,817
Total Program Service FTEs		67		69
% of Total \$		88.8%		88.5%
% of Total FTEs		77.0%		73.4%
Support Services:				
Management & General		1,511		1,438
FTEs		5		6
Plant Operations		-		-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising		2,342		2,571
FTEs		15		19
Total Support Service \$		3,853		4,009
Total Support Service FTEs		20		25
% of Total \$		11.2%		11.5%
% of Total FTEs		23.0%		26.6%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		34,310		34,826
TOTAL FTEs		87		94
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)		5,327		979

REPORTS OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

Each year the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA submits a *unified* report to synod composed of ministry updates provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and congregational service ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The reports of the ministries are organized and presented in alignment with Our Five Callings—ministry priorities endorsed by synod (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 610; *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 563): Faith Formation, Servant Leadership, Global Mission, Mercy and Justice, and Gospel Proclamation and Worship. Supplementary reports may be provided, if needed, prior to the time synod convenes.

Writing these reports is an exercise of accountability that is appropriate in our life together as a denomination. Much of what is written is provided as information for synod. Some of the material provides a background for decisions that synod will be asked to make. In either case, these reports are the story of how God is blessing and guiding our ministry through the agencies and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. As you read the material that follows, we invite you to join us in thanksgiving for the many opportunities provided to proclaim our Lord in the communities in which we live and work, and throughout the world.

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

Calvin College

I. Introduction

For the past two years Calvin College has been operating under its new strategic plan—*Calvin 2019: Strengthen, Support, Secure*—and has been developing means to carefully track progress on each of its six themes. The plan helps the college sharpen its program offerings and operations as it lives out its core mission “to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ’s agents of renewal in the world.” In the context of a dynamic higher education marketplace, the plan helps the college leadership ensure that Calvin College remains anchored in its rich theological tradition while strengthening its commitments to academic excellence.

In the 2015-16 year the college is focused on the following objectives from its strategic plan:

- Increase enrollment of first-year students to 1,000 (from 950) plus 75 transfer students for the fall of 2016. Some of the key strategies implemented include expanding the number of admissions counselors and increasing time spent on the Great Lakes territory, offering a Legacy Scholarship of \$4,000 to students from the Christian Reformed Church and children of alumni, and implementing a constituent relationship management software for improving communication with prospective students.
- Devise a comprehensive retention plan for the college by identifying risk factors, reviewing best practices, coordinating care, and developing a comprehensive list of strategies to increase student success.
- Complete a comprehensive campaign feasibility study.
- Receive board approval for a debt refinancing strategy.
- Develop a process for academic innovation and approval of new academic programs that advance the college mission, enrollment, and financial sustainability goals.
- Meet financial goals outlined in the prioritization plan, including reducing long-term debt to less than \$80 million.
- Complete a college-wide assessment plan to measure student learning outcomes in alignment with the new educational framework.

The college is also continuing to work diligently, as are many denominational agencies, on setting and meeting goals for diversity and inclusion. The goals from the strategic plan include continuing to enhance the cultural competency within the Calvin community, advancing and supporting inclusive excellence and global awareness on campus, and increasing the proportion of underrepresented populations on campus. We still have significant room for improvement, but we are encouraged by our progress.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Calvin College’s curricular and cocurricular efforts centered in our Academic Affairs and Student Life divisions align well with the denomination’s five themes of Our Calling: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship. Educating young adults puts us at the center of each of these callings. Whereas much of our programming inside

and outside of the classroom advances these goals, examples of work within each area include the following:

- *Faith formation*—Barnabas leaders in each residential dorm help fellow students foster communities in which students are encouraged and empowered to love God and love others with individual encouragement and supportive programming.
- *Servant leadership*—Community-based and academically based service learning opportunities abound, many of which are coordinated by our Service Learning Center.
- *Global mission*—Calvin offers multiple opportunities for short-term and long-term global experiences, and in the classroom our ministry leadership minor in the Congregational and Ministry Studies Department offers a mission emphasis.
- *Mercy and justice*—Spring 2015 marked the college’s tenth annual Faith and International Development Conference (FIDC), a completely student-organized event to link students to professionals in the field. The college is also pleased to announce accreditation approval for a bachelor of arts degree in ministry leadership, an associate of arts degree in ministry leadership, and a certificate in ministry leadership offered to inmate students at Handlon Correctional Facility, Ionia, Michigan, in cooperation with Calvin Theological Seminary.
- *Gospel proclamation and worship*—Our Office of Campus Ministries sponsors daily chapel and Sunday evening on-campus worship services, and it helps link students to active participation in local congregations.

III. Board matters

A. Board officers

Board officers for the 2015-2016 year are Mr. Craig Lubben, chair; Ms. Mary Bonnema, vice-chair; Ms. Christine Metzger, secretary; Ms. Sally Vander Ploeg, treasurer (vice president for finance and administration); and Ms. Sharolyn Christians, assistant secretary (executive assistant to the president).

B. Board membership

1. Reappointment of trustees

a. Regional trustee

The Calvin College Board of Trustees recommends reappointment of Mr. Michael J. DenBleyker (Region 7) for a second three-year term.

b. Alumni trustee

The Calvin College Board of Trustees recommends reappointment of the following alumni trustee eligible for a second three-year term: Ms. Mary C. Bonnema.

2. New trustees

a. Regional trustees

Region 4

Dr. Wytse van Dijk is completing his second term on the board. The board presents the following slate of nominees to the classes in Region 4 for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2016 for ratification:

Mr. Isaac Hoogland, B.S. in accounting, Calvin College.

Mr. Hoogland worked for five years as a Certified Public Accountant (U.S. designation) at Plante & Moran on Michigan college and university audits. He is now the director of finance and operations for a family-owned national sign company. He recently completed a three-year term as deacon, having served on the administrative committee and as financial representative to council at Faith CRC in Burlington, Ontario.

Dr. Albert M. Wolters, B.A., Calvin College; M.A in biblical studies, McMaster University; Ph.D. in philosophy, Free University of Amsterdam.

Dr. Wolters, is a retired professor of Bible and Greek and is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, Ancaster, Ontario. He has served multiple terms as elder since the 1970s and has twice served as a delegate to synod. He has served on the denominational Candidacy Committee (2006-12), on a *Banner* editor search committee (1988-89), and on several synodical study committees—re Dr. H. Boer’s confessional-revision gravamen (1977-80); the translation of the Canons of Dort (1983-86); creation and science (chair, 1988-91); inclusive language for God (chair, 1994-97); and Third Wave Pentecostalism (chair, 2004-2007; chair, 2007-2009).

Region 8

Mrs. Andrea G. Van Kooten is completing her second term on the board. The board presents the following slate of nominees to the classes in Region 8 for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2016 for ratification:

Mr. Jon Kuyers, B.A. in business administration, Calvin College.

Mr. Kuyers is a senior global product manager at Vermeer Corporation. He is a member of Faith CRC in Pella, Iowa, where he recently completed his first term as elder and has also served two terms as deacon. He has served on the Pella Christian High School board and as president of the Calvin College Alumni board. He led the strategic plan process for both of those organizations. He has also served on work-related industry boards and committees.

Rev. Mark N. Verbruggen, B.A. in psychology, Calvin College; M. Div., Calvin Theological Seminary.

Rev. Verbruggen is pastor of First CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa. He has also served as an adjunct professor in the Theology Department at Dordt College in Sioux Center. In addition to theology, he has pursued studies in archaeology and has participated in digs in Abila, Jordan, and in Ashkelon, Israel.

b. Regional at-large trustee

Rev. Michael D. Koetje is completing his second term on the board. The board recommends the appointment of the following candidate be ratified by Synod 2016 (Region 10):

Mr. Bruce A. Los, B.A. in economics, Calvin College.

Mr. Los serves as president at softArchitecture LLC and previously served as senior vice president of Gentex Corp. (2012-14) and as vice president of human resources at Gentex Corp., after more than 20 years of experience in human resources management. He began his career at Prince Corporation (now Johnson Controls, Inc.) and serves as chair of the board for Ready for School, New North Center for Innovation, and Davenport University Foundation. He also serves on the board of directors at Talent 2025 and Evergreen Commons Senior Center. He is a member of Faith CRC, Holland, Michigan, where he has served as both elder and deacon.

c. At-large trustee

Mr. David L. Schutt was unable to complete his term. The board recommends the appointment of the following candidate be ratified by Synod 2016:

Ms. Rachel VanderVeen, B.A. in economics, Calvin College; master's degree in public administration, San José State University.

Ms. VanderVeen is an administrative officer for the City of San José, California, and presently serves in its finance department. She is a member of San José CRC, where she serves as a volunteer Kid's Life director and has previously served as deacon. Ms. VanderVeen currently serves on the San José Management Association board, a professional organization for the City of San José management employees.

IV. Finances

Assumptions about tuition, room, and board rates were approved by the board at its winter meetings, and final decisions on those matters will be included in the final 2016-17 budget to be considered by the board in early May. These financial details will be reported to synod by way of the supplemental report.

The college is also nearing completion of its financial restructuring plan. The college will make an \$11 million payment on its debt, bringing the long-term debt amount into the target range of less than \$80 million. Fundraising targets have now been met, real estate that is not core to the college's mission has been sold, and expenses in the operating budget for 2016-17 have been repurposed to cover future debt service payments, which will be fully amortized. The college is thankful for God's provision and care throughout this process.

V. Academic initiatives

A. *Resources on the relationship of science and technology*

In response to an overture that raised concerns about the teaching of science and theology, Synod 2014 passed a motion asking the denomination's Board of Trustees to

encourage Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, in concert with other CRC-related institutions of higher education, to (a) make available to a future synod a list of resources on the relationship of science and theology, especially as they

relate to the doctrines of creation, the fall, original sin, and the atonement, and (b) to organize one or more conferences or open conversations on these same topics.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 567)

Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary have formed an ad hoc committee of representatives from each institution to respond to this request. Prior to Synod 2016, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary faculty members will lead a workshop conversation on this matter at a pre-synod gathering in Grand Rapids. The sessions are currently titled "Engaging Science and the Bible." The resource list identified at this presentation will also be available at synod. We also invite you to visit the Ministry Theorem website at <http://ministrytheorem.calvinseminary.edu>.

The Ministry Theorem seeks to remind pastors and other leaders in the church that an appreciation of science lies deep within the Reformed tradition as well as within the Christian tradition generally. From a biblical-theological standpoint, Christians rightly view science as a partner in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church, increasing our wonder over God's works and so enhancing our worship of the Creator God. Developed jointly by the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary and the Science Division of Calvin College, the Ministry Theorem serves to promote an enhanced awareness of contemporary science and to provide resources and encouragement for engaging science in the ministries of congregations everywhere. The resources provided on the website will be of help to pastors, church school teachers, youth leaders, worship planners, and others in our congregations.

B. Graduate programs initiative

One of the substantial advances by the academic division and the Faculty Senate this fall was the completion of the final proposal from the ad hoc graduate studies task force. In keeping with the strategic plan objective, the task force recommended that the college "create a new committee with a mandate to encourage, support, develop, and assess new programs, either a graduate studies committee or a general program innovation committee." It should include faculty and administrators/staff from the various divisions of the college. A mandate for this committee will be developed in spring 2016. The ad hoc committee's report is on the Academic Affairs committee and board agenda for ratification. The task force affirmed the college's long-standing commitment to graduate education from a Reformed Christian perspective and suggests that thoughtful growth helps the college to diversify its program offerings and the populations served by our mission. It should also be noted that program design needs to be mission driven and self-supporting and will not undermine the undergraduate student experience. One program proposal is already in the pipeline, and other programs are currently in the discussion stages.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the chair of the board, Mr. Craig Lubben, and to the president of Calvin College, Dr. Michael K. Le Roy, when matters pertaining to education are discussed.

B. That synod ratify the follow faculty appointments/reappointments with tenure, effective September 1, 2016:

1. Mark D. Bjelland, Ph.D., professor of geography
2. Becky R. Haney, Ph.D., associate professor of economics
3. Elisha M. Marr, Ph.D., associate professor of sociology
4. Victor T. Norman, Ph.D., associate professor of computer science
5. Marilyn S. Stansbury, Ph.D., associate professor of business
6. Marjorie A. Terpstra, Ph.D., associate professor of education
7. Rachel M. Venema, Ph.D., associate professor of social work
8. Susan K. Verwys, Ph.D., associate professor of education
9. Eric M. Washington, Ph.D., associate professor of history
10. Gail L. Zandee, M.S.N., associate professor of nursing

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect new members, reappoint for subsequent terms, and ratify the results of elections held in classes for membership on the Calvin College Board of Trustees.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin College Board of Trustees
Christine A. Metzger, secretary

Faith Formation Ministries (Dr. Syd Hielema, team leader)

“Encouraging discipleship shaped by grace.”

I. Introduction

Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) is just over one year old and has been serving with the mandate to “join God’s mission of transforming lives and communities worldwide by encouraging and equipping local CRCNA congregations and their leaders as they practice intentional, lifelong, intergenerational, holistic, missional discipleship and faith formation.”

FFM is gradually building a ministry focused on developing a regionally based, relational presence with congregational leaders. While still being developed, we estimate that this presence will be fully in place by the summer of 2018. At this time our regional catalyzers cover about half of the denomination, and our team is available for the “noncovered half” upon request. During the next year we will expand our coverage through collaboration with the Lilly-funded Connections Project.

Because we are a young ministry that is experimenting its way into its calling, we are hosting a cohort of fifteen congregations during the 2015-16 year who are experimenting with an assessment tool called “The Building Blocks of Faith.” We are learning that hosting a cohort is fruitful for both FFM and the participants, and we hope to host a cohort with a different focus each year.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Faith Formation Ministries focuses on the “faith formation” dimension of our denomination’s calling (no surprise there), but because faith formation is, by nature, holistic, our work also intersects significantly with the other dimensions of our calling as a denomination: servant leadership, loving mercy and doing justice, global missions, and gospel proclamation and worship.

Our strategy for navigating our multidimensional calling is to adopt the following multipronged approach:

- Use our “Let’s talk” motif to strengthen a consulting culture between FFM and congregational faith formation leaders.
- Visit classes to help church leaders become acquainted with FFM and to help them discern the best ways to make use of our services and resources.
- Facilitate full-day Faith Formation workshops for leadership teams from congregations throughout the denomination as a way to engage in faith formation ministry conversations together.
- Use a wide variety of electronic means to provide faith formation equipping for congregations: webinars, blog posts, the Network, and more.
- Develop toolkits that provide a wide array of options for supporting congregations as they navigate specific matters related to faith formation (and the other areas noted above). Last year we completed a “Welcoming Children to the Lord’s Table” toolkit (which is being well used), and currently we are working on an Intergenerational toolkit, a Profession of Faith toolkit, and a Discipleship Practices toolkit.

III. Faith Formation Ministries and the Ministry Plan

“Desired Future 2” of the Emerging Ministry Plan—*Our Journey 2020* focuses on discipleship and faith formation. It has been beneficial for FFM that the

Ministry Plan is being developed simultaneously with the formation of our young ministry; as a result, these two developments have correlated with each other from the beginning.

We at FFM are especially grateful that both the Ministry Plan and FFM are being formed in close consultation with congregational leaders. We are seeing this consultative strategy bearing these kinds of fruit:

- Both the Ministry Plan and FFM are rooted in a culture that respects each congregation in terms of its own unique identity, calling, history, and context.
- We have learned that CRC congregations desire a stronger vocabulary and clearer strategy for faith formation, and this desire most often expresses itself in the conviction that the intergenerational character of the church needs specific tools in order to be intentionally developed. We're eager to see how our forthcoming Intergenerational toolkit will be used by congregational leaders.
- We have learned that in every corner of the denomination, congregations desire tools for developing sturdy storytelling practices, and these tools will be included in our Discipleship Practices toolkit. We have begun to share these tools through our workshops and through our Building Blocks cohort, and we're delighted and encouraged to learn that many congregations are already working with the rudimentary tools we have shared.

IV. Conclusion

We are just over one year into a four- to five-year ministry building process, and it's our sense that congregations are ready to receive the kind of support we are providing. As we continue to develop, we recognize that there are three areas we have not yet addressed in significant ways that will need attention soon:

- When synod approved the dissolution of Faith Alive Christian Resources in 2013, it gave no clear guidance concerning the future of developing and supporting CRC curricula. It is not yet clear to us what our mandate is in this area.
- We will need to develop a donor base.
- We will need to intentionally explore stronger ministry strategies for young adults.

We trust that these needs will be met as our capacity to work on them allows. In the meantime, our team considers it a privilege to serve, and we are very encouraged by the initial reception we have received.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (Rev. Ronald A. Klimp, director)**I. Introduction**

Many CRC members would be surprised to learn that over 140 of our ordained clergy (approximately 10%) serve full- or part-time as endorsed chaplains. The mandate given by synod to the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is “Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional or specialized settings.” The mission of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is “to implement and regulate the denomination’s commitment to chaplaincy by recruiting, training, and endorsing persons to provide ministry in specialized settings, including military chaplains, pastoral counselors, institutional spiritual caregivers, hospice care, and others called to minister in places where the institutional church is not present. This office supports and promotes the development of chaplaincy and related ministries for the denomination.”

We estimate that the service of our endorsed chaplains in institutions throughout the United States and Canada represents over \$10 million worth of ministry to thousands of individuals and families in crisis. This activity is generated, supported, and monitored by a small staff (1.67 FTE) with a relatively small budget. This may be the best ministry “return on investment” that this or any other faith group can possibly generate, due to the fact that all of these individuals are paid, supported, supplied, and sometimes educated by the institutions they serve.

A significant percentage of our chaplains lead departments, serve on committees of national credentialing associations, or act as trainers of other chaplains. Among our military chaplains a number have served part of their career in the Pentagon and/or in command positions, supervising other chaplains. These realities should be more broadly known and celebrated.

II. Ministries of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care*A. Ministry that reflects our calling***1. Faith formation**

Most of our endorsed chaplains have completed a full theological education (often an M.Div.) plus two to four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE; 400 hours per unit) that focus on how best to understand and meet the emotional and spiritual needs of persons in crisis, usually within the context of an institution with a diverse population. This means our chaplains are uniquely qualified not only to serve but also to encourage and train others (also in their local church) about how to live out their faith by providing compassionate care to others around them in times of crisis.

2. Servant leadership

Currently we have four chaplains serving as CPE supervisors. These individuals are instrumental in training future chaplains of all faith groups. A number of other chaplains serve as directors of departments or independently manage counseling or chaplaincy ministries. Many of our chaplains are members of and often serve in leadership roles in a variety of professional organizations, including the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, the

Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, the Association of Professional Chaplains, the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care, the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy, and the Michigan Chaplains Association. Two of our U.S. Army chaplains are currently serving as trainers at the Chaplains Training School at Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina. All of the above facts are remarkable for a relatively small denomination and represent significant influence in God's broader world through our chaplains.

3. Global missions

While serving locally or overseas, our chaplains enter into and influence populations, cultures, and faith groups from all over the globe. Our chaplains have the unique opportunity to influence individual lives in crisis. They also influence the institutions in which they serve by calling them to ethical standards of care and concern (for example, our chaplains are often asked to serve on ethics committees in hospitals). The influence of our chaplains stretches literally "from the prison to the Pentagon." Individuals in crisis often search for meaning beneath and around the circumstances they face. Chaplains represent the caring presence of God in such circumstances. They have extensive training in how to minister to these individuals, regardless of their faith background or lack thereof. When it's appropriate, they share their own faith story. With 140 chaplains touching numerous individuals and their families daily, the potential for introducing and for strengthening faith is significant.

4. Loving mercy and doing justice

As noted above, chaplains in hospitals often serve as key members of ethics committees or give moral advice to the institutions in which they work. Chaplains in other institutions often have access to management and are respected for their observations and insights in terms of policies and procedures affecting justice issues. Military chaplains are instructed in chaplaincy school that they are *expected* to be the moral conscience for the command structure. "From the prison to the Pentagon" few other voices have such access to such important cultural arenas.

5. Gospel proclamation and worship

All CRC chaplains are called and their life and doctrine are overseen by a local church. Most have filled the pulpit of their calling church or those of other area churches on numerous occasions. Some have served on their church council, at classis, or as delegates to synod. Some pastor local churches while serving part-time as local hospital, hospice, prison, or military chaplains. Chaplains conduct adult education classes and workshops, and they help formally and informally with pastoral care in local congregations. We encourage this interaction with the local church as part of the emphasis on *Care* in our ministry name. In addition our chaplains lead in worship opportunities in places where the church might otherwise not be visible—from hospital chapels to veteran's facilities, long-term care facilities, prisons, college campuses, Army field tents, air bases, and aircraft carriers.

B. Collaborative efforts

1. In response to Synod 2012's challenge to develop ways to get involved earlier in situations of pastor/church tension, several agencies and ministries (Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, Calvin

Theological Seminary, Pastor-Church Relations, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, etc.) worked together with a consultant (Dr. Bryan Dik, Colorado State University) to launch a two-year pilot project in 2013 to enhance ministry assessment for pastors and other religious leaders. This effort has created a proactive strategy for improving pastor/congregation/ministry relationships. The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has played an active role in this initiative from the beginning. Based on positive results from two pilot projects with nearly 100 participants, and with the encouragement of other leaders in the denominational offices, we have recently hired a half-time ministry assessment coordinator (Rev. Samantha De Jong McCarron). With this development we aim to bring current and potential ministry leaders together with several vetted counseling services to provide a robust assessment and vocational guidance process, and we expect that this will bring about better ministry “fit” for ministry leaders and therefore more productive and lasting ministry leadership service. Rev. De Jong McCarron will be available one day per week at Calvin Theological Seminary and several days a week at the Grand Rapids denominational offices.

2. We annually arrange for chaplaincy representatives to visit a number of Christian colleges and seminaries (six in the past year) to talk with students about the exciting ministry options available in the world of chaplaincy. We often do this in conjunction with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) endorser and chaplains.

C. *Diversity and development of future ministry*

Currently 31 of our 140 endorsed chaplains are female (22%). Nine of our current chaplains represent ethnic diversity. Most of these have come into chaplaincy in the past few years. Based on current applicants and students showing an interest in chaplaincy, we expect this trend to continue.

III. Connecting with churches

In addition to the ministries mentioned above, the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry encourages chaplains to be connected to their calling churches by having them formulate together a *Covenant of Joint Supervision* (CJS) which we and they sign, and which is reviewed for renewal every five years (along with the chaplain’s endorsement). This covenant usually provides opportunity for chaplains to report regularly on their activities and to be present (and hopefully speak) at a worship event at least once a year—often on Chaplaincy Sunday in November. For this event we provide bulletin inserts, liturgies, video clips, responsive readings, and other resources to the local church.

The director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry enjoys the opportunity to personally address congregations from time to time about the wonderful work of chaplains. This past November the director was able to bring the message to two neighboring churches in the Cadillac, Michigan, area on Chaplaincy Sunday.

IV. Recruitment and training

The future of chaplaincy depends on the growth or restriction of chaplaincy positions and on developing an interest among younger (and older) members of our denomination who are drawn to full- or part-time ministry. We believe we are expanding this interest by interacting with students at Christian colleges and seminaries throughout North America and by encouraging chaplains to tell their

rich and moving stories of service to individuals in crisis situations. We are also attempting to interact with churches and classes to help create opportunities for these stories to be heard.

There seems to be a growing interest among educational institutions and students in “nontraditional” ministry options such as chaplaincy. We currently are working with 32 students (in college, seminary, or CPE) and more than 30 other inquiring individuals, assisting some of them in their education both financially and through mentoring. We currently grant between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year to this end. Funding for this assistance comes from the Chaplains Development Fund, and as we expect the need for such funding to increase, we encourage many of our contributors to specify this fund with their gifts.

We have begun to plan our 2016 chaplains conference with Drs. Kenneth Pargament and Jason Nieuwsma as our primary speakers on the theme of Psychology/Spirituality – Dichotomy or Duality. The conference will convene June 9-11 at the Prince Conference Center on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. We arrange for transportation, housing, meals, speakers, music, and chaplaincy resources to make this event edifying and enjoyable (at a total cost of approx. \$30,000 per year). Since chaplains work at the margins of church and society, they relish the time they can spend with each other at the annual conference to renew friendships, learn together, and dialogue with fellow servants of the Lord who identify with the unique pressures, joys, and challenges that chaplaincy brings.

V. Chaplaincy statistics

The Chaplaincy and Care Ministry Advisory Council and the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry present the following statistics:

1. Total CRCNA endorsed chaplains: 140 (full-time 96; part-time 28; endorsed-unemployed 16); in the United States: 117; in Canada: 23
2. Military chaplains: 15 in the United States; 2 in Canada; 5 in the National Guard and Reserves
3. Fourteen chaplains were endorsed in 2015:

Timothy Blackmon*

Vern Bareman*

Adrienne Croskey*

Michael De Witt

Jeffrey Funk

Daniel Gregory

Layne Kilbreath

Robert Johnson

Raidel Leon Martinez

Michael Miedema

Chris Pool

Ed Thompson*

Jack VanderVeer*

Perrin Werner

(*Provisional endorsement – still completing one or more prerequisites)

4. Eight chaplains retired in 2015:

Rozanne Bruins
Ron Cok
James Molenbeek
Curt Roelofs
Betty Vander Laan
James VanderSchaaf
Siebert VanHouten
Case Vink

5. Military chaplains who have served in the past year, or are currently serving, overseas are Dae Lee, Douglas Vrieland, Lloyd Wickers, and Timothy Won.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., was established by Synod 1983 with a directive to assist organized Christian Reformed churches in the financing of capital improvements. The Loan Fund operates exclusively in the United States. The Board of Directors of the Loan Fund oversees the loan approval process, the determination of loan interest rates, and the setting of Loan Fund policies. The board also establishes interest rates for Investment Certificates sold—primarily to members, classes, churches, and agencies of the CRCNA.

II. Board of directors

Loan Fund board members are eligible to serve for two three-year terms. Members of the Board of Directors are Ms. Andrea Karsten (2017), Mr. Thomas Sinke (2017), Ms. Chery De Boer (2016), Mr. Kenneth Stienstra (2016), Mr. Scott Ritsema (2018) and Mr. James Brewer (2018). Ms. De Boer and Mr. Stienstra are both completing their first terms.

The board recommends that synod reappoint Ms. De Boer and Mr. Stienstra for second three-year terms.

III. Financial operations

A. The Loan Fund is eligible to sell Investment Certificates to investors in twenty-three states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Additional states could be added as needed to benefit the Fund.

B. At the close of the 2015 fiscal year (June 30, 2015), a total of \$27,040,944 in interest-bearing Investment Certificates held by investors was outstanding. Interest rates vary from 1.25 percent to 2.50 percent, with a weighted average of 2.15 percent. The variances in interest rates reflect market conditions and the terms of the Certificates at the times they were issued.

C. Since its inception in 1983, the Loan Fund has originated more than two hundred loans totaling over \$70 million to churches across the United States. As of June 30, 2015, the Loan Fund had \$21,470,300 in loans and interest outstanding. Loan delinquencies do occur from time to time, but they are closely monitored and are very low in number. The Fund maintains a loan loss reserve to help cover potential losses. The Fund is blessed not to have experienced any loan losses in its history.

D. Financial operations are also reflected in the following data:

	2015	2014	2013
Cash and equivalents	\$13,096,796	\$11,836,031	\$11,607,134
Net loans and interest receivable	\$21,470,300	\$22,292,604	\$21,208,263
Total assets	\$34,567,096	\$34,128,635	\$32,815,397
Certificates and interest payable	\$27,105,990	\$26,847,368	\$25,666,069
Net assets	\$7,461,106	\$7,281,267	\$7,149,328
Total liabilities and net assets	\$34,567,096	\$34,128,635	\$32,815,397

E. A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2015, appears in the *Agenda for Synod 2016—Financial and Business Supplement*.

IV. Sources of funding

Funds for the Loan Fund operations are derived from the following sources:

- A. The sale of Investment Certificates in those states where legal approval to offer them has been obtained.
- B. Gifts and bequests made to the Fund.
- C. An unsecured line of credit with a bank that permits borrowing up to \$2 million. The Loan Fund currently does not have any amounts outstanding on this line of credit.

V. Staff

The Loan Fund is served by Mrs. Alice M. Damsteegt, customer service specialist, and Mr. David E. Veen, director.

VI. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the Loan Fund director or any members of the Board of Directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., when matters pertaining to the Loan Fund are discussed.
- B. That synod reappoint Ms. Chery De Boer and Mr. Kenneth Stienstra to a second three-year term on the Board of Directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
David E. Veen, director

Pastor-Church Relations (Rev. Norman J. Thomasma, team leader; Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis, lead consulting pastor)

I. Introduction

Synod 1982 approved the formation of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR). The mandate for this ministry was that it provide programs of “healing and prevention” for ministers, staff, councils, and congregations.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The report that follows reflects considerable change and development to the initiatives and strategies in which PCR is engaged. This does not mean that the calling of PCR has changed so much as that it operates in a changing context, in which congregations and their leaders are increasingly seen as a key priority for denominational engagement.

III. Connecting with Churches – Our Journey

“Connecting with churches” continues to make up the core of our work, but a number of additional initiatives and responsibilities have been added to PCR’s work chart. The balance of our report describes these changing dimensions of old and new as Our Journey unfolds in 2016 and beyond.

A. Ongoing ministry

1. The staff of PCR respond to various questions and requests from congregational leaders. This includes **consultation/intervention** in times of difficulty or transition, suggesting resources when congregations are adding staff or considering a change in organizational structure and helping with processes by which challenging congregational conversations can be planned and implemented. Much of this work is accomplished over the phone or through email, but PCR staff also work “on site” when circumstances warrant doing so. **Educational and retreat activities** for councils, congregations, classes, and church staff also continue to be a focus of PCR activity.
2. PCR continues to seek effective ways to build a working relationship with **persons entering ordained ministry**. Each year PCR hosts a dinner for graduates of the M.Div. program at Calvin Theological Seminary as well as those enrolled in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy. Relationships are initiated, and the work of PCR is explained. PCR is also seeking ways to build relationships and serve the expanding group of **commissioned pastors** in the denomination.
3. On behalf of synod, the Office of Pastor-Church Relations administers a **continuing education fund** for pastors and professional church staff. Grants of up to \$750 per year are awarded to pastors and staff who demonstrate the value of an educational event and/or opportunity they are pursuing. Applicants access this information via the PCR website.
4. Two interim ministry options are available: Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs) and supply pastors. **Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs)** are trained to help congregations deal with challenges and opportunities during the transition between pastors. At this time, there are sixteen STMs endorsed by PCR. Congregations are also calling on other pastors to be

supply pastors, most of whom are retired, who serve congregations for a period of time during vacancy. Although these pastors are not working directly with PCR, a list of these supply pastors is available in the PCR office.

5. PCR *extends* its work through **regional pastors** at the classis level who provide support, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and spouses challenged by the demands of life and ministry. Regional pastors also assist in setting up mentoring relationships for new pastors and encourage the development of support mechanisms when there are multiple staff persons within a congregation.
6. One key initiative housed within PCR is the **Sustaining Congregational Excellence** (SCE) program. Since its beginning in 2007, SCE has provided grants to smaller congregations for new ministry initiatives. As of February 2016, *just over 500 churches* have participated in the SCE program.
7. **Sustaining Pastoral Excellence** provides grants for pastor peer groups, biennial conferences for pastors' wives, and regional gatherings for pastors and their spouses. Since SPE's inception in 2003, nearly 800 pastors have participated in this program.
8. **The Healthy Church Initiative** helps a church get a clear look at what is really happening in their congregation. The process is guided by trained coaches who administer the Healthy Church Survey with the goal of energizing the congregation through involving them in a dynamic conversation about the future of their church and how to get there together.
9. Our office provides support and various resources to nonordained church staff. Two recent resources focusing on congregational staff are *The Church Staff Handbook* and *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders*. Both can be ordered through Faith Alive Christian Resources (faithaliveresources.org). A credentialing process, recognized by the CRCNA, for church staff who are not ordained is also in place. Information can be found on the PCR website (crcna.org/pcr).
10. PCR assists pastor search teams in the basic procedures of calling a new pastor. The resource *More Than a Search Committee* (which can be ordered through Faith Alive) is a recommended starting point.

B. *Completed ministry*

1. Special projects

a. Mental health leave

As part of a special task force facilitated by Disability Concerns, PCR staff helped to draft a set of guidelines to assist pastors and councils in thinking through dynamics and good process if the need for a mental health leave should arise. These guidelines are now available on the PCR website.

b. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship workshop

PCR staff helped facilitate a January Symposium workshop titled "Worship in Times of Tension." Worship is the place where such tension is experienced and where it may receive meaningful pastoral attention.

c. Proposed Church Order changes regarding sexual misconduct

PCR personnel joined a small committee tasked with addressing concerns raised by Synod 2015 with respect to special discipline for office-bearers. The challenge of responding to issues of sexual misconduct in ways that are both firm and fair resulted in a brief report and recommendations to Synod 2016.

2. Vocational assessment

In response to Synod 2012's challenge to develop ways to get involved earlier in situations of pastor-church tension, PCR, along with other offices and agencies (Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Candidacy Committee, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, and Sustaining Pastoral Excellence) launched a two-year pilot project to develop best practices around vocational assessment for pastors. This proactive strategy is intended to improve and enhance ministry "fit." We have recently hired the first ministry assessment coordinator, who is working half-time to bring current and potential ministry leaders together with several vetted counseling services to provide a robust assessment and vocational guidance process.

3. The "Better Together" project

In response to a request of Synod 2013 and the Board of Trustees, PCR convened an initiative called "Better Together." The initiative was intended to enhance and strengthen denominational support for classis functionaries, such as church visitors, regional pastors, mentors, and church counselors, as a key strategy for assisting congregations in the early stages of challenging situations. Having a healthy "system" is a practical way of experiencing the reality of being "Better Together" as congregations in the CRC (see section II, A, 16 and Appendix E of the Board of Trustees report in this agenda). Encouraged by the work of the "Better Together" team, PCR is planning for more robust resourcing strategies intended to strengthen the role and work of classical church visitors, regional pastors, and classically appointed counselors for congregations. Classes that have an interest in these initiatives are invited to communicate their interest to the staff of PCR.

4. Ministerial Information Service transition to web-based approach

The **Ministerial Information Service (MIS)** supports pastors seeking new positions and churches seeking new pastors. This service maintains a database of more than eight hundred pastor profiles as well as several hundred congregation profiles. Currently the Office of Pastor-Church Relations, with the assistance of a volunteer committee, suggests potential pastors to search committees of congregations. A web-based approach to the MIS has been developed and is now partially in place to provide greater freedom for communication among churches looking for pastors, as well as for pastor candidates looking for churches. A pastor is now able to access the minister profile through the CRC Minister Portal. The upcoming development of a new Church Portal will also allow churches to access the church profile. Churches and ministers will then have the capability to update their profiles and find vacancies and pastor candidates.

C. Ministry on the horizon

1. Classis renewal initiative

Much of what flows from the “Better Together” Project will integrate with the work of the new Classis Renewal Group (CRG). The need for this group emerged as Synod 2015 identified renewal at the classis level as a high priority. Upon the direction of synod, the executive director appointed the Classis Renewal Group to carry forward the work of renovating the classis structure.

PCR is one of the ministries represented on the CRG and will participate in cooperative efforts to increase the capacity of classes and to revitalize inter-congregational life as a Christlike community. The CRG will promote and coordinate new opportunities to gather for worship and prayer, share learning, equip leaders, exchange promising practices, and discover resources. The new position of classis coach has been approved to head up this classis renewal initiative, to be available to classes, to support the new initiatives of PCR, and to ensure broad collaboration with minimal overlap and maximum clarity.

2. Recommendations from the “Better Together” Project

a. Regional pastors

In an effort to better support and strengthen the work of regional pastors, in response to the recommendations made by the “Better Together” Delivery Team, PCR created an electronic repository site as an initial step for the sharing of helpful resources and maintaining regional pastors’ contact information and mentor assignments. A grassroots approach is being used for building relationships among regional pastors and to promote an ongoing effort to clarify the role and authority of the regional pastor.

b. Church visitors

Synod 2015 assigned PCR with a responsibility to resource classis church visitors. And the “Better Together” project identified a large number of potential enhancements to the practice of church visiting. This is significantly influencing PCR’s work, and we will now be devoting considerable attention to church visiting. Having a new staff person working on classis renewal as well as the “Better Together” recommendations will help to achieve the desired objectives in this area.

c. Mentors

PCR continues to advance the work of mentoring new pastors. Mentoring, beginning in the seminary and continuing throughout a pastor’s ministry, is seen as a crucial area of pastoral growth and accountability. PCR provides mentors and mentees with *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*, a guide that gives shape to the mentoring conversation and relationship. Plans are under way to review and update this guide.

d. Counselors

Congregations approaching a pastor vacancy are on the verge of both significant opportunity and significant temptation. Possibilities for either development or disorientation are accentuated during this time of transition. Having a well-appointed, informed, and supported church counselor can be very helpful to congregations at such a time. Having a “rubber stamp” church counselor misses an opportunity for the larger church community to bless key conversations and thoughtful discernment. Supporting

the ministry of classical church counselors is one of the priorities for PCR in the coming year.

e. Classical stated clerks

The resourcing of classical stated clerks is recognized as an important dimension of supporting the work of classes. This work will be included as part of the classis renewal initiative and will be supported by several offices, including Synodical Services and PCR.

3. Double-ordained clergy couples retreat

In the coming year, the first retreat for clergy couples in which both spouses are ordained will be held. Sustaining Pastoral Excellence will bring together such couples to encourage and support them while they explore their unique role in ministry.

D. *Changes in ministry*

1. Ministerial Information Service

New profile forms for ministers and for churches have been created. These take the place of previous forms that were submitted to the PCR office for distribution. A web-based approach to the MIS has been developed and is now partially in place, as noted above in section III, B, 4 of this report. Once in place, this process will result in the transition of MIS out of the PCR office to becoming a function of the *Yearbook* office.

2. Staff Ministry Team

Recently the Staff Ministry Team finished its work after many years of serving nonordained church staff ministry leaders. A new group consisting of representatives from various ministries is being formed to support and encourage over 1,000 nonordained church professionals. This group will continue to provide opportunities for networking, distribute resources, respond to requests from churches pertaining to staffing concerns, oversee the credentialing program, and encourage church staff through one-on-one conversations.

3. Personnel adjustments

The past year has been one of significant change in the faces and names of PCR staff. Two longtime support staff representing 24 years of experience concluded their service in 2015. One administrative coordinator has been hired to replace them.

In addition, PCR is now home to staff whose assignment reaches well beyond PCR. A half-time vocational assessment coordinator is now in place to help with vocational assessments for pre-ministry students and established pastors on behalf of PCR, Calvin Theological Seminary, Home Missions, World Missions, Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, the Candidacy Committee, and Chaplaincy and Care. The hope is that vocational assessment will become a regular part of individual and communal discernment so that unique ministry needs are met by well-suited ministry leaders.

A classis renewal coordinator is also now in place to support the mission and functions of classes. This new position provides continuity with an ongoing emphasis on classis renewal and provides support for implementing recommendations of the "Better Together" initiative.

In addition, PCR is loaning 25 percent of one staff person's time to direct the Connections project funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc. (see E, 2 below), and

50 percent of another staff person's time to cofacilitate the RCA/CRC Reformed Leadership Initiative funded by the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

E. New ministry

1. Spiritual vitality project

A grant from the Pastoral Excellence Network has enabled 16 pastors to engage in a two-year spiritual formation journey. Activities include assessments with follow-up coaching, retreats, cohort meetings, time with spiritual directors, and reading. The hope is that pastors will learn habits of mind and heart toward spiritual growth in self and community.

2. Connections: Embedding regional resourcing in the CRCNA

Connections is a 3.5-year project that seeks to build a model of regional resourcing. Congregations from up to twelve classes will engage in projects of their choosing with the goal of enhancing ministry. Regional staff will provide opportunities for gatherings and coaching as well as myriad resources. Funding for Connections is provided through a Lilly Endowment, Inc., grant.

3. Resourcing lay leaders

As this report is being written, the Emerging Ministry Plan is gaining traction. One element of the plan that is affecting PCR is the further development of ministry resources and initiatives to support lay leaders, particularly elders and deacons.

F. Looking ahead

As this report suggests, there has been a lot of movement within and around the Office of Pastor-Church Relations lately. This ministry has been shifting from being a distinct and separate office to being a converging hub. This situation presents some interesting opportunities as well as some significant challenges. Sometimes the opportunities and challenges look a lot alike.

1. Opportunities

a. PCR is developing significant partnerships with other ministries as well as some grant initiatives.

b. One consideration revolves around PCR's desire to become more regionally present while retaining some of the advantages of a centralized office. This is happening in concert with other offices and agencies who share similar interests and objectives.

2. Challenges

a. With an increasing variety of projects and responsibilities, PCR staff are challenged to make sure that core competencies and time to exercise them are retained. Requests for assistance from churches and classes happen frequently and unpredictably and call for timely and effective responses.

b. For those involved in the work of consultation, it is necessary to learn ways of effectively toggling back and forth from projects we are generating/implementing/managing to addressing complex critical situations that arise in regular but uneven fashion.

G. Macro observations

1. On the increase

- concerns being heard relative to our calling system
- political/ideological polarization
- double-ordained clergy couples
- questions about navigating pastor transitions
- challenges negatively affecting the marriages of pastors
- congregations discontinuing their ministries and dedicating the assets to new ministries
- discussions surrounding pastor sabbaticals
- desire for resourcing and supporting pastors' spouses
- women clergy seeking collegial interaction and learning opportunities
- congregations wondering how to "end well" as they consider closing

2. On the decrease

- inquiries relative to church staff
- inquiries relative to evaluations of pastors and staff

IV. Proposed name change

The Office of Pastor-Church Relations is proposing a name change to reflect current responsibilities and initiatives. PCR brought the proposal to the Board of Trustees in February, and it will be presented to synod for consideration by way of the Board's report (see section II, B, 6 of the Board of Trustees report).

Pensions and Insurance

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church in North America maintains employee benefit programs that provide retirement, health, life, and disability benefits for employees of the denomination in its ministries, agencies, local churches, and other CRC organizations.

II. Board matters

The ministers' pension plans, special-assistance funds, and the employees' retirement plans are governed by the boards of the U.S. and Canadian Pension Trustees. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint session. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed.

Concluding service on the board of the Canadian Pension Trustees is Ms. Cynthia Stutski. The board recommends that synod elect one new member from the following slate of nominees to a three-year term:

Ms. Kathy Wassink has been a lifelong member of Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ontario. Ms. Wassink is a chartered professional accountant and currently works for Christian Horizons as director of finance. Believing it important to be active within the church community, she has recently completed five years as treasurer of Community CRC and is an active participant in their community care group. She has also served on the boards of directors for Woodland Christian High School, Breslau, Ontario, and Laurentian Hills Christian School in Kitchener.

Mr. Hessel Kielstra is a member of Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alberta. Mr. Kielstra is president of various family businesses involving agriculture and food processing. He has served four terms as an elder at Emmanuel CRC and two terms as a school trustee at Calgary Christian School. He has also been a delegate to synod three times, has served two terms on the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, two terms on the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA, and three terms on the Back to God Hour Advancement Board. Mr. Kielstra is currently completing a second term on the Dordt College Board of Trustees.

III. Benefit-program activities

A. Ministers' pension plans

The ministers' pension plans are defined-benefit plans. Benefits paid by the plans are defined by formula, and the required funding of the plans is determined by actuarial calculations. The primary purpose of the plans is to provide retirement benefits to plan participants. The plans also provide benefits to the surviving spouses of participants and to any dependent children who are orphaned. In addition, long-term disability benefits are provided through an insurance product to all full-time, active participants in the plans who have furnished the information concerning compensation and housing as required by the insurance carrier.

The following is a summary of participant counts as of December 31, 2015, for each plan and in total. Participants having an interest in both plans (generally the result of having served churches in both the United States and Canada) appear in the column where their interest is the greatest.

	United States	Canada	Total
Active ministers	742	261	1,003
Ministers receiving benefit payments	574	141	715
Spouses and dependents	176	35	211
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	105	29	134
Total	1,597	466	2,063

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. The U.S. plan is required to have a valuation every three years while the Canadian plan is required to submit an annual valuation to provincial regulators. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their performance is measured against established benchmarks and is regularly reviewed by the trustees.

The plans' actuaries have informed us that as of the date of the plans' last valuation, the actuarial liability totaled approximately \$118.4 million for the U.S. plan (as of December 31, 2013) and \$43.3 million for the Canadian plan (as of December 31, 2014). These amounts reflect the present value of the plans' obligations to all participants including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	December 31, 2015	December 31, 2014
United States (U.S. \$)	\$100,220,000	\$106,769,000
Canada (Can. \$)	51,076,000	48,289,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings provide a significant portion of the resources needed to meet the plans' obligations to the active participants and to fund payments to retirees and beneficiaries.

2. Plan review

The pension plan has undergone several changes since separate plans for the United States and Canada were established in 1983. While the basic defined benefit form of the plan was not altered, changes were made to improve benefits provided by the plan, to clarify how the plan is administered, and to improve the protocols used to obtain funds needed to pay costs.

The more significant changes to the plans (or changes that affect them) made by recent synods include the following:

2001 Approved a variety of optional benefit forms in addition to the plan's normal form.

Applied the plan's 1.46 percent multiple to all service beginning January 1, 1985.

2003 Approved guidelines for part-time service.

Required payment for upgrading the interests of previously frozen participants reinstated as active members of the plans.

Acted to replace self-insured disability benefits with an insurance contract.

Changed funding protocols for all organized churches, effective January 1, 2004, to require payment of the greater of direct costs or per-member assessments.

Linked timely payment of contributions (the greater of participant or per-member costs) to the grant of credited service to first or only pastors of organized churches.

2004 Required that pension costs of endorsed chaplains be paid as a condition for active participation in the plan, effective January 1, 2006.

Approved rule VII for synodical procedure, requiring synods to defer any proposed action concerning the plans until advised by the pension trustees.

Amended Church Order Article 15 to include specific elements of "proper support," including payment to the denomination's ministers' pension plan.

2010 Decreased the multiplier used to determine benefit amounts from 1.46 percent to 1.3 percent for credited service beginning January 1, 2011.

Approved a change in the early retirement reduction factor to 0.5 percent from 0.3 percent per month, effective January 1, 2014.

2011 Increased the normal retirement age from age 65 to age 66.

Advanced the implementation of the change to the early retirement factor (from 0.3% to 0.5% per month) from January 1, 2014, to July 1, 2011.

Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2010 level.

Changed the normal form of retirement benefit from joint and survivor to single life with five years certain. (Participants can still elect to receive a joint and survivor benefit at a slightly reduced level of payment.)

3. Funding

All organized churches are expected to pay church assessments determined by an amount per active professing member age 18 and older or, if greater, the direct costs of their first or only pastor's participation in the plan. The amount of the assessment for 2016 is \$42.96 per member in Canada and \$37.20 in the United States, and direct costs have been set at \$9,840 and \$7,704, respectively. These amounts are collected by means of monthly billings to each organized church, based on reported membership statistics.

All emerging churches and other denominational ministries that employ a minister as a missionary, professor, or teacher, or in any other capacity, including organizations that employ endorsed chaplains (with the exception of chaplains serving in the military who are not yet entitled to receive any military pension benefits) are required to pay the annual cost of participation in the plan. All pension assessments, however determined, are billed monthly, and the grant of credited service for pastors is contingent on timely payment of amounts billed.

While circumstances could change, it is unlikely that there will be a need for an increase in the pension contribution costs for the next year.

B. Employees' retirement plans

The employees' retirement plans are defined-contribution plans covering most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries who are not ordained as ministers of the Word. In the United States, contributions are paid to the plan by participating employers in an amount up to 6 percent of compensation. An additional employer contribution of up to 4 percent of compensation is made to match employee contributions of a similar amount. In Canada, contributions of up to 9 percent are paid to the plan by participating employers. In Canada, there are no contributions made to the plan relative to matching employee contributions. In both plans, participants may make additional contributions up to the limits determined by federal regulation. Participants receive periodic statements indicating the dollar amount credited to their accounts, the value of their accounts, and the vested percentage.

Individual participants direct the investment of their account balances among several investment alternatives, including fixed-income and equity funds. The investment alternatives are currently managed for U.S. participants by J.P. Morgan Chase Trust Division, which also serves as custodian of the plan's assets, and for Canadian participants by Sun Life Financial Group.

As of December 31, 2015, the balances in these plans totaled approximately \$30,752,000 in the United States and \$4,699,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 367 participants in the U.S. plan and 83 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	Canada
Active	237	79
Inactive	130	4

C. Nonretirement employee benefit programs

Oversight of the denomination's nonretirement employee benefit programs is provided by the Board of Trustees.

Consolidated Group Insurance is a denominational plan that offers health, dental, and life coverage in Canada to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 325 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 219 pastors and employees of local churches, 104 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 2 retirees. The plan in Canada is a fully insured plan with coverage purchased through a major health-insurance provider and is supplemental to health benefits available through government health programs.

In the United States, the denomination offers health, dental, and life coverage to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies

and ministries. Currently there are 728 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 309 pastors and employees of local churches, 216 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 203 retirees. The plans are provided by the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) through a trust established to fund benefits and expenses of the plan. RBA was established as of July 2013 by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the Board of Benefit Services of the Reformed Church in America to provide nonretirement benefit programs for both denominations.

Premiums charged by the plan in Canada are set by the insurance carrier. The premiums for the U.S. plan are set by RBA based on overall expectations of claims and administrative expenses for the coming year.

D. Financial disclosures

Audited or reviewed financial statements of the retirement plans and of all of the agencies and institutions are made available each year to the treasurer of each classis with the request that they be made available to any interested party. In addition, summary financial statements are included in the *Acts of Synod*. Individualized statements are furnished to active members of the ministers' pension plans and the employees' retirement plans.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Canadian Board of Pensions and the U.S. Board of Pensions and to Mr. John H. Bolt when insurance matters and matters pertaining to pension plans for ministers and employees are discussed.

B. That synod designate up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2017 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1) but only to the extent that the pension is used to rent or provide a home.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect one nominee to a first term on the Canadian Board of Pensions beginning July 1, 2016.

Pensions and Insurance

John H. Bolt, director of finance and operations

Back to God Ministries International

I. Introduction

For more than 75 years, Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) has served as the worldwide media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. With ten indigenous ministry teams, BTGMI produces resources online and on the air, reframing lives with God's story.

The mission of Back to God Ministries International is to share the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church worldwide by the following means:

- Proclaiming the gospel through media within and across diverse cultures, clearly and efficiently communicating within a variety of cultural contexts to ensure the gospel is truly heard. Because we are a witness to the unity of Christ's body, and because we value stewardship of resources, we work in partnership with mission organizations.
- Our commitment to working with and through local churches and denominations. We see churches as both sending and receiving, serving and being served. We commit to a prayerful, thoughtful, and wise allocation of resources.
- Working with excellent international ministry team leaders and staff, under the direction of Rev. Kurt Selles, who provide direction in the production of culturally relevant programs and related ministries for gospel proclamation.
- Carrying out ministry in ten major world languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Over the past year BTGMI has provided evangelism and discipleship resources to people in nearly every country of the world through media outreach.
- A comprehensive website, BackToGod.net, which helps the church and individuals engage in our worldwide witness. Web visitors will also find information about BTGMI outreach and links to all ten language ministries.

Thanks to faithful support of BTGMI media outreach through ministry shares, church offerings, and individual gifts, people are hearing about Jesus and coming to faith in him. Some are hearing the name of Jesus for the first time in places where they would have no other way to learn God's Word.

II. Reflecting on the five aspects of Our Calling

A. Faith formation

BTGMI has provided faith formation resources in the English language since 1939, beginning with the flagship program *The Back to God Hour*. Today, under the brand ReFrame Media, BTGMI provides audio, print, and digital faith formation resources for North American audiences and English-speaking people anywhere in the world. Nine additional indigenous ministry teams produce biblical resources that disciple people in Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

1. **ReFrame Media:** Producing a family of programs to help people of all ages and stages of faith reframe their lives in light of God's Word.

Resources available to churches, families, and individuals include the following and can be found at ReframeMedia.com:

- a. **Today** daily devotions, produced since 1950, is available in print, on the web at ThisIsToday.net, and by email subscription, Facebook or Twitter posts, and digital apps. We print and distribute 210,000 *Today* booklets six times each year, and more than 91,000 people have signed up to access the *Today* email.

Through *Today* we continue to share God's Word with families and individuals, believers and seekers, especially making an impact on the lives of prisoners. Arnold sent this letter: "*Today* has changed my life completely—spiritually, mentally, and physically. You have helped make me into the man God needs me to be not only for family but for others. I first wrote you while I was incarcerated, and now I have been released! Now I live for Christ. *Today* helps me so much!"

Timothy wrote this message: "I can remember the *Today* devotions used by my parents many, many years ago. God used this ministry to bring me and siblings to salvation. I would like to pass the *Today* devotions on to my son, who is not yet a Christian but has the seeds of faith in his heart."

- b. **Kids Corner** is an audio adventure for children, especially ages 6-12. Web-based Bible stories and devotions complement the audio program to help cultivate a lifelong love for the Bible. Parent resources are also available at KidsCorner.net.
 - c. **Groundwork** is a half-hour audio program and podcast that builds biblical foundations for life. Pastors Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast guide listeners in casual but thoughtful conversations about practical applications of God's Word in today's world. *Groundwork* is produced in partnership with Words of Hope. Listen on the air or online at GroundworkOnline.com.
 - d. **Family Fire** is an online community (Facebook and website at FamilyFire.com) that provides resources to strengthen families through articles, devotions, email and social media interaction, and live retreat events.
 - e. Faith formation goes beyond Bible study and devotional resources. **Think Christian** is an online conversation where Christians bridge the gap between faith and culture. Thoughtful discussions—which include seekers, agnostics, and atheists—are guided by Reformed authors and bloggers as they explore God's sovereignty over all of culture and consider what it means to live and think as a Christian. Interested individuals can join the conversation at ThinkChristian.net.
 - f. **Church Juice** works with congregations to offer free resources and in-person training to help churches communicate better with their congregation and communities. In addition, *Church Juice* offers financial grants to churches. CRC congregations are encouraged to apply for this financial assistance through BTGMI at thejuicys.org. For information about how *Church Juice* can assist your congregation, visit ChurchJuice.com.
2. Culturally relevant discipleship resources are also available in the other nine major languages in which BTGMI works. Produced and distributed in print,

online, on social media channels, and through smartphone apps, devotions and faith formation resources are bringing God’s Word to people around the world. Audio and video programs apply God’s Word directly through Bible teaching programs, offering Reformed and biblical perspectives on current cultural issues within the context of the nations where we do ministry. Thank God with us for the ways he is using BTGMI discipleship resources to bring people to faith and help them grow in their walk in the Word:

- a. Rui, a Chinese student who received her master’s degree in the United States, is a new believer who came to faith in part through our *Chinese Today* daily devotions. When Rui contacted the BTGMI Chinese staff to say she is “spiritually hungry to grow in faith,” we pointed her to our new *Be Thou My Rhythm* app. The app provides resources to help Rui—and at least two million additional followers—to grow in the knowledge of God’s Word.
- b. Patar described himself as “a hard-tempered man” who resisted his wife’s invitations to go to church. When she received a radio from our Indonesian listener community in North Sumatra, he mocked her and discouraged listening to our gospel broadcasts. But as she persisted, he became increasingly interested and started to attend worship with her. He now testifies, “I am grateful to my wife, my pastor, my community, and of course the Lord for his blessings through this small radio.”

B. *Servant leadership*

Back to God Ministries International is blessed to work with indigenous leaders gifted in both ministry and media. These leaders and their teams provide culturally relevant outreach in each of our ten language ministries.

1. In July 2015, Rev. Jimmy Lin passed the mantle of leadership for Chinese ministries to Pastor Jerry An, who brings valuable gifts with his understanding of current media trends, his ability to partner with Christian organizations in mainland China, and his passion for sharing the gospel.
2. In addition, the following serve BTGMI as ministry leaders in their respective languages: Arabic: Rev. Victor Atallah; English: Rev. Steven Koster; French: Rev. Marc Nabie (in Burkina Faso) and Rev. Jacky Chéry (in Haiti); Hindi: Dr. A.K. Lama; Indonesian (interim): Rev. Lukas Banne; Japanese: Rev. Masao Yamashita; Portuguese: Rev. Hernandes Lopes; Russian: Rev. Sergei Sosedkin; Spanish: Rev. Guillermo Serrano.
3. BTGMI provides leadership training in several regions of the world.
 - a. In October 2015 our Spanish ministry team had an unprecedented opportunity to provide training in two cities in Cuba for pastors, evangelists, leaders, and teachers. More than 100 people attended the events. “We’ve presented leadership workshops in many other countries over the past eleven years, but this is the first time doors were opened in Cuba. The Christian communities there anticipate that through mass and social media, believers and seekers inside Cuba will have access to gospel resources,” says Rev. Serrano.
 - b. Newly redesigned in 2015, our French ministry began working with Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI) in Burkina Faso to produce a pilot radio program that corresponds with the TLTI Bible study, *Choosing*

Good Leaders. The programs were timely, as Burkina Faso experienced two coups that interrupted national elections. Radio stations aired the series of programs three times in the months leading up to elections. Our French ministry leader in Burkina Faso, Rev. Nabie states, “Pray for our training and broadcasts of *Choosing Good Leaders*. This topic is so timely and will resonate with many leaders.” We are now producing a new series, *I Belong to God*, based on the Heidelberg Catechism and consisting of 52 broadcasts with corresponding Bible studies.

- c. The BTGMI Chinese ministry team annually facilitates leadership conferences on using media in missions. The conferences this past fiscal year were held in Hong Kong and North America. In January 2016, Pastor Jerry An, along with Chinese ministry staff and Rev. Kurt Selles, led a media conference in Taiwan.
- d. In partnership with Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM), The Reformed Church of Japan (RCJ), and Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI), BTGMI has offered leadership training and coaching programs to assist local churches with reaching out to listeners looking for church fellowship and a place to grow in faith. Included is training for *Discovery Bible Study* leaders. This program has been especially successful in the Sendai area of northern Japan, where people are still greatly affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. More than 100 people attended a special event in August 2015, and several of them participated in weekend Bible study gatherings. Japanese ministry leader Rev. Masao Yamashita has completed TLTI master trainer certification.

C. *Global missions*

BTGMI is uniquely positioned to provide gospel outreach in nearly every country of the world, even in places where Christian missionaries are not allowed. By proclaiming the gospel through radio, television, Internet, mobile apps, and social media, we are able to reach people who may not otherwise have access to a community of believers or to answers to life’s difficult questions. We regularly receive responses from people around the world who testify that they heard about Jesus for the first time through the media resources produced by BTGMI.

For example, a listener of our Arabic programming in Iraq writes, “The ongoing terrorist incidents in my country made me more convinced that the true God would never ask people to kill themselves and others for him to be pleased. Only a false god would ask people to do so. It is through your broadcasts that I am learning more about the true God, and I am finding true love and peace.”

Another listener of our programs, Sandeep, writes from India, “I consider myself blessed because I have access to listen to your Christian broadcasts, which guide us in the right direction and help us live true and meaningful lives. We live very far from the nearest church and can attend Sunday worship services only occasionally. Your radio programs give us the fellowship we so crave. Thank you for all your efforts!”

1. BTGMI employs more than 190 staff members working around the world. BTGMI has a ministry presence in more than 130 countries through production and discipleship centers, broadcast locations, and resource distribution.

In addition, BTGMI reaches people in more than 180 countries through Internet and mobile app resources.

2. Our international ministry teams have developed 34 ministry websites in ten languages supported by 48 social media sites. BTGMI produces 41 radio/audio programs, 14 TV/video programs, and 8 mobile device resources.
3. We distribute more than 3 million printed devotional booklets each year in six languages. In addition, daily devotions are delivered by email, Facebook, or smartphone apps to more than 500,000 people every day in these languages.
4. When people who respond to BTGMI outreach ask for personal spiritual guidance, our staff and more than 600 volunteers worldwide offer discipleship, mentoring, and prayer, and they help seekers connect with local churches. Networks of more than 1,000 prayer partners in North America and throughout the world pray regularly for people who respond to our media outreach.
5. BTGMI global outreach is strengthened through crucial networks of North American and international partners. Strong collaborations create effective partnerships for mission and allow resources to be invested wisely. BTGMI works cooperatively with the following organizations in various ministry areas:
 - a. Christian Reformed World Missions—collaborative ministries in Haiti, Japan, Indonesia, El Salvador, and Eastern Europe.
 - b. Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed congregations—media outreach assistance for new church plants as well as established congregations seeking to use electronic media for ministry.
 - c. Timothy Leadership Training Institute—cooperative leadership training worldwide.
 - d. Korean Council—publication of Korean-English *Today* devotions.
 - e. Calvin Theological Seminary, Sustaining Congregational Excellence, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, The Network, and World Literature Ministries.
 - f. Words of Hope—partnership in Indonesian, Hindi, and Arabic ministries and in the production of the English-language program *Groundwork*.
 - g. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF)—media outreach to the Arabic-speaking world.
 - h. Good Books Educational Trust Ministries—media outreach and discipleship in northern India and the Himalayan region.
 - i. Reformed denominations worldwide—joint-ministry partnerships in Japan (Reformed Church in Japan), Brazil (Presbyterian Church of Brazil), and Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church). In addition, we partner with evangelical congregations in Eastern Europe and Africa and with house churches and Christian ministries in China.
 - j. Christian universities in Russia and Brazil.

k. Crossroad Bible Institute—discipleship ministry through a Bible study correspondence program.

D. Loving mercy and doing justice

While the mission of BTGMI is primarily media missions, our ministry teams and partners have opportunities to provide comfort and assistance to people who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and disadvantaged.

1. As extremist factions in the Middle East ramp up conflict and violence, an increasing number of people are being displaced and becoming disenchanted with their traditional religion and feeling bolder about looking for alternatives. God is using this time in history to open their hearts to the truth of God's Word and the Christian faith. Through our partnership with MERF (Middle East Reformed Fellowship), our Arabic ministry offers practical and spiritual assistance to people displaced by conflict. Through BTGMI/CRC support, we've been able to provide spiritual encouragement by means of audio programs available on radio and a 24/7 Internet broadcast, Bible studies, and children's programs.

Alice, who volunteers with BTGMI Arabic ministry, uses her gifts and experiences to assist and follow-up with Syrian refugees—especially Muslim women. "In contrast to the jihad mentality, they are attracted to Christ's words to love your enemy," Alice explains. As a result of Alice's connections, at least 1,500 people are visiting our sites, and a vast majority of them are Muslim.

2. Conflict in Ukraine has disrupted people's lives. Last year we partnered with local churches to create a hotline for refugees to call. We not only recorded hope-filled messages but also connected callers with area churches for assistance. This year we are expanding that ministry to produce up to 10 one-hour live broadcasts on local Ukrainian FM stations and to make the broadcasts available online. The programs are gospel-focused for hurting refugees, and they challenge local Christians to get involved in relief efforts. Information is offered about sources of humanitarian aid such as Christian relief agencies, government assistance, food pantries, and church events.

3. Pain and brokenness are not just international concerns. Our English program *Family Fire* addresses hurting families in North America. BTGMI English outreach, ReFrame Media, produces *Family Fire*, primarily a Facebook-based ministry, to help strengthen families, one of the most basic relationships for a strong society. *Family Fire* addresses broken relationships and provides instructional and inspirational posts and conversations on facebook.com/FamilyFire, as well as biblical advice through follow-up emails. The posts lead people to a website that offers resources to explore God's design for marriage, parenting, and other relationships. The *Family Fire* team also offers retreats and teaching events for churches and local groups—all to help strengthen families. A volunteer prayer support team of more than 1,000 prayer warriors daily lifts up the needs of participants who ask for specific prayer by email, Facebook comments, and web responses.

A subscriber to the *Family Fire* blog who has been experiencing trouble in her marriage emailed a response after reading an article based on Romans 12, written by *Family Fire* producer, Deb Koster: "I was at my breaking point with my husband, even considering divorce. I love my husband and my family

with all of my heart and soul. When I am feeling angry or hurt, I will turn to Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 4:44. Thank you!"

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

As outlined above, for more than 75 years the mission of Back to God Ministries International has been to proclaim the gospel, disciple those who want to follow Jesus, and strengthen the church. By God's grace, we have been blessed to faithfully carry out our mission in ten languages, through a variety of media tools, reaching people with the gospel wherever they are in the world.

To stay current, BTGMI continually seeks out effective ways to proclaim the gospel and call people into relationship with God. Additional examples include the following:

- Our Arabic ministry has created an Android-friendly website. Previously women in the Middle East had little access to the Internet, but now they can hear gospel messages through mobile devices. To meet this need, we have produced a 15-minute audio segment, *Hadidh Al-sipat* (literally, "Talk of Ladies"), that especially touches the hearts and interests of women.
- Children's audio programming in Spanish. *Las Aventuras de Elisardo* is an outreach of our Spanish-language ministry. The weekly half-hour radio show is produced in partnership with *Kids Corner*, the children's outreach of Reframe Media. More than one hundred stations have picked up our programming. We broadcast in Colombia, Argentina, and Peru and are beginning to promote the program in North America and Brazil.
- A multiplatform mobile app produced in Chinese provides a broad collection of solid biblical resources. This is especially reaching young people seeking to learn about the Christian faith for the first time or to grow in their newfound faith.

By God's grace and with the faithful prayers and support of individuals and churches, BTGMI will continue to carry out media missions, proclaiming the gospel throughout the world. And as God gives us opportunities to make an impact on people's lives, we are thankful to see the ways they pass along the blessing to others.

Yaminah (not her real name) is an assistant university professor in the Middle East. A former Muslim, she became disenchanted with all religions. Yaminah does not like to listen to radio or watch TV. But one of her female students—also of Muslim background—whom she describes as "bright and brave," told her about the BTGMI Arabic radio broadcast. "This broadcast helped me better understand the beliefs of Christians," Yaminah's student told her. She also shared with Yaminah links to Christian websites, including the website produced by our Arabic partner, MERF (Middle East Reformed Fellowship).

As avenues for spreading information improve and change with time, media outreach must also change. The Chinese team has responded, revising their ministry strategy in a variety of ways. They've revised their outreach approach in order to reach more people with more resources, refocusing efforts to create a new mobile app platform called *Be Thou My Rhythm*. Summer Tang is a new believer and subscriber to *Be Thou My Rhythm*. She affirms, "I found myself inspired and my life nurtured by the quality content. Simply put, I found myself growing daily with this app, and I've indeed learned to let God be the rhythm of my life."

Again, thank you for ministry shares, offerings, and individual support that make it possible for Back to God Ministries International to proclaim the gospel, disciple people who want to follow Jesus, and strengthen the church.

III. The Back to God Ministries International board

A. Function

Back to God Ministries International is governed by a regionally representative board that meets three times a year to set policy and to evaluate the work of the staff.

B. Officers of the board

The board officers of BTGMI are Rev. Reginald Smith, president; Mr. Wayne Brower, vice president; Mrs. Cindi Veenstra, secretary; and Mr. John Vejt, treasurer. Rev. Greg Fluit serves as president of the BTGMI Canadian board.

C. Board member nominees

Rev. Gregory Fluit (Region 4), Ms. Alison Libolt Renkema (Region 6), Mr. Leland Vanderaa (Region 8), and Mr. Mark Van Beveren (at-large) are completing a first term on the board and are eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod reappoint these four members to a second three-year term.

Dr. Calvin J. Aardsma (Region 9) has completed two terms of service on the board. We are grateful for his service to Back to God Ministries International and to the church. The following slate of nominees was presented in the spring of 2016 to classes for a vote. Synod will be asked to ratify the result of the election.

Region 9

Mr. Steve Scott, a member of Pathway CRC in St. John, Indiana, is a lawyer at a law firm in Merrillville, Indiana. Mr. Scott has a heart for ministry and for the Christian community. As a lawyer, he is comfortable in the board-room setting and with the decision-making process. Mr. Scott is very active in his church.

Mrs. Sally Haywood, a member of Bethel CRC in Lansing, Illinois, is a retired professor from Prairie State College in Chicago Heights, Illinois. She served the college as president of the Faculty Academic Senate, as faculty president, as chair of the Faculty Development Committee, as facilitator for the New Faculty Committee, as a member and chair of the College Search Committee, and as the department chair/program director. Mrs. Haywood has also served on the Lansing Christian School Board and Foundation Board and on the New 2 You Board (local school thrift store) as secretary. She has also been involved with congregational life and strategic planning at Bethel CRC.

D. Salary disclosure

The following information is provided to synod as requested:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
18	1	1	0
16	4	0	4
15	1	0	1

IV. Recommendations

A. That Rev. Kurt Selles, director of Back to God Ministries International, and Rev. Reginald Smith, board president, be given the privilege of the floor when BTGMI matters are discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the election and reelection of board members from the slate of nominees presented.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Back to God Ministries International
Kurt D. Selles, director

Christian Reformed Home Missions

I. Introduction

God is in the restoration business. Thanks to the faithful support of congregations and individuals across the CRC and beyond, Christian Reformed Home Missions is able to join in God's mission. Home Missions is working to come alongside churches and ministries across North America to encourage and support people doing real ministry in real neighborhoods. It has been a great privilege to see the transformation God has brought in these communities.

This past year has been an inspiring one for Home Missions—our report highlights just a few of the ways we have seen the Holy Spirit at work. God longs to be in a relationship with all of us, as well as with our neighbors and colleagues who don't know him. Our denomination stands before its greatest opportunity yet. With prayer, hope, and imagination we can become more and more a missionary people, being restored and sharing the unchanging message of God's grace in new ways.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The essence of our calling flows through every part of our work. The following summary highlights a few ways in which the work of Home Missions reflects our calling.

A. Faith formation—CRC churches and leadership working together to equip believers to grow in faith and be faithful disciples in the kingdom

Faith Formation is occurring regularly in churches and campus ministries. A growing number of church plants (and even some established churches) are using a missional community model. This model encourages a Christian community to live out their faith in their everyday lives and to share the love of Christ with others. As people gather on campus for Bible study, prayer, study, and work, campus ministers serve as catalysts, facilitators, and connectors, leading and empowering discipleship endeavors.

B. Servant leadership—Identifying, training, and recruiting leaders in the kingdom; inspiring leadership is essential

Home Missions is continuing its approach of coming alongside congregations, classes, and leaders to coach, encourage, connect, and resource. In order to do this well, we partner with a variety of initiatives and organizations, seeking to help make available a wide range of opportunities that ensure the widely differing needs of congregations and contexts can be met.

C. Global missions—We are witnesses of Christ, to the ends of the earth; the denomination strengthens and encourages local congregations to be part of God's mission

We stand before a new and exciting era in God's mission in this world. Globalization has led to an unprecedented movement of people. The world has come to our North American doorstep. Separate agencies for *home* missions and *foreign* missions no longer reflect our context in the globalized, highly mobile, interconnected world of today.

God is moving ahead of us, and we will continue to discern his call to unify Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions into one new agency, which will enable the denomination to foster a new imagination for joining God's mission.

Note: Additional details regarding the progress of joining Home Missions and World Missions will be provided in a subsequent report to Synod 2016.

D. Loving mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly with God—We think of the oppressed, the brokenhearted, and the disadvantaged; therefore we seek to act justly and love mercy

Mercy and justice are woven through all of Home Missions' work. Many new church plants and established churches are asking tough questions about their ministry and their response to loving mercy, doing justice, and being a faithful presence in their community. Campus ministries are connected to both local congregations and community development groups. As campus members serve as volunteers and interns in the community, they work alongside others who are similarly seeking justice and the *shalom* of the city.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship—We proclaim the saving message of Jesus and worship him in all that we do; faith is strengthened by hearing the Word

Gospel proclamation and worship remain core values in the life of new churches and campus ministries. Many new church plants and missional communities deepen their faith community by sharing God's Word and worshiping together in living rooms and coffee shops. Many established congregations are asking tough questions such as "What does worship look like the other six days of the week?" At the core of campus ministries are the communities where people gather to worship, and where students, faculty, and staff worship through the studies and vocational callings they pursue. In doing this, these ministries proclaim the gospel in a variety of ways both on campuses and in surrounding communities.

III. Connecting with churches

Relationships with local churches throughout North America are vital to Home Missions' work. The three main areas of our work happen in concert with local congregations and communities—in each area, Home Missions desires to partner with local congregations in sharing the gospel.

By **starting and strengthening missional churches**, we seek to help all churches move toward becoming missional (mission-centered, mission-focused, mission-shaped) churches and to bring all churches together in mission. By **developing disciples, leaders, and campus ministries**, we seek to equip the leaders in our local congregations. By **engaging with classes, clusters, and communities**, we connect with churches throughout the CRCNA to develop innovative new ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

These three areas of focus bring us together around our aim of transforming lives and communities to extend God's name and renown throughout North America.



A. *Starting and strengthening missional churches*

1. Starting and strengthening missional churches is the core work of Home Missions. One of the ways we do this is through partnering with congregations and classes to start new churches. We also provide resources for assessing churches and leaders, coaching for congregations and pastors, and effective church renewal tools. Our regional leaders, catalytic leaders, and ethnic leaders work closely with both new and established churches to help them discover their place in God's mission.

a. Starting churches

Leadership models, planting models, and funding models have changed, so Home Missions has needed to find new, improved ways to resource and support church planting in the CRCNA.

The first shift focuses on developing Partnership Teams for each church plant. Partnership Teams are made up of local leaders and a Home Missions liaison, each bringing skills and resources that will create a strong foundation for the church plant. As a partner, Home Missions commits to a number of ways in which to support the planter, including continuing education, training, coaching, prayer, planter wellness, and grant money. We also ask the church plant to consider their role as a partner with the denomination, with a commitment to accountability, good communication, denominational participation, and contributing to the ongoing mission work of the CRCNA.

There has also been a shift in the purpose and structure of Home Missions grants for church planting. Please note that there has *not* been a change in the amount of funding available for each plant. Grants will now be available in the form of resourcing grants for church planters who receive approved Partnership Agreements. This list of *à la carte* grants provides strength and health to church plants, and planters can choose from them on an as-needed basis, over an extended period of time (previously limited to three years). More information is available on our webpage: www.crhm.org/starting.

One can imagine the following word picture as a way to describe Home Missions' posture and role in church planting: Home Missions used to be the farmer that planted the seed in the ground—we hired and employed church planters to start new churches in places where the CRC was experiencing growth. As we've moved to a model in which local churches, clusters, and classes plant churches, Home Missions is providing the fertilizer—resources that will help these new churches grow strong, healthy, sustainable, and vibrant ministries.

As we've redesigned our support structure and made it available to a greater variety of church planting models, churches and classes are responding with exciting new ideas for ministry opportunities that will bring continual growth to our multiplication. We anticipate a challenge in having enough financial resources to support all the partnership requests in the pipeline—an exciting challenge that we pray God will faithfully meet.

b. Strengthening missional churches

Through our network of regional and ethnic leaders, along with regional resource staff and consultants, Home Missions continues to work with classes and local congregations. A key component of strengthening existing congregations is the training and provision of coaches who work with local congregations.

1) Coaching, consulting, and training

Home Missions ministry leaders are focused on coming alongside and providing just-in-time coaching for local church pastors and leaders to discern God's call for ministry in their communities. We support classes by supporting connections, innovation, learning, and relationship building.

2) Experiments and adaptive challenges

The adaptive challenges facing our denomination, as stated in the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Team report and identified in

the denomination's Emerging Ministry Plan through the first desired outcome for church and community, are a priority for Home Missions. Working adaptively is not another program or technique but a way of approaching challenges so that we can learn and then apply this learning in conjunction with things we already know and skills we already have to address these challenges. Home Missions ministry leaders are helping churches understand and address these adaptive challenges by helping pastors and church leaders design effective adaptive change experiments. "A good adaptive change experiment is not just trying things until we hit upon a strategy or program that might solve our church problems. A good adaptive challenge experiment moves us to rethink our understanding of God and the gospel and the relationship of the church and its context" (The Missional Network).

3) Going local initiative

God is ahead of us and up to something in our neighborhoods and communities. This adaptive initiative will provide congregations the encouragement, vision, framework, and tools to reengage their neighborhoods in living the gospel. In February 2016, partnering with the Mission Network, Home Missions initiated "Joining God in the Neighborhood," a shared action-learning process in three regions within the CRC. Home Missions will identify a cluster of congregations (5-7) and their pastors in each region who desire to be a mission-centered worshiping community deeply connected and embedded in their surrounding community. These congregations will commit to an eighteen-month journey of discerning, experimenting, and reflecting to address the challenges of doing ministry in their local context. The method for this journey of experimenting involves the creation of learning communities shaped by a set of action-learning steps.

Our partnership with the Mission Network is an integral component of this initiative that will provide our ministry leaders with the necessary training and experience to roll out this experiment to more regions and congregations across the denomination.

4) Enter: Community

An adaptive and innovative experiment, Enter: Community has been developed in partnership with pastors and outreach teams from five congregations. Since the launch of the first experiment in 2014, other churches have requested help to develop similar experiments in their neighborhoods. Through Enter: Community, Home Missions ministry staff work with churches to address questions such as

- What are the challenges your outreach team is facing?
- Does your evangelism committee have a desire for members to get to know the people in their neighborhoods? How is this expressed? What are the growth opportunities?
- Are you looking to enhance connectedness to your community and church neighborhood?

These questions are not unique in the CRC, and Home Missions staff come alongside church leaders and evangelism committees to find ways to address challenges. For instance, a large CRC in a residential

neighborhood experimented with a “walk and pray” event in order to really see, engage, and pray for their neighbors. One hundred people participated and later shared during a worship service what they felt and learned during the “walk and pray” event.

2. Regional, ethnic, and catalytic leadership

An ongoing strength of Home Missions is our regional, catalytic, and ethnic ministry leadership. Distributed across North America to work with regions and ethnic communities, these leaders are our key connectors and coaches. The past year was one of major transitions for Home Missions. Three of our regional leaders, with a combined service of more than 53 years, retired or accepted new positions. These roles were filled with interim, part-time regional mission leaders. The Great Lakes team, following a period of interim leadership, hired a new regional leader.

Our current regional, ethnic, and catalytic leaders are

- Eastern Canada region: Adrian Van Giessen
- Western Canada region: Karen Wilk (interim leader)
- Eastern U.S. region: Carl Bergman (interim leader)
- Great Lakes region: Amy Schenkel
- Central U.S. region: Peter Kelder
- West Central U.S. region: Kevin Schutte (interim leader)
- West Coast U.S. region: Carl Leep (regional coordinator)
- Black and Urban Ministries: Bob Price
- Hispanic Ministries: Partnership with Consejo Latino
- Korean Ministries: Charles Kim
- Native American/First Nations Ministries: Stanley Jim
- Catalytic Leaders for New Churches: Amy Schenkel and Adrian VanGiessen
- Catalytic Leader for Discipleship: Sam Huizenga
- Catalytic Leader for Campus Ministries and Leadership Development: Mark Wallace

3. Stories

a. Neighborhood on Alberta Avenue

“As God called us to the Alberta Avenue neighborhood, it became clear that God was up to so much redemptive work here already and simply wanted us to join in this work with him,” say Aaron and April Au. “But in order to do that, he wanted us to be present in the neighborhood—to live, love, and learn from our neighbors.”

Aaron and April lead Avenue Church, which currently meets on Sunday mornings at the Carrot Arts Community Coffeehouse, a local hub for the community which features local artists, concerts, and open-mic nights. Conveniently, the coffeehouse is closed on Sundays, making it a perfect location for Sunday services. Avenue Church also hosts house church and prayer gatherings in different neighborhood clusters throughout the city.

Coming into the neighborhood, Aaron wants to make sure that he is not just a “service provider” from the outside but a “stakeholder” who lives in and is invested in the neighbors and neighborhood.

This past summer Avenue Church, along with eleven other partners and churches in the community, put on Avefest 2015. Avefest is a free two-day

event for the community designed to build and foster community regardless of ethnicity, income, or faith. Usually people come to festivals to be entertained. But at Avefest the community was the entertainment—and as they participated, community grew.

“God is showing us,” Aaron says, “the beauty of what happens when diverse members of the body of Christ come together under Christ, who is our head, and work together for the sake of his kingdom!”

b. God blesses obedience

Utilizing his training on coaching through Christian Reformed Home Missions, Native American/First Nations Ministries Leader Stanley Jim coached Caleb Dickson for about a year. Caleb is a graduate of the Red Mesa Leadership Development Network and is now pursuing the commissioned pastor status. “We get together and talk about his leadership at the Naschitti CRC in Naschitti, New Mexico,” says Stanley. “I have also provided him with resources that he wanted to utilize as he ministers.” Naschitti CRC asked Caleb to minister to the congregation for six months. After completing the six months, they extended it to a year, and now he is there for a longer period.

The church is on the Navajo reservation, and the members are from the Navajo tribe. The congregation had dwindled down to just a few members, but they were persistent that they were to be a living body in their community. Granted, the economic opportunities are scarce. They insisted that Caleb and his wife, Alice, drive about one hundred miles every Sunday to minister. The ministry has changed and has become a place where people are reconnecting with God.

It started with a children’s ministry. Children became the avenue by which the parents and relatives began to show interest in the church. When the adults started coming, Caleb began teaching the catechism to them. At the end of December 2015 five individuals from 25-35 years of age were baptized. Another became interested in making profession of faith and having their children baptized.

Caleb shared with Stanley at one of their coaching sessions, “I don’t know if the people are hearing, but I will keep on ministering. I just preach the Word, and God does the rest.” His persistence has indeed paid off. Praise the Lord!

B. *Developing disciples, leaders, and campus ministries*

1. To transform lives and communities

Developing disciples, leaders, and campus ministries is an important work that contributes to the vital work of starting and strengthening churches. Home Missions is committed to recruiting and training, engaging all generations, and providing resources at the local congregational level in order to transform lives and communities. Our campus ministries, discipleship initiatives, training programs, small groups, clusters, and other projects embody a faithful and loving presence in communities across North America. They identify, equip, and send leaders into all walks of life. Key aspects of this area of focus include the following.

a. Developing leaders

Presently Home Missions is partnering with, or helping congregations connect to, the Ridder Initiative, the Reformed Leadership Initiative, Deeper Journey, the Renewal Lab at Calvin Theological Seminary, Dunamis Fellowship initiatives, and local leadership development networks. We are continuing to identify, support, and equip church planters as they prepare for, discern, and pursue callings to plant new expressions of church throughout North America. Working with the Missional Network, we are conducting three regional experiments through the Go Local pilot project in equipping congregations to better understand and connect with their local contexts in order to join God in mission there. Through the Missional Leadership Cohort we are coming alongside a diverse group of leaders, helping them connect, learn from, and encourage each other in the work they are doing. Through them we anticipate spawning new networks of similar leaders across North America. We are also continuing to support the development of young adult leaders through our Emerging Leader program in campus ministry.

Working together with World Missions, we are collaborating in a number of ways to further leadership development. These include the Urban Training Collective, the Montreal Project, Global Coffee Break, and Timothy Leadership Training Institute. These are truly both global and local initiatives. As we learn from these existing collaborations, new initiatives are taking place, such as a gathering of leaders of Egyptian congregations in the greater Toronto area, a new project working with immigrants and refugees in Vancouver, and the Synergy Team for the Americas and Caribbean. This latter group is an interagency effort, larger than just World Missions and Home Missions, seeking to “nurture a shared vision for ministry with Hispanic and Caribbean communities” that results in shared learning and the building of greater trust, collaboration, and ministry. Much of the work, then, is experimental, adaptive, and intended to help find new ways to develop leaders within a collaborative, global framework.

b. Campus ministry

Christian Reformed campus ministries are active and growing on more than 35 campuses across North America. Embracing students, faculty, and staff in intentional community, together they engage their campuses, bringing the gospel in word and deed. These campus ministries are actively pursuing all five callings identified by our denomination, being places of faith formation, worship and gospel proclamation, servant leadership, global mission, and mercy and justice. They are both a gift from our denomination to others, as well as a significant gift to the denomination as leaders are shaped, encouraged, and sent. Connected to their campus communities, local churches, and the world, our campus ministries continue to be places of hope and grace, joining in God’s mission as those who participate in and with them pursue their callings and vocations.

In our changing cultures, and within the rapidly changing landscape of higher education, our campus ministries continue to adapt to the new challenges they face. New models are emerging, more partnerships are forming, and new ways of joining in God’s mission within higher education are emerging. With the issues of race and diversity front and center on

campuses throughout North America, our campus ministries are becoming places of repentance, humble learning, solidarity, prophetic ministry and action, and reconciliation. In doing this, they offer hope and help to point a way forward for our congregations and classes.

Home Missions does not do this work alone but in grateful partnership with classes, congregations, and the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry Association.

2. Stories

a. Beyond the classroom

Mike Wagenman came to Western University in London, Ontario, as a campus pastor in 2005. He found that even though there were many Christian student clubs already established, first-year students who became involved were leaving after a year or so. When they started asking harder questions, student clubs weren't equipped to answer.

Wagenman began the Kuyper Centre, a campus ministry dedicated to both student and faculty development, modeled on a study center. In addition to helping students through their tough questions, the Kuyper Centre is also focused on providing leadership positions to students. "We want to provide opportunities to the Christian leaders of tomorrow," says Wagenman. The ministry is intentionally by students and for students—the Kuyper Centre supports a whole group of student leaders.

In addition to Wagenman, the Kuyper Centre also has an intern who looks after the undergrad programs. Funded by Christian Reformed Home Missions, Classis Chatham, and other entities, this extra help allows Mike to spend more time with grad students and faculty programs as well as with one-on-one mentoring.

Another focus of the Kuyper Centre is its emphasis on the relevance of the gospel in all life. Academia and religion are not separate, despite what some college students think. Mike strives to emphasize the importance of incorporating the gospel into all aspects of life.

This past year, the Kuyper Centre partnered with other groups to host an event on the harms of pornography. Over 600 students and faculty attended the event. Afterward, a professor came up to Mike and expressed her appreciation for the way they approached the issue of pornography. She was impressed that they addressed it from a perspective of hope as opposed to despair, saying that the world may be broken, but there is hope in the midst of the brokenness.

Mike says this is what campus ministry is all about, and he references John 13:35, saying, "They'll know we are Christians by our love." Striving to be a community that cares for those around them and takes the time to teach its members is essential when trying to foster the growth of Christianity in a college setting.

b. Coffee and kindness

Anna (not her actual name), who did not attend church, reluctantly showed up to a Coffee Break meeting at First CRC this past year after being invited by a neighbor. At first she was uncomfortable, but she continued to come every week. She read stories like David and Goliath for the first time. It wasn't long before Anna felt that she belonged and was comfortable

sharing with the group. As the year drew to a close, she found that she didn't want Coffee Break to end.

First CRC, in DeMotte, Indiana, has been hosting a Coffee Break group for 34 years. Jayne Bowers, group leader for the past 21 years, is now experiencing the largest group that this Coffee Break has ever seen. With 105 women and 14 leaders, the group has had to be creative just to make room for everyone.

Like the many other Coffee Break groups supported by Home Missions, this one includes all types of women. No matter one's age, race, denomination, or walk of life—all are welcomed with open arms. The goals of Coffee Break are to accept each woman and to make everyone feel comfortable enough with the group to open up and share. "We love each lady that walks through the door," explains Jayne.

"That is what Coffee Break is all about," Jayne says. "Studying Scripture, changing lives, growing closer to God, encouraging one another, and loving the women right where they are." In addition to studying the Bible, members pray together—some for the first time. "I have had women tell me they did not know you could just talk to God like that. Women learn how to pray, and we pray for them. They share how much it means to hear someone pray for them."

"I want you to know that Coffee Break has changed my life," wrote one member. "I think it is so awesome—the things we are learning about God. I feel very close to our whole group—everyone there has inspired me to strive to live the way God intended me to live. Thank you for showing me such kindness and acceptance."

C. Engaging with clusters, classes, and communities

1. Collaboration and partnership

In the challenging contexts and cultures in which we find ourselves, it is more and more necessary to work fully in collaboration with churches and classes. We are approaching all of the work mentioned in the above two sections from the perspective of partnership. Home Missions' regional, catalytic, and ethnic leaders are actively working with local clusters, classes, and communities to determine needs, to secure resources, and to work together to start and strengthen ministries in North America. Strengthening our regional presence and coming alongside classes is a vital part of our strategy because we believe that classes can and should play a critical partner role in our missionary work with congregations. The approaches we have developed, such as using clusters to engage in local communities, have proven to be effective for doing ministry in specific geographic areas.

In addition to working with 48 classes and 59 clusters in regional contexts, Home Missions is committed to connecting to a growing network of diverse mission leaders, partners, and organizations in North America who desire to listen, learn, and reflect about what God is doing among them and follow him on mission.

Home Missions continues existing partnerships with Calvin Theological Seminary (Church Renewal Lab, Facing Your Future), Christian Reformed World Missions (Salaam, Mission Montreal), Diaconal Ministries and Classis Eastern Canada (Mission Montreal), World Renew (regional ministry teams), the Office of Social Justice (campus ministry initiatives), Pastor-Church

Relations and Sustaining Congregational Excellence (Ministry Assessment and Vocational Guidance Pilot Project), the Office of Race Relations, the Reformed Church in America, and many others.

2. Stories

a. Giving peace

Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan, invited Sam Huizenga, Home Missions catalytic discipleship leader, to walk with their church through a period of discernment and experimentation. The design team experimented with giving peace. The team of ten people had been reflecting on Luke 10. They were wondering how they could practice some of the same things as the seventy-two Jesus had sent out. A teenager in the group said she was curious about what it meant to give peace. Whom would you give it to? How would you know that they received peace?

At her encouragement, the group decided that they would each look for ten people who looked like they needed peace over a 30-day time frame. They committed to answering the following questions: What happened? What did you learn about giving peace?

The group had a variety of stories and experiences. The youth pastor found a Big Lots employee having a rough day. She explained she was so busy that she hadn't had time for coffee. He gave peace by running to the local coffee shop and returning with a cup of coffee for her. A mom found herself writing a card to an estranged friend. A young person asked a Target cashier about her day and learned the cashier was surprised to be noticed. The design team learned that giving peace requires intentionality, watchfulness, and the willingness to take a risk. They also saw and experienced the Holy Spirit's leading. With great enthusiasm, the team designed a similar congregational experiment for the Advent season.

b. Learning clusters

In partnership with Forge Chicago and the Central U.S. region, a cohort of eight leaders met every other week for three months of coaching on a specific question related to discipling and mission in their local church context. The cohort was led by Eric Lerew (director of Forge Chicago) and facilitated by Ruth Kelder (HM regional ministry developer). The eight leaders were a diverse group, having come together from a church that is nearly ready to closing its doors, to a church in a rural community, to one of the largest churches in the denomination, to a church in a university campus setting—and yet all of the leaders faced some of the same realities, challenges, and questions. Could a group of like-minded leaders benefit from this exercise, even though their church contexts differed so greatly? The answer was a resounding “yes” as these leaders were coached through specific matters that could apply to all their church contexts.

The capstone of the exercise was a field trip to a missional community (not CRC) that has a presence in their region and partners with its community in mission. The event also served as an opportunity to teach specific principles and practices. Several other interested leaders from the CRC and Reformed Church in America joined the group for this day trip.

At least four of the leaders want to join a cluster group and continue this journey of discovery. This further engagement and learning will lead

to developing a discipleship cohort, and possibly missional communities, in their church contexts. Another goal is to start a new cohort in the first half of 2016 for leaders who are interested. The long-term goal is to form a network of peer learning for leaders as they go about developing disciples and leaders in their local church using an approach of forming distributed learning communities.

D. Conclusion

Joining the mission of God, Home Missions calls, catalyzes, and collaborates with God's missionary people to start and strengthen missional churches and campus ministries that transform lives and communities. As we follow God's leading, committed to serving God's mission with local congregations and classes, we are expectant to learn together where God is already at work and how we might join God on mission everywhere. Please continue to pray for God's mission. By working and serving together, the Christian Reformed Church might be everything God has called her to be.

IV. Board Matters – additional update may follow February Board meetings

Normally the board officers present a slate of board nominations to be approved by our board, forward that information to the denominational office, which in turn sends the slate to the respective classes for voting at their spring meeting. The votes for each region are tallied by the denominational office, and the results of the voting are forwarded to synod for ratification in June. The persons on each slate of nominees who receive the most votes become the new board members, and those not elected remain available as alternates. Due to the beginning of unification for World Missions and Home Missions, the nomination and election process has been adjusted for this coming year.

A. Board membership

The Board of Home Missions is mandated by synod to guide and carry out the domestic mission of the CRCNA. The board includes twelve regionally based members (matching CRCNA regions) with the primary functions of governance and strategic direction. Seven at-large board members balance expertise, gender, racial diversity, and clergy and nonclergy requirements set by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

Five board members are completing their first term and are eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term:

Region 12: Dr. Peter Steensma; Ms. Ruth Kuder, alternate

Member at-large: Ms. Sara DeMoor

Member at-large: Mr. John Hwang (has not confirmed willingness to continue on the board)

Member at-large: Mr. Ricardo Tavarez

Ms. Jenna Huitink is completing a first term as member at-large but has chosen not to serve a second term.

Home Missions board president Harvey Roosma is completing an extra year granted by Synod 2015 and will be concluding his service on the board this year.

Due to the unification process of Home Missions and World Missions, no new nominees from the respective regions are being presented for ratification.

B. Board officers

The officers of the board of Christian Reformed Home Missions are Rev. Harvey Roosma, president; Rev. Joy Engelsman, vice president; Mr. Adam Veenstra, secretary; Mr. Ricardo Tavarez, treasurer; and Rev. Bruce Gritter, vice-all.

C. Salary disclosure

The following information is provided to synod as requested:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
18	1	1	0
15	8	4	4

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Moses Chung, Christian Reformed Home Missions Director, and Rev. Harvey J. Roosma, board president, when matters pertaining to Christian Reformed Home Missions are discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint members to a second term as presented.

C. 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.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Christian Reformed Home Missions
Moses Chung, director

Christian Reformed World Missions

I. Introduction

For over 125 years, Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) has been helping Christian Reformed churches fulfill the Great Commission mainly through planting churches and sending individual missionaries around the world. Over the past decade, we have intentionally shifted our focus. We understand that strategic partnerships and intentional networking are crucial to extending Christ's reign among the nations. From our work with unreached peoples to mobilizing local churches, strategic partnerships exponentially increase our ability to initiate and sustain transformational momentum in lives and communities. Together, partnering with each other and with God's Spirit, the good news is being preached around the world.

II. Reflecting Our Calling: Global Missions

God commissioned his people to witness to the good news of his kingdom and make disciples of all nations. CRWM exists to lead members of the CRC in responding to that commission on the international mission field.

CRWM has more than 200 missionaries serving in over 40 countries. Through partnerships, our work extends to more than 50 countries. Within our office staff, field staff, and on our board, we value ethnic, gender, and role diversity to better understand God's call for us. This takes place on the international missions field in four main ways:

- Christian education: We are sending Christian teachers and equipping educators to apply a holistic biblical worldview. Through this ministry, students are becoming active participants in God's mission.
- Leadership development: We are multiplying vibrant disciples and churches through the development of godly servant leaders. Our ministry in leadership development involves both formal education and nonformal training.
- Evangelism and discipleship: We are sharing the good news of salvation and leading people to develop and deepen a personal relationship with Christ and with his body.
- Transforming communities: Throughout the world the Spirit is inspiring Christian movements to ask what the good news of Jesus might look like in the context of their time and place. CRWM identifies, encourages, and learns from these movements as we together endeavor to put faith into action.

CRWM also has a fifth category of work: mobilizing the CRCNA. We come alongside Christian Reformed churches to encourage and enable them to fulfill the mission of God among the nations. The CRC engages in that mission in many ways through various agencies, but CRWM has a responsibility to challenge congregations to live into this calling. Section III of this report highlights some of the ways CRWM serves in mobilizing the CRCNA.

III. Our Journey: Connecting with churches

In early 2016, Duane Postma estimated that he has helped construct 30 churches, 15 pastor's homes, and eight schools in the Dominican Republic. Each year, he supervises and hosts teams of volunteers from Christian Reformed churches throughout North America.

Almost all of these teams are paired with members of communities within the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic (ICRRD). Together, this culturally blended team begins to find common ground as they build churches and homes alongside one another.

“The hope is that volunteers will be more responsive to needs in their immediate area and also in ministry worldwide,” said Postma.

Postma is just one of 440 volunteers who served with CRWM in fiscal year 2014-15. The teams of North Americans that he connected with the ICRRD were among 30 CRWM teams that served in 2014-15. Connecting members of the CRC with missions opportunities around the world is just one of many ways CRWM leads members of the CRC in fulfilling the Great Commission. In the 2014-15 fiscal year, 85 percent of CRCs in Canada and 71 percent of CRCs in the United States participated in international ministry through CRWM.

A. *Engaging younger generations*

Younger members of the CRC are getting hands-on understanding of their role in missions. This takes place through short-term service trips, year-long programs, and key partnerships. As young people explore their calling in missions through these opportunities, they return to North America with a better understanding of God’s whole creation and the role they play in building his kingdom.

1. Momentum

Momentum is a year-long discipleship program for young adults (ages 18-22) who are looking to grow in their relationship with Christ through mentorship and service in God’s local and global kingdom. The program’s structure includes (1) teams of young adults who meet with a spiritual mentor or couple, (2) monthly discipleship meetings and monthly service projects in the local community, (3) a culminating, month-long international missions experience, and (4) exploration of both local and global service opportunities in the future.

The initial pilot program for Momentum included three sets of two participants each. With an official launch in fiscal year 2015-16, we are now expanding the program.

2. Cohort of missionaries

The Cohort of Missioners program offers North Americans and Central Americans a year-long experience in which participants, known as *missioners*, are immersed in a new culture by serving with local mission organizations at the grassroots level. Each participant is linked to fellow missioners with whom they communally participate in service, intensive learning, reflection, and spiritual formation. In 2016 CRWM will host its first Central American missioner in North America.

In fiscal year 2014-15, there were three appointed missioners from North America and four appointed Central American missioners. Several more participants have signed up or have begun serving in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

3. Calvin Theological Seminary

Through our partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary we provide cross-cultural internships for several students each summer. These internships place seminarians alongside long-term missionaries and national ministry partners and provide a valuable learning experience.

B. Resources for leadership

CRWM comes alongside churches to train them in caring for their missionaries and in taking an active role in the global church. Churches in North America are extending their impact beyond their church community, beyond their neighborhood, and onto other continents through CRWM. This takes place in several ways:

1. Preparing missionaries and volunteers for service

CRWM orientation prepares missionaries and volunteers in spiritual care, conflict management, developing healthy relationships, support-raising, diversity and antiracism, communication, and other topics relevant to cross-cultural living. When the missionary or volunteer leaves for the field, they continue to receive support from CRWM staff.

2. Missions advocate

A church-appointed volunteer who serves as a catalyst in the area of international missions acts as a communication link between members of the local congregation and CRWM.

3. Communicating to churches and individuals

We share how God is working through members of the CRC to bring positive change on the international missions field. We also publish monthly newsletters that share best practices for supporting global ministry in prayer and with financial gifts.

4. Church engagements

CRWM staff are also available, upon request, to preach at churches or support congregations or missions leaders in strengthening their role in missions. CRWM staff also share missions expertise at regional workshops like the annual Day of Encouragement events hosted by Diaconal Ministries Canada.

C. Improving relationships between pastors and churches

In response to Synod 2012's challenge to develop ways to get involved earlier in situations of pastor/church tension, several CRC ministries (Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, Calvin Theological Seminary, Candidacy Committee, Pastor-Church Relations, Chaplaincy and Care Ministries, etc.) worked together with a consultant (Dr. Bryan Dik, Colorado State University) to launch a two-year pilot project in 2013 to enhance ministry "fit" for pastors and other religious leaders. This has been an effort to create a proactive strategy for improving pastor/congregation/ministry relationships. CRWM has played an active role in this effort from the beginning. Based on positive results from two pilot projects with nearly 100 participants, and with the encouragement of other leaders within the CRCNA, we have recently hired a half-time ministry assessment coordinator, who is bringing current and potential ministry leaders together with several vetted counseling services to provide a robust assessment and vocational guidance process. We are excited about this initiative and trust it will contribute to better ministry "fit" for ministry leaders and therefore more satisfying, productive, and lasting ministry leadership service.

IV. Board matters

As CRWM moves forward in the process of unifying with Christian Reformed Home Missions, the two agency boards will continue to function as separate boards, coming together for pre-arranged sessions.

A. Regional board nominations

The board of the new unified mission agency will be composed of the current membership on the CRWM and CRHM boards through June 2016, assuming that most members will participate in the April 2016 meeting.

B. Ratification of a second term

The board recommends that synod appoint the following persons to a second three-year term on what will become the new mission agency board:

- Ms. Cora Rempel (Region 2)
- Rev. John Eigege (Region 7)

C. World Missions board membership

The board received the resignation of Rev. Elmer Tandayu (Region 6) due to health reasons. In addition, Ms. Lisa Thomson (U.S. at-large) is unable to serve a second term on the board. The World Missions board is working to identify nominees for appointment to fill these vacancies on what will transition to the new mission agency board.

D. Salary disclosure

The following information is provided to synod as requested:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
18	1	0	1
17	1	0	1
16	2	2	0
15	6	1	5

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the president of CRWM-Canada, Ms. Andrea Bootsma; CRWM-U.S.A., Rev. Ronald J. Meyer; and the director of CRWM, Dr. Gary J. Bekker, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to CRWM are addressed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify, appoint, and reelect members of the board of Christian Reformed World Missions as presented.

C. That synod along with the Board of Trustees encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2016, and the third Sunday of September 2016 as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Christian Reformed World Missions.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Christian Reformed World Missions
Gary J. Bekker, director

Committee for Contact with the Government/Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (Mr. Mike Hogeterp, research and communications manager)

I. Introduction

The Committee for Contact with the Government, operating as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, is a justice and reconciliation ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada. We work in partnership with the Reformed Church in America, Regional Synod of Canada. The Centre for Public Dialogue cultivates passionate citizenship in Christian communities, studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective, and interacts with legislators in a constructive manner. Our focus issues, which are decided through communication with local church representatives and our partners, are currently refugee rights and Indigenous justice.

II. Reflecting Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We seek, in every part of our work, to help local churches live into doing justice as a key component of a vibrant and faithful faith life. We do this by

1. Providing worship resources like those developed with the Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee (CAMC) for Reconciliation Sunday (to mark the end of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a deeply significant event for churches seeking justice and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada).
2. Helping local church members to tell stories and think together about Christ's call to justice through our Do Justice blog (dojustice.crcna.org) and initiatives like the Milestones Project (crcna.org/milestones). In the last six months of 2015, Do Justice received 35,000 visits, double the web views of the preceding six months!
3. Leading by example, especially by challenging churches to join us in initiatives like our Election Spirituality Challenge and by publishing articles and blog posts on Do Justice and in publications like *Christian Courier*. Our research and communications manager, Mr. Mike Hogeterp, also visits and speaks at local churches several times a year.

B. Loving mercy and doing justice

We assist local churches in loving mercy and doing justice by

1. Communicating with government, both through direct interaction with parliamentary leaders and through mobilizing Christian citizens to speak into government policy through work such as our Vote 2015 resources (crcna.org/vote2015), which provided visually engaging, concise background information and talking points to help Christians speak with their electoral candidates about refugees, physician-assisted suicide, Indigenous education reform, human trafficking, and foreign aid for smallholder farmers. These election resources were used in local churches such as Waterloo (Ont.) CRC and were viewed more than 1,600 times online.

2. Connecting churches to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada by mobilizing local church participation in TRC events, helping church members to tell stories of how they have been transformed by listening to the stories of residential school survivors (especially through crcna.org/Milestones and Milestones articles in CRC News), and helping to draw attention to Indigenous members of the CRC through *Banner* articles and the Do Justice blog.
3. Developing and facilitating workshops such as Journey with Me: Refugee Stories Change Lives, the Blanket Exercise, and *Living the 8th Fire*, a small group curriculum for churches wishing to learn more about Indigenous justice issues. In 2015 we launched Journey with Me (a refugee workshop and online toolkit) in both Toronto and Vancouver.

C. *Gospel proclamation and worship*

Doing justice and reconciliation is gospel proclamation—we know and celebrate that Christ is renewing all things and that he calls us to be collaborators in this task. When the church does justice, our witness is stronger and has more integrity. In addition to the work already mentioned (worship and learning resources), we have done this work in 2015 through

1. Working with CAMC to develop the CRC's Action for Reconciliation statement, presented at the final event of the TRC (June 1, 2015). Through the second half of 2015 we worked with CAMC and other partners to discern how the CRC in Canada can live out the gospel in response to the TRC *Calls to Action*. This will be the subject of a plan to be shared with the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA in spring 2016.
2. Supporting the Justice and Faith Project, a partnership of Canadian Ministries, to hear from congregations and to work with them in building a clear and active connection between faith and justice.

III. Connecting with churches—Our Journey (the Ministry Plan)

A. *Engaging younger members*

For the past two years, we have especially emphasized connection with our young adult audience in various ways (e.g., moving to more visual representations of information, using Facebook to target this audience, hiring a young communications staffer, joining Twitter, running a contest for university students, and hiring a university intern). The results have been encouraging—more than 25 percent of the visitors to our blog are under age 35, and our Facebook page now attracts a significantly younger audience than before.

B. *Assisting churches within their local contexts*

As noted above, our Vote 2015 election resources (crcna.org/vote2015) were used by local churches and visited by many viewers. Momentum has also been growing around our workshops. We launched the Journey with Me workshop in spring 2015 to encourage compassion and justice action concerning refugees. This workshop has been used at least eight times this year, at classis meetings, in churches, and in schools. The Blanket Exercise has been used all over the denomination and has been facilitated by various agencies, but we personally facilitated it twelve times in Christian schools, churches, small groups, and classis meetings. There has also been significant interest in our *Living the 8th Fire* small group curriculum, and it has been picked up by other denominations as well.

Disability Concerns (Rev. Mark Stephenson, director)

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

The Office of Disability Concerns (DC) strives to promote and foster relationships, communities, and societies where everybody belongs and everybody serves by assisting churches, agencies, institutions, and leadership within the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America

- to think and act in keeping with the biblical call regarding people with disabilities.
- to break barriers of communication, architecture, and attitude.
- to establish ministries with, for, and by people with disabilities and their families.

B. Vision

Since 2009, CRC DC has been working in close cooperation with the Disability Concerns office of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Together, our vision can be summarized briefly: “In healthy churches, ministries, and communities, everybody belongs, and everybody serves.”

C. Mission

DC’s mission is to bring about the full participation of all people with disabilities in the life of the church and the full participation of the church in the lives of people with disabilities.

D. Five-year plan

DC adopted a new five-year plan for 2014 to 2019 that has four main parts:

1. Network – Strengthen the network of advocates both in quantity and quality.
2. Awareness/education – Help churches prioritize the full inclusion of people living with disabilities.
3. Resource/consultation – Provide churches with the tools they need to minister to and engage people with disabilities in congregation and community.
4. Ministry promotion – Enhance and promote the future growth and development of Disability Concerns for the purpose of serving communities and societies more effectively.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Although our work is reflected in all five areas of our calling, some of the five receive more focus than others.

A. Faith formation

1. Friendship Ministries assists churches in faith formation with persons who have intellectual disability. While DC has always maintained a close and productive relationship with Friendship Ministries—an affiliated ministry with the CRC—that relationship has taken on a much deeper dimension with our director serving on the Friendship Ministries board and executive committee and assisting Friendship in the development of their new *Together* curriculum.

2. Because about 13 percent of children and youth have disabilities of various kinds, Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns ministries have produced five training videos for church leaders (volunteer and staff) to assist in their ministry with children and youth, and we have provided a variety of templates such as an Individual Spiritual Formation Plan. In addition, CRC DC has been closely involved with Faith Formation Ministries to assist them in their work.

B. *Servant leadership*

1. Disability Concerns staff and volunteers have recruited and trained over 600 church and regional disability advocates who serve their churches and classes. Their primary purpose is to assist churches in their ministry with the 15 to 20 percent of people in their communities who live with disabilities. In October 2016, DC is cosponsoring a conference in Niagara Falls, Ontario, to train church leaders, disability advocates, and others. In addition, CRC and RCA DC have training videos and webinar recordings available on our website.
2. Besides the DC Advisory Committee, we have regional committees that serve in Ontario, Michigan, the U.S. Midwest, the U.S. Southwest, and Illinois/Indiana. In addition, DC has a committee that focuses on ministry with people with mental illnesses: the Mental Health Task Force. Each of these committees includes volunteers from the CRC and the RCA, and some include staff from other disability ministries as well.
3. The CRC DC staff consists of our full-time director and two part-time administrative assistants with a part-time church and volunteer associate (for a total of 2 FTEs).
4. The DC Mental Health Task Force, working with representatives from the RCA, Faith Formation Ministry, Pastor Church Relations, and Faith and Hope Ministries has produced “A Guide for a Leave of Absence/Sabbatical for Mental Health Reasons for Clergy” and a workshop toolkit that can be used at classis meetings to introduce the topic of mental illness among clergy as well as the guide.
5. CRC and RCA DC provides to all churches that request it a quarterly resource, *Breaking Barriers*, which deepens understanding and suggests new opportunities for ministry by telling the stories of people who have disabilities and their loved ones. All disability advocates and many churches have received our *Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves*, which helps church leaders and members welcome and engage people with disabilities in the life of the church.

C. *Global missions*

Although DC focuses primarily on North America, our web (www.crcna.org/disability) and Network pages (network.crcna.org/disability) reach worldwide. In 2015, we received over 37,000 page views in 26,000 sessions. Of these, 13 percent came from outside the United States and Canada. In addition, we received an unsolicited gift from a gathering of churches in Michigan that we are distributing to ministries that work with people with disabilities in Africa.

D. *Loving mercy and doing justice*

1. Providing the possibility for people to be involved in congregational life is a critical part of justice toward our neighbors and fellow church members. The annual survey of CRC congregations indicates that 306 churches worship in barrier-free facilities, and another 644 have partially accessible facilities for a total of 86 percent of CRC church buildings that are fully or partially accessible; 530 churches offer aids for people who are hard of hearing or deaf, and 453 have aids for people with visual impairments. Over 540 churches offer transportation for people who cannot drive themselves, and one-third of congregations have adopted a church policy on disability. Synod 2013 encouraged all churches to adopt a policy on disability, and all churches in Ontario are required to do so by law. Congregations in Ontario have had to think much more carefully about accessibility of their activities and communications due to the passage of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act; CRC DC has provided guidance to these congregations for complying with the act and has made available a template policy for Ontario churches produced by Classis Hamilton.
2. Diaconal Ministries Canada and CRC DC have partnered together so that communities and churches will be enriched and strengthened by the inclusion, diversity, and gifts of people with disabilities, thus contributing to the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical well-being of persons/families with disabilities.
3. CRC DC collaborated with the Office of Race Relations and the Office of Social Justice to produce a webinar on increasing welcome and diversity in congregations.
4. Our director serves on the board of Pathways to Promise, a parachurch organization that helps churches minister to people with mental illnesses and their loved ones.
5. DC volunteers and staff speak regularly at churches, classis meetings, conferences, webinars, and seminary classes; they also connect with many CRCs about engaging people with disabilities in church life.
6. The Mental Health Task Force has created a speakers bureau—people who are qualified to make presentations on mental health issues to congregations in several regions across North America. (See also section II, B, 4 above.)
7. RCA and CRC Disability Concerns ministries are members of the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition, which works on public policy priorities in Washington, D.C.

E. *Gospel proclamation and worship*

DC provides worship leaders with a variety of online resources including litanies, prayers, and sermons. In appropriate settings we have been promoting the new, large-print edition of the hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts*.

III. **Connecting with churches re Our Journey (the Ministry Plan)**

DC depends on and therefore places the highest priority on a network of church and regional disability advocates, connecting our work as directly to churches as possible. 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. Congregations that do this well are much better equipped to connect with members of their community, 15 to 20 percent of whom live with disabilities. In addition, we provide a variety of resources for congregations to engage as fully as possible with children and young people who have disabilities.

The following are the areas of the Ministry Plan to which DC can contribute best.

- Strategic Focus 1.1: Congregations discover and discern how God is at work in their churches and communities, bringing renewal and transformation.
- Strategic Focus 2.2: Our congregations are experienced as places where people of all generations find their spiritual homes and grow in Christlikeness together.
- Strategic Focus 2.4: Our congregations engage children, youth, and young adults in the life of the church.
- Strategic Focus 3.4: Congregations and ministries create opportunities for women, racial-ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and young adults to discover and develop their leadership gifts and callings.
- Strategic Focus 4.3: Congregations, ministries, and members understand, embrace, and express our identity as a diverse church gathered from “every nation, tribe and tongue.”
- Strategic Focus 4.4: Congregations, ministries, and members respond to the call to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” with God.
- Strategic Focus 5.2: The Christian Reformed Church develops new ways of connecting congregations with the denominational services they need, as well as increased opportunities to participate in mission outreach, in a way that generates greater efficiency, accessibility, cross-cultural competence, clarity, and sustainability.

Race Relations (Rev. Esteban Lugo, director)

I. Introduction

The Office of Race Relations continues to meet the challenges of assisting the congregations, classes, agencies, and institutions of the CRCNA in embracing and living out our identity as God's diverse and unified family. We do so through continued and growing partnerships and collaborations with denominational agencies and ministries, the Reformed Church in America, and organizations outside the CRC. Race Relations is privileged to continue its responsibilities in providing (1) antiracism and racial reconciliation initiatives that provide education, training, and resources, (2) the Multiethnic Conference/Engage 2016 Gathering, (3) All Nations Heritage celebrations, and (4) a scholarship program that provides not only financial assistance but also training in antiracism and cultural awareness for students attending our institutions of higher education.

II. Connecting with churches and aligning with the five aspects of "Our Calling"

Within our mandate for antiracism and racial reconciliation, we are called to provide education and resources to equip our denomination not only to war against the effects of the sin of racism but also to facilitate reconciliation through both workshops and materials. We offer several workshops: Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR), Widening the Circle (WTC) in Canada, Building Bridges, and Church Between Borders. In addition, we have a second-level antiracism workshop, the Dance of Racial Reconciliation: Level 2, which piloted successfully in 2014 and is now being offered to all our constituencies. In partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue and the CRC Office of Social Justice, we have created a new training/workshop resource called the Blanket Exercise. First developed in Canada and now contextualized for use in the United States, the Blanket Exercise offers an interactive telling of the shared history of Indigenous peoples of North America. This is a history from a perspective not often heard and which speaks to the profound urgency of reconciliation.

Other trainings offered by the Office of Race Relations include

1. Cultural Intelligence Building—a focus on four concrete skill areas: knowledge, motivation, interpretation, and behavior.
2. *Facing Racism*—a DVD featuring a series of six small-group studies that enables participants and their congregations to engage effectively with the issue of racism and reconciliation.
3. Leadership and Race—a training that develops and supports leadership that contributes to racial justice.
4. Restorative Practice Circles for Congregations—assists congregations in applying fair process in decision making, healing offenses, etc.
5. Cultural Sensitivity for Communicators—a new workshop to be offered in 2016.

Resources offered by the Office of Race Relations include the 1996 synodical study committee report *God's Diverse and Unified Family*, which provides the theological underpinnings for antiracism. It is available for purchase from Faith Alive Christian Resources (faithaliveresources.org) in English, Spanish, and Korean. We also offer several booklets in a series on ethnic minorities within the Christian

Reformed Church. In addition, we provide bulletins and bulletin covers for All Nations Heritage celebrations, designated for the first Sunday in October each year. The 2016 All Nations Heritage Sunday is October 2. Many of our materials are translated in several languages.

The Office of Race Relations also sponsors a Race Relations Scholarship Program for students who attend CRC-endorsed institutions. More information is available, including the application forms, on our website at www.crcna.org/race/scholarships.

We support the CRCNA Race Relations Team, which serves within the administrative offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Burlington, Ontario; and Palos Heights, Illinois, to encourage and work toward a racism-free environment within our workplaces.

The denomination continues to face the challenge of placing a high value on the dignity of all persons and on the inclusiveness of multiple cultures in life together as a church, as well as on the integrity of that identity. To that end, the ministry of Race Relations continues to lead and encourage throughout the whole church. Race Relations is committed to its statement of vision and its mandate to make the CRCNA a truly diverse and unified family of God. We continue to attribute all the progress and success in this ministry only to the grace and goodness of God. To this end, we covet your prayers. Please visit our website for more information on Race Relations matters at www.crcna.org/race and our Facebook page at facebook.com/crcracrelations.

I. Introduction

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. We help build communities in which the value of each person is honored and people are free to worship and grow free from abuse. Where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

II. Participation in the calling of the CRCNA

Abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a grave injustice that affects large numbers of people in and outside of our congregations. Safe Church Ministry is part of the collaborative work of JIMA (**justice, inclusion, mercy, and advocacy**). Through JIMA, Safe Church cosponsors training events in restorative practices for congregations. Increased use of restorative practices was an approved response by Synod 2010 to the report of the Abuse Victims Task Force. In addition, Safe Church team members in local churches have given of themselves to preventing the injustice of abuse and to seek justice for those who have experienced abuse. Safe Church team members walk alongside, providing a listening ear, offering support, and pointing to resources. New Safe Church team members are needed for this important work, and training is available (remote training is an option).

We are called to follow Jesus, not just individually but corporately, as we reflect our Lord in the way we treat one another. Safe Church continues to promote the *Circle of Grace* program, which involves children and youth in creating a safe environment for everyone. The program promotes a shared sense of God's presence in sacred, respectful relationships. Safe Church is exploring greater partnership in regional **faith formation** initiatives to discover ways to work together toward common goals, including living out our faith in community with one another.

Between 2010 and 2014, the number-one reason churches ended up in court had to do with sexual misconduct against a minor by a church leader. Abuse prevention must begin within the church and with its leadership. **Servant leadership** is antithetical to any kind of abuse. Leaders who follow Jesus' way do not use the power they've been given for selfish gain, to harm, to manipulate, or to diminish another. Instead, like Jesus, they humbly and sacrificially love and serve for the benefit of others in God's kingdom. Safe Church Ministry produces web-based resources for church leaders, including webinars, PowerPoint presentations, documents, and **worship** resources that fit with safe church themes. Safe Church Ministry has partnered with the Office of Pastor-Church Relations and World Renew to present a workshop for persons preparing for **global mission** assignments. The workshop, "Healthy Boundaries for Ministry Relationships," was well received and met a need expressed by World Renew in training these ministry candidates.

III. Connecting with churches

Safe Church Ministry accomplishes its work through Safe Church volunteer team members who act as resources and catalysts for abuse awareness, prevention, and response in their local context. Team members offer educational opportunities, assist with policy development, and provide consultation and support in situations involving abuse. A monthly electronic newsletter is sent to over 500

team members throughout the United States and Canada. In some places efforts are supported and coordinated by an active classis Safe Church team. Synod encourages the formation of such teams in each classis.

The fourth Sunday in September is designated as Abuse Awareness Sunday. In 2015 the featured topic was child sexual abuse. Safe Church produced a webinar on the topic, as well as an informational flyer/bulletin insert. Over 14,000 of these inserts were distributed by 90 congregations participating in Abuse Awareness Sunday in various ways in 2015.

The Safe Church staff consists of the director and an administrative specialist. In the past year staff conducted presentations and team training events in Michigan, Washington, Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, Ontario, and California. In addition we recorded over 920 interactions with congregations and individuals in 2015. We track these interactions with keywords: 203 interactions were related to abuse awareness; 343 were team focused; 106 had to do with a situation of abuse; 104 were about a policy concern or question; and 67 were related to the *Circle of Grace* program. 237 interactions took place with Canadians.

IV. Safe Church Advisory Committee

The director of Safe Church Ministry is assisted by a 6- to 8-person advisory committee. We seek to maintain diversity with regard to gender, nationality (Canada/U.S.), and race within our committee.

Social Justice and Hunger Action (Mr. Peter Vander Meulen, coordinator)

I. Introduction

The Office of Social Justice (OSJ) exists to help the CRCNA address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and oppression both around the world and in our own locales. It was created in 1995 to add the critical element of justice and advocacy to our overseas ministries.

Today OSJ works to develop a deeper understanding of and response to God's call to "let justice flow like a river" in our personal and communal lives and in the structures of our societies. It assists the CRC in responding to social justice issues identified by synod—such as refugee policy, immigration reform, indigenous justice, human trafficking, and peace building. OSJ works to educate CRC members and to encourage and support their engagement in social justice issues. OSJ is also occasionally involved in direct advocacy.

The Office of Social Justice acts in three ways: (1) through individuals or groups in congregations, (2) through organizing collaborative efforts with existing denominational agencies and institutions, and (3) through ecumenical efforts and partnerships. In short, our office aims to be a catalyst that energizes and organizes our denomination for more appropriate, effective, and efficient action on behalf of and with the poor and the oppressed.

II. What is social justice?

Doing justice is about making things right. It involves seeking restoration of our world and society through vocal, active, fearless love for others. It means being a part of Jesus' incredible ministry of reconciliation, restoring broken relationships, and making all things new.

Justice is the work we are already doing—renewed, revamped, refocused on the needs of the marginalized. It involves an understanding of the gospel that adds an important dimension to our community outreach, faith formation, missions, and worship. Seeking justice makes us always look for ways to follow Christ and his up-side-down kingdom, where the last are first, the least are important, the poor can meet their needs, and the oppressed can find justice.

III. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. In partnership with Micah Challenge and World Renew, we created a CRC version of the church education resource titled *Live Justly*. This resource is an in-depth scriptural and practical study to help people live faithfully in the areas of advocacy, prayer, consumption, generosity, creation care, and relationships. Both a Canadian and U.S. version are available from OSJ or World Renew.
2. Faithful to Synod 2010's call to welcome the stranger amid the challenges of a broken immigration system, we continue to equip believers to care for the stranger as an integral part of discipleship. Many churches have incorporated our education curriculum, *Church Between Borders*, into their education calendar.

B. *Servant leadership*

1. Our restorative justice work has transitioned to Kate Kooyman with strong collaboration with the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy collaborative working group (JIMA). We have begun several workshops and trainings in the United States to complement the highly effective workshops already happening in Canada. These workshops equip congregational leaders to respond to conflict in a holistic, restorative way.
2. *Do Justice*, a blog in partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue, is becoming a focal point for dialogue—a space for thoughtful voices in the denomination to express themselves on topics ranging from abortion to stories of hope and liberation. We have seen a dramatic rise in readership and in contributing authors from all points in the denomination.

C. *Global missions*

As an active participant of the Justice and Excellence in Short-Term Missions Think Tank, OSJ has coordinated a multiagency curriculum to help congregations do a better job of short-term missions and mission trips.

D. *Loving mercy and doing justice*

1. The world has more displaced persons and refugees than at any time since World War II. OSJ has led our denominational effort—particularly in the United States—to share in our global and Christian responsibility to care for, welcome, and resettle Iraqi and Syrian refugees and to resist misguided or cynical attempts to turn them away.
2. With the Office of Race Relations and Aboriginal Ministries Canada, a U.S. version of the Blanket Exercise is being disseminated. This is a workshop that literally walks participants through the history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States. It helps participants understand why reconciliation is needed and how to take steps toward reconciliation and new relationships.
3. Mr. Peter Vander Meulen, coordinator of OSJ, and Hizkias Assefa, a Mennonite peace facilitator, responded to a request from Nigeria to explore the possibilities of a peace process to resolve economic and religious conflicts in the nation's Middle Belt region. The CRC has done similar work successfully in the past in the Takum Peace Process.
4. In response to the Creation Stewardship report of Synod 2012, OSJ has provided significant resources on the church's responsibility to creation and to people who are most affected by environmental degradation. The *Climate Conversation: Kenya* video series provides an opportunity to get up close and personal with the issues of climate change and environmental stewardship. Our Climate Witness Project leveraged public attention on Pope Francis's encyclical and the historic agreements of COP 21 in Paris into a grassroots organizing effort that resulted in 200 Climate Witness Partners in 35 churches in the United States and Canada. This project will continue through 2017 and should result in increasing stewardship and advocacy activities on the creation/climate care fronts.

5. This year we launched an unusual campaign around abortion and life issues. For several months in the fall of 2015, we featured blog posts on our *Do Justice* site that dealt with multiple topics for which the affirmation of life as a sacred trust was the common denominator. Essays included topics as diverse as abortion, restoration and reconciliation, trafficking, and many others. All of this culminated in a set of worship and education resources for Sanctity of Life Sunday in January 2016.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

1. Our Advent devotional series, a joint effort by OSJ and World Renew, continues to be our most widely read and shared publication, with over 2,000 subscribers.
2. We offer fresh content for worship every week through *OSJ Prayers*, a weekly email featuring the most pressing justice issues around the world with written prayers appropriate for individuals, small groups, and congregations. *OSJ News* is our bimonthly newsletter for CRC justice activists. This popular newsletter is delivered electronically to over 600 recipients, and it supplies a unique Christian Reformed perspective on social justice news and events. To subscribe to any of our publications, visit www.crcjustice.org and click on “Newsletters.”
3. In our work on immigration we have developed several new worship resources. They can be found online along with our other worship resources at www.crcjustice.org.

IV. Connecting with churches—Our Journey (the Ministry Plan)

1. We provide focused training and leadership development through the Blanket Exercise, Church Between Borders, and restorative justice trainings. In the United States, Ecumenical Advocacy days in Washington, D.C., give us a chance for intergenerational experiences among those who attend from the CRC.
2. OSJ naturally engages younger generations, but this year we anticipate strong connections through our short-term missions curriculum, immigration workshops in bilingual and immersion schools, the many Sunday school classes and GEMS/Cadets groups sending cards for women and children in detention centers, growing vibrancy and readership of *Do Justice*, Ecumenical Advocacy days, our Climate Witness project, and our social media coverage of timely issues.
3. OSJ continues to partner with World Renew to equip churches to understand and seek justice. The Congregation Justice Mobilization (CJM) project is well into its ninth year with a shared full-time coordinator. Some of the many initiatives coming out of CJM include presentations on various timely issues, an expanded resource collection for small groups, and growing relationships with over 400 congregations. Our work with churches includes increasing congregations’ capacities to recognize the dynamic challenges faced by migrants and challenging CRC members to personally and publicly commit to take action to make their communities and nations better places to live for

immigrants. We also host resources to help churches and families respond to current hot-topics such as the Syrian refugee crisis and other current events.

4. We offer a wide variety of resources for leadership, ranging from consultations to online discussion guides to weekly prayer newsletters. The OSJ website (www.crcjustice.org) serves more than 2,000 visitors each month. In addition to providing news and advocacy opportunities, the site supplies practical resources and helpful information to pastors, deacons, social justice committees, students, and every CRC member who wants to live the call to do justice. OSJ also engages with over 3,000 subscribers on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest who are eager to learn, speak, and act as agents of social justice.

The Office of Social Justice, in collaboration with the agencies and institutions of the CRC, looks back with gratitude on a rewarding and productive year. We look forward to continuing to assist members of the CRC to become salt and light in the service of God's justice and mercy.

Urban Aboriginal Ministries

The work of Aboriginal Ministries in Canada has been maturing for nearly forty years. Especially in this past year when we as the CRC in Canada received an opportunity to be the only Protestant church to speak into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "Action for Reconciliation" held in Ottawa, this has been a momentous season showing promise of more to come.

The Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Edmonton, Alberta, are highly regarded by the communities they serve. Ministry participants value the dignity and respect they experience as they attend and participate in the programs and community activities.

- *Indigenous Family Centre* in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is celebrating more than 40 years of ministry. It continues to deepen its work in counseling services, contextualization of ministry, and developing a social enterprise project to manufacture moccasins.
- *Indian Metis Christian Fellowship* in Regina, Saskatchewan, provides a drop-in ministry and daily prayer circle. The ministry is known for its ability to contextualize the gospel and to deepen the understanding of the meaning of Aboriginal spirituality.
- *Edmonton Native Healing Centre* networks with local partners to carry out a variety of programs to help participants strengthen their capacities and build community.

Educating and mobilizing CRC members are the objectives of the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC).

- For the past nine years CAMC has produced bulletin covers and inserts and other worship resources for Aboriginal Sunday.
- The paintings *Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin: The Creator's Sacrifice* have traveled throughout Canada in the reForming Relationship tour and continue to create opportunities for dialogue and to inspire relationship building between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples.
- The Blanket Exercise is a workshop that illuminates the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. CAMC is working with the Centre for Public Dialogue, the Office of Social Justice, and the Office of Race Relations to train facilitators and extend the Blanket Exercise to churches across Canada and the United States.
- CAMC and the Centre for Public Dialogue have also collaborated on a new resource called *Living the 8th Fire*—a curriculum based on a CBC documentary series intended to deepen congregations' understanding of the call to indigenous justice and reconciliation.
- Tools for local churches to use in light of this kind of ministry continue to expand. The Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC) has put together a Month of Prayer guide that focuses on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Each week of prayer follows the pattern of the 7 Sacred Teachings found in Indigenous cultures (Love, Honesty, Humility, Wisdom, Respect, Courage, and Truth). This toolkit is a great prayer resource for individuals, families, small groups, and churches. Find it at www.crcna.org/Canada/aboriginal-ministry.

For more information about CAMC and its work, please contact Ms. Shannon Perez at camc@crcna.org or visit our toolkit website: aboriginalministry.wordpress.com/.

For more information about Urban Aboriginal Ministries, please contact the directors:

- Edmonton Native Healing Centre—Harold Roscher, hroscher@e-nhc.org
- Indian Metis Christian Fellowship, Regina—Bert Adema, imcf.bertadema@sasktel.net
- Indigenous Family Centre, Winnipeg—Michele Visser, mvisser@crcna.org

World Renew

I. Introduction

A. *Mandate*

In 1962 the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) approved the formation of the denomination's diaconal agency. Its mandate is to "minister in the name of our Lord to those distressed by reason of the violence of nature, the carnage of war, or other calamities of life, and to relieve the suffering of the needy in the world." In its essence and existence, World Renew makes every effort to channel justice and mercy, flowing from God and his church worldwide, to bring healing among the nations.

B. *Mission and ministry*

Today, as the diaconal agency of the Christian Reformed denomination, World Renew continues to fulfill this mandate, reaching out in Christ's name to people who are poor, hungry, and affected by disaster and injustice around the world. In doing so, World Renew holds to its mission "to engage God's people in redeeming resources and developing gifts in collaborative activities of love, mercy, justice, and compassion" in communities around the world. This ministry addresses the needs of the whole person—physical and spiritual—and recognizes each person as a reflection of the image of God.

To inspire hope in communities where chronic poverty crushes both body and soul is nothing short of miraculous. And yet through prayers, involvement, and support for World Renew in 2015, hope was inspired in 1,841 communities among 838,298 people who live in 40 countries.

World Renew does not receive ministry shares from the CRC but depends, in faith, on the generosity and sacrifice of God's people to carry out compassionate ministry in impoverished communities. Through its membership in international alliances, World Renew leveraged the \$22 million in gifts it received from individuals and churches into \$34.8 million in ministry. World Renew's ministry was supported by 3,211 volunteers who donated 254,569 hours—equivalent to the work of 122 full-time employees for one year.

World Renew's holistic approach to its mandate, mission, and ministry contributes to each of the five denominational callings of the CRC: faith formation, servant leadership, global missions, justice and mercy, and gospel proclamation and worship. Because of the integrated nature of World Renew's ministry to the whole person, much of this work flows into more than one of the Five Callings even as it focuses primarily on justice and mercy. World Renew's work is not only integrated; it is collaborative—it involves working with Christian partners to train leaders and develop biblically based community values that strengthen the message of the local church in North America and around the world.

World Renew can reflect on 2015 with deep gratitude for the ways in which God is at work in his people. World Renew seeks to empower people in poverty to recognize their God-given dignity and shake off the bonds that keep them poor. In 2015, the light of Christ shone brightly in the places where World Renew had a presence. Farmers in Mali now grow more crops to feed their families. Women and babies are surviving childbirth in Bangladesh. Families displaced by war and famine have food, water, and shelter. Tanzanian teens are learning job skills that equip them to leave the sex trade.

World Renew can also look forward with perseverance inspired by hope. We pray that in the days ahead the church worldwide will continue to grow in both local and global communities, that justice for people living in extreme poverty will prevail, and that all who suffer hunger and want will have the opportunity to build on their resilience.

For the privilege of bearing witness to God's goodness in the lives of people who are hungry, thirsty, sick, abused, oppressed, and persecuted, we give thanks.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. North America

a. Church and family education

World Renew produces educational curriculum and intergenerational resources for use by both congregations and families. There are four World Renew church offerings designated by synod: World Hunger, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Disaster Response Services (DRS) Sunday. These offerings give churches the chance to pray for, learn about, and support World Renew's work around the world. The annual World Hunger Campaign includes a family devotional guide, an adult devotional guide, the Peter Fish activity for younger children, and a newly developed Feed Your Fish® app to connect with a new generation. In 2015 World Renew held its first church campaign for maternal and child health, which included material such as bulletin inserts, a video, and a leader's guide to help churches pray for and support programs aimed at improving the health and nutrition of pregnant women and young children. Sunday school teachers and parents can also use children's projects such as *Traveling Our Father's World* to teach the diaconal values of serving and loving our neighbors.

World Renew's Free A Family® program also contributes to faith formation in families and in individual hearts. In 2015 more than 2,700 families and individuals shared from their material blessings to help free more than 4,200 families from poverty. Over \$1.1 million was raised for World Renew's poverty alleviation programs through Free A Family®. The cost of this efficient, effective program is less than 2 cents per dollar raised.

b. Christian schools

World Renew has completed research on how best to address unmet educational needs among more than 400 North American Christian schools in both curriculum and student service.

A sample of Christian Schools International (CSI) elementary, middle, and high school staff participated in interviews. The results revealed that there are opportunities for World Renew to be more present in Christian elementary and high schools in both the U.S. and Canada, by providing requested educational assistance in curriculum content and potential service opportunities. These opportunities will be facilitated through structured relationships, using the strengths and experience of World Renew and its staff to meet the schools' educational needs with respect to both learning about disaster response and development and acting on this learning. These efforts represent a major step toward reinvigorating World Renew's historic relationship with CSI schools across North America.

c. Youth and young adults

World Renew continues to seek out opportunities to engage youth and young people in poverty and justice ministry and mission. In 2015 these opportunities included involvement in youth-centered events, global volunteer relationships, and a variety of internships. World Renew engaged with 4,262 youth and young adults—over four times the goal set for 2015.

One youth engagement highlight from 2015 was the issuing of an award to a group of Ontario high school students by the Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC). In celebration of the 25th anniversary of International Development Week (Feb. 1-7, 2015), OCIC recognized nine Ontario youth as Global Changemaker Youth Ambassadors for their contribution to international cooperation and social justice. Five of these nominees were part of a group called Let Kids Be Kids, which was formed to raise funds for World Renew’s adolescent health and rights work in Senegal and Nigeria. These programs help young people and their families learn how to break the cycle of poverty and address critical issues that affect their lives, including child labor, human trafficking, and poverty. The five students attended the All Ontario Youth Convention six years ago and were inspired by what they heard about World Renew’s programs. They then began organizing small fundraising events, such as bake sales and car washes, to raise money for World Renew. The students’ Let Kids Be Kids initiative began to grow and soon included 15 members. The group set a goal of raising \$15,000 by their high school graduation in June 2015. These students raised a grand total of \$21,000 for World Renew’s adolescent health and rights programs in Senegal and Nigeria—an amount that was matched threefold through a World Renew funding commitment from the Canadian government.

2. International volunteer opportunities

World Renew provided individuals with a wide variety of international volunteer opportunities in 2015. The volunteers’ experiences yielded powerful testimonies of faith formation in the context of global ministry. As men and women used their time and skills to serve alongside God’s children in a country or community other than their own, they enlarged their understanding of what it means to be a global citizen and discovered new ways to listen for God’s affirmation and direction.

Words of reflection from the travel blog of Trent Kischer, a Global Volunteer Program participant involved in World Renew’s agriculture programs in Uganda, provide one glimpse of such formation taking place:

One of the things that stood out to me during my time in Uganda was the importance of relationships in development work. Relationships need to be developed at every level of interaction for the work to progress smoothly and become successful.

I am starting to see that when things don’t go as planned, there is usually a good reason. God wants to show us or teach us something so that we will trust him more—to show us that he is in control. Giving up control is not easy, but it is rewarding when you see God work out all of the details in a given situation. It is humbling when something bears fruit that was not part of our original game plan.

We need to trust God in everything, and look to him for direction. We need to start asking if our plans match up with his, and stop telling him what the plan is. Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many are the plans in the mind of man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.”

Once my time in Uganda is up, I do not know where I will be or what I will be doing, But I am praying that God will open doors that give me opportunities to continue in this work and use the experiences and skills he has taught me here.

B. Servant leadership

As the corporate expression of the office of deacon in the body of Christ, World Renew has the task of addressing the challenges of a hurting world. This involves raising up and equipping servant leaders to develop and exercise their gifts in ways that enhance their own faith walk as they minister in their community, nation, and world. Servant leadership is at the heart of World Renew’s activities and is integral to the CRC’s callings of faith formation, global mission, justice and mercy, and gospel proclamation and worship.

1. Global Volunteer Program

World Renew’s Global Volunteer Program offers collaborative learning opportunities for individuals with a heart to serve others through international internships and long-term volunteer placements. This includes engaging groups in church partnership opportunities, discovery tours, intergenerational church-based work teams, and college teams and semester programs, as well as youth and young adult service opportunities in North America and around the globe.

Last year, the Global Volunteer Program developed a new opportunity for highly skilled volunteers called the Global Associate Program. The program attracts seasoned professionals who share their expertise in agriculture, finance, management, and technical and professional skills. Their involvement helps build the capacity of partner groups, staff, and community leaders and contributes to World Renew’s worldwide strategic goals.

Overall World Renew’s Global Volunteer Program matched 335 non-disaster volunteers with opportunities to serve, learn, and grow last year. This included 30 intergenerational groups, 8 pastors, 161 young adults, and 35 youth. In total, these volunteers donated 39,936 hours of their time to World Renew’s ministry.

2. Disaster Response volunteer programs

a. International Relief Managers

In 2015, World Renew’s International Disaster Response Team placed nine International Relief Manager (IRM) teams in six countries. These volunteers assist with implementing and managing World Renew’s disaster response efforts in communities of severe drought, famine, flooding, and displacement due to civil unrest. The IRMs worked in Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Zambia, and they gave 5,192 hours of their time to this work—equivalent to that of 2.5 full-time workers for a year.

World Renew's international disaster responses include food distributions to meet emergency needs, preventative and educational health initiatives in response to the Ebola crisis, distributions of seeds and tools to help families begin to grow their own crops, and food-for-work projects that offer capable families food vouchers in exchange for community restoration and improvement projects, such as building roads and accessing water sources.

b. Disaster Response Services (DRS) in North America

World Renew's Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers give of their time and talents to help clear debris, assess needs, and rebuild homes after disasters strike in North America. More than 2,800 DRS volunteers, including 470-plus young people, provided 18,500 low-income, elderly, or disabled disaster survivors with labor, support, and resources to help them recover from a flood, wildfire, tornado, or hurricane in 2015. World Renew DRS volunteers include general and skilled laborers, building estimators, construction supervisors, site managers, and regional project and area managers.

World Renew DRS volunteers gave 217,000 hours of their time in 48 disaster-affected communities in North America, repairing and rebuilding 423 homes, helping 132 families with clean-up and debris removal, contacting and assessing 5,500 households, providing training, and building the capacity of local long-term recovery groups.

World Renew DRS volunteers represented more than 570 different churches from 25 different denominations in 2015, in addition to individuals from the CRC and the Reformed Church in America, which partners with World Renew DRS in domestic disaster response.

3. International development programs

One of the strengths of World Renew's international development programs is that they are implemented through servant leaders from Christian partner groups and churches in local communities. World Renew works to empower its partners so that they are able to lead development in their communities. In southern Africa and other locations where Christian mission work has historically focused on evangelism and handouts, these partners must step back and unlearn dependency-creating behaviors while also moving forward to mobilize local congregations to become catalysts for change and for more just systems in their own communities.

C. *Global missions*

World Renew's main focus of responding to poverty, injustice, hunger, and disaster, through community-based programming, contributes to each of the CRC's ministry callings, involving global missions, faith formation, servant leadership, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship in wide variety.

One of the important principles of community development, disaster response, and even constituent engagement that World Renew tries to follow is to see God at work in the story of people's lives and in the context of the communities we work in. Our task is now seen as understanding how God is already present in places of brokenness so that we can work with him to continue to encourage his intended new story of hope, the flourishing of life, and the reconciling

of relationships. World Renew joins with local churches and organizations in these places to grow and strengthen partners for ministry.

World Renew's work in the village of Kikubwa, Tanzania, is a great example of local-church-initiated change through assets-based development. For many years, Kikubwa was known as a place of darkness and hardship in rural Tanzania. Families struggled as a result of extreme poverty, severe unemployment, low education rates, and poor health care. What's more, it was a community where many people practiced witchcraft.

World Renew's local partner, the Mara and Ukerewe Diocese African Inland Church of Tanzania (AICT-MUD), began its work by coming alongside community members to determine their assets and resources. Based on these findings, AICT-MUD began trainings in health and income generation in Kikubwa. This led to the development of 19 small, community groups of 120 people. Each community group was given a different purpose, such as specializing in growing and selling herbal medicines, farming, widow care, and promoting the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Together, group members defined their own vision and developed action plans for success.

Christopher Wambura is just one of the community group members whose life has been transformed through this program and the ministry of the local church. Before getting involved in the program, Christopher and his family members were living in extreme poverty. He believed those who told him that brewing alcohol was the only method he could use to earn a living. One day Christopher's best friend, Joash, started to talk to him about church, and about the AICT-MUD village savings and loan group in the village. Christopher could see firsthand the physical, social, and spiritual transformation occurring in his best friend. Eventually Christopher decided to join the group himself. Through this group, Christopher received training on village savings loans and learned how to make natural medicine. Joash and the others also had the opportunity to tell him about God's love and what it meant to follow him. Christopher has become a Christian and a respected leader in the church as well as in his community work. He has also witnessed relationships in his community changing for the better.

D. Loving mercy and doing justice

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) formally acknowledges mercy and justice as an integral part of its mission and vision. In World Renew's global ministry of poverty alleviation and disaster response, justice and mercy are inseparable for achieving the *shalom* that God intended for all relationships between people and God, their neighbors, and creation. World Renew's mandate and mission recognizes that it is the power of God's mercy and justice that sustains motivation and movement for changing the story of a suffering and broken world to something better. He uses us and his church worldwide to do so.

1. International community development

In 2015, World Renew touched the lives of 838,298 people in 1,841 impoverished communities around the world through community-based programs in agriculture, health, literacy, income earning, and leadership training. These communities, urban and rural, are located in some of the world's poorest countries where basic services like health, education, employment, and food security are negligible or out of reach.

World Renew's development programs are carried out in communities in collaboration with Christian agencies and organizations that benefit from structural, board, and financial training from World Renew as well as leadership development and Bible-based values training that strengthen the preaching of the gospel at the local church level. These Christian partners reach out into their communities with the whole gospel—proclaiming the Word, caring for those who are poor and in distress and promoting active citizenship that promotes more just systems.

Seventy-five percent of the world's poorest people are farmers. One-third of the farmable land in eastern Africa is so degraded that it is difficult or impossible for subsistence farmers to feed their families from it. In addition, the size of the harvests the farmers can reap from the land shrinks each year. In 2015, World Renew worked alongside partner organizations to expand agriculture programs in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania with a five-year, \$14 million grant from the Canadian government. This Conservation Agriculture Program of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank involves 14 local organizations and 120,000 subsistence farmers who are now better able to rely on the land to support their families. The farmers address soil infertility and the need to adapt to the changing climate. New agriculture techniques help them increase their harvests and their food security at the household level. The goal is to improve their profitability so that they can rely on the soil to withstand more frequent droughts.

World Renew's agriculture programs equip farmers to increase production while better managing their soil and water resources so that farmers can diversify their crops for a more balanced diet and earn income to pay school fees. James, a husband and father in Wabiroch, Uganda, is one example of a farmer who has been strengthened through these programs. He struggled to feed his family before he joined a farmer field school through a World Renew partner, the Church of Uganda. James and his neighbors learned to grow produce using cover crops that help control weeds, retain moisture, and improve the soil. They also started to save money in their group savings fund and to raise poultry and bees. James took apriary management training and received a loan to buy two beehives. He and his wife then invested their profit in three more hives. Because James is part of a farmer's group, there is less risk in trying these new techniques, and lasting change can take root in their lives and community.

World Renew again received recognition in 2015 from government and public health networks in North America for high-quality work in maternal and child health. Between 2011 and 2014, World Renew addressed the health and nutrition needs of mothers and babies in Bangladesh and Malawi through a program that equips and mobilizes health volunteers. World Renew implemented \$1.15 million of health programming in this initiative, in part through your gifts and through Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies events. In Malawi, World Renew focused on malnutrition and malaria. Partner staff collaborated with officials and clinics to train 480 volunteers to provide at-home counseling to pregnant women about prenatal and newborn care, nutrition, family planning, safe delivery, and breastfeeding. In Bangladesh, World Renew trained 200 volunteers. Communities also set up health funds to help the poorest families pay for transportation and treatment in emergencies.

World Renew programs in protecting adolescent health and rights blessed and changed the lives of youth in Senegal and Nigeria in 2015. Two years ago World Renew and two partners began working on Protecting Adolescent Health and Rights, a five-year program focusing on young people, their families, and local leaders. It provides youth with training in reproductive health, relationships, communication skills, their right to security, and vocational skills. Parents, school administrators, and community leaders also engage in discussion and planning about protecting adolescents from abuse and supporting good choices. The program is benefiting 5,000 young adults in 71 impoverished communities in Nigeria and Senegal. Their parents, guardians, and religious and community leaders are involved in creating policies and public events that address exploitation and abuse to bring about large-scale change. This program will continue through 2018.

In the communities where World Renew works, there have been many opportunities to find the courage to serve others during times of unrest. In 2015 extremist sympathizers and others made a well-planned attack in several communities where World Renew works. Property, buildings, schools, and homes were ransacked, looted, and burned. In all, dozens of churches, homes, schools, an orphanage, and a mission office were damaged or destroyed, including two World Renew partner churches. People fled for their lives with only the clothes on their backs. The response of some Muslim neighbors who came to the assistance of their Christian friends communicated a heart of love in the midst of this violence. In the aftermath, World Renew was instrumental in organizing an immediate response and in helping people begin the healing process and promote forgiveness and reconciliation by training facilitators and leading workshops with local partners and churches.

2. Disaster Response

a. International Disaster Response

World Renew's International Disaster Response Team demonstrated Christ's love in concrete ways in response to some of the many disasters that threatened people in 2015. Thanks to the prayers and generosity of our churches and supporters, World Renew responded, providing hope with immediate assistance and by building the resilience of communities to face future disasters.

In 2015, World Renew's immediate and long-term international disaster response activities totaled \$14,254,712 (U.S.) and served 529,946 people in 30 countries (not including the United States and Canada).

Since 2012, World Renew has actively responded in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon with vital food assistance and the distribution of hygiene kits, kitchen kits, and emergency heaters to thousands of displaced families.

After witnessing unimaginable horror in Syria, Rania, her husband, Yousef, and their children ran for their lives to Lebanon, where Yousef found work to pay only for their small apartment. They were very appreciative of food vouchers from World Renew that helped them meet their family's basic needs.

In Iraq, World Renew's International Disaster Response program provided food, rent assistance, and medical care to persecuted groups who were internally displaced by extremist groups. World Renew provided medical

assistance to more than 20,000 individuals at the Sharya displacement camp in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

When the worst earthquake in eighty years struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, twelve-year-old Dawa was playing outside. Although his home collapsed, Dawa and his family were unharmed. World Renew responded immediately, thanks to the generosity of our churches and supporters. Dawa's family and many other affected families were grateful to receive food, shelter tarps, and hygiene kits from World Renew. In 2016 World Renew will help to provide communities with improved water sources, latrines, and the construction of earthquake-resistant homes. This response is expected to continue until 2017.

Typhoon Haiyan caused the most destructive disaster of 2013, affecting 14 million people in the Philippines. A total of 43,766 affected people who were part of World Renew's shelter, livelihoods, and psychosocial programs benefited from this program until its conclusion in 2015. World Renew constructed homes for nearly 1,400 families and built 320 latrines on three islands of the Philippines. A total of 182 community volunteer counselors were trained in recognizing and responding to trauma. The counselors worked with 3,000 community members in healing trauma. A total of 590 fishing families were able to return to their livelihood of fishing and improve their economic stability. An intensive livelihoods-rebuilding program in northern Iloilo province will continue until 2018. This was again World Renew's largest international disaster intervention in 2015.

The threat of Ebola made simple human contact a life or death interaction in West Africa. Despite the risk, health workers responded courageously. World Renew trained these heroic volunteers in Ebola prevention and supplied medicine, protective equipment, and hygiene kits.

"There was no hope left here until World Renew brought health education and hygiene items to help us prevent Ebola," said one chief. In Sierra Leone, families released from treatment centers received food and household supplies to help them restart their lives. World Renew is also providing food assistance to families who foster orphaned children.

In Madagascar, World Renew responded to communities affected by storms, and in South Sudan we provided agricultural assistance for post-conflict peacebuilding. Farmers in Madagascar reaped bumper harvests after losing everything in a cyclone. Farmers in South Sudan learned about improved farming, thanks to World Renew's farmer fairs. In the midst of turmoil and conflict, your support for World Renew inspired hope and transformation.

World Renew's active membership with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank contributed to food assistance and food security projects in 39 countries last year, reaching 1.16 million people through 125 projects. This included over \$7.9 million in programming for World Renew projects.

b. Disaster Response Services (DRS) in North America

In 2015 World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) touched the lives of nearly 18,500 people in 48 communities throughout the United States and Canada. The work was accomplished by trained, dedicated volunteers from Christian Reformed, Reformed, and other denominations who gave their time, energy, and talent to people in need. This servant-hearted

effort is a witness to the faith and commitment of God's people to reach out in his name.

World Renew DRS volunteers helped fifteen communities with organizational capacity-building that provides training in carrying out disaster recovery work. These volunteers worked closely with local long-term recovery groups explaining best practices in recovery, networking with national and federal response organizations, and offering World Renew DRS services.

Through unmet needs assessments in disaster-affected communities, volunteers were able to identify the disaster-related emotional, physical, household, and financial needs of thousands of vulnerable residents. These needs are prioritized, and cases involving urgent needs, such as unsafe living conditions, are immediately delegated to case workers who expedite the response. These assessments also prepare communities for reconstruction and ensure that vulnerable residents are taken care of.

Grounded in a commitment to justice and peace, World Renew is devoted to helping homeowners who face significant barriers in recovering from disasters in North America. As part of the Christian call to be agents of change in the world, World Renew DRS is working to restore health and well-being in disaster zones by committing to using their hands and hearts as part of the larger restoration of humanity and creation.

3. Mobilizing churches for justice

As a CRC agency, World Renew seeks to mobilize congregations to faithfully and effectively pursue "God's justice and peace in every area of life."

a. North America

In 2015, 223 North American churches were involved in addressing justice issues in relation to climate adaptation, peace-building, and refugee policies.

Believing that more can be accomplished together than independently, World Renew participates in the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy (JIMA) collaborative working group along with the CRC agencies and congregational services ministries whose mission encompasses these four areas. As the diaconal arm of the CRC, World Renew provided leadership in the formative stages of the working group and continued to function as a participating member in 2015.

b. Justice mobilization in Canada

In Canada, World Renew serves on the JIMA working group with Christian Reformed World Missions, Diaconal Ministries Canada, the Office of Race Relations, the Office of Social Justice, and the Centre for Public Dialogue. Through this work, churches are organizing forums for learning about justice issues and using education tools and opportunities for justice action to increase their capacity to connect meaningfully with diverse neighborhoods, locally and internationally. Forums were held in various locations throughout Canada in 2015, and a video of the drama presentation "Just Faith" was made available.

In 2015, World Renew, with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, began an advocacy campaign that encourages the Canadian government to take action to provide support for small-scale farmers in the developing world.

This campaign is called the Good Soil Campaign, and it included workshops at Redeemer University and at the Day of Encouragement in Truro, Nova Scotia (in collaboration with Diaconal Ministries Canada).

World Renew is one of the private organizations in Canada that has a refugee sponsorship agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Each year Christian Reformed congregations and individuals sponsor refugees and refugee families who have fled persecution in their home country. 2015 was an exceptionally busy year for the Canadian Refugee Office, particularly after early September, when a photograph of a Syrian boy gathered international media attention. One hundred ten CRCs from across Canada have been in dialogue with World Renew's Refugee Office, many of which are new to sponsorship and settlement. The office has also been involved with advocacy activities, working in collaboration with the Centre for Public Dialogue, the CRC Office of Social Justice, and Diaconal Ministries Canada. The "Journey with Me" refugee workshop has been very helpful as a teaching tool for churches. By the end of December 2015, approximately 117 refugees had arrived in Canada, facilitated by World Renew.

c. Justice mobilization in the United States

U.S. Congregational Justice Mobilization (CJM) has a four-part strategy: partnering, raising awareness, taking groups deeper with adult dialogue education, and organizing and mobilizing advocates for policy change. World Renew's CJM efforts in the U.S. are implemented in partnership with the CRC Office of Social Justice.

The *Live Justly* small group study is available to congregations and has currently sold over 500 copies. World Renew, in partnership with Micah Challenge U.S., has developed an in-depth scriptural and practical study on advocacy, prayer, consumption, generosity, creation care, and relationships. Currently there is a World Renew version of this group study available in the United States. A Canadian version of this study is being developed.

In the time leading up to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in Paris, France, the Christian Reformed Church implemented a Climate Witness Project, encouraging congregations to think about and discuss the challenges posed by climate change and to follow the global conversation on the topic. On Earth Day 2015 (April 22) World Renew launched *Climate Conversation: Kenya*, a series of four short videos produced by the CRC Office of Social Justice and World Renew. These videos combine on-the-ground footage and interviews from Kenya with study materials to help groups and individuals not only hear the stories of Kenyan Christians but to begin to think about how they can respond. This video was shown at COP21 by a World Renew staff member who attended along with delegates from other CRC ministries.

d. International justice

Each year, World Renew makes grant funding available to address justice issues that are uncovered as our programs and partners develop on the field. The Peace-Building and Justice Fund helps create opportunities for training and education—often through church networks—about human rights to meet needs that arise while working in local communities. In 2015, for example, peace-building and justice projects that received up to \$5,000

in grant money were located in the Dominican Republic, Philippines, India, and Guatemala. The projects addressed trafficking, discrimination, abuse, and corruption.

In rural indigenous communities in Guatemala, women are oppressed and often experience physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence. With a grant from the Peace-Building and Justice Fund, a World Renew partner, Asociación de Desarrollo Integral Polochic (ADIP), worked with the Guatemalan Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women to train 150 people from five rural communities in human rights and gender justice. This human rights and gender justice training, offered through local churches, included information about women's legal and human rights, confronting discrimination and abuse, healthy marriage and family relationships, and community conflict resolution. By building up local partners and congregations, the project confronted gender violence and helped save women's lives by building healthier relationships and communities.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

World Renew's integrated programs in development and disaster response represent the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, ministering to those in need with practical interventions in community development, justice education, and disaster response that point to the saving grace of his death and resurrection. In contexts where the gospel can be freely preached, World Renew openly integrates the Christian faith into its work in communities that are poor or affected by disaster. In contexts where Christianity is not recognized or welcomed, World Renew establishes common ground through values training that is based in Christian faith, often bringing the first glimpse of the gospel into hearts, homes, and communities where the darkness of hopelessness and spiritual poverty reign.

By working with churches and partners around the world, World Renew strengthens both local churches and their denominational structures through essential training that increases ministry capacity and the proclamation of the gospel. World Renew works collaboratively with Christian Reformed World Missions throughout the CRC's ministry in global missions, opening the door to greater Christian ministry presence through development and disaster response programming.

World Renew partners with Timothy Leadership Training Institute on every continent where it works to integrate training for deacons, elders, pastors, and community leaders in Christian stewardship, biblical teaching, pastoral care, and teaching the Christian faith.

In Uganda, for example, World Renew works alongside two church denominations to meet the needs of people in poverty and to build up communities. These partners are the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) and the Church of Uganda (COU). In addition to offering programs in the area of food security, World Renew staff integrate a development mindset into the partners' vision for ministry in their communities. Pastors and churches are mentored and trained using Timothy Leadership Training (TLT), which equips pastors and church leaders to apply God's Word to their ministries in practical ways. This training is especially helpful for those leaders who have not been able to attend a Bible college.

Mr. Baker, a TLT graduate, is an example of a leader who is changing lives for the better by putting his training into action in a practical yet powerful way.

He noticed that it is common for girls in Uganda to drop out of school when they start menstruating, since most girls cannot afford to buy feminine hygiene supplies. Some girls use old rags or banana fibers as sanitary pads, but they find that they cannot get to the latrine frequently enough to keep from getting blood on their clothes. To avoid being embarrassed or teased by other children, girls drop out of school—a move that has a great impact on their future. As one of his TLT action plans, he came up with a way to make reusable menstrual pads out of cloth so that more girls could stay in school. His story is an impressive example of a TLT student who identified a need, responded to that need, and then worked hard to pass his learning on to others in the community in a practical way.

In one West Africa town where World Renew is at work through local partners, a water pump project became an opportunity for gospel proclamation. The initial project plan was for a new pump to be installed in the well in the town pastor's compound—a pump that would make it easy for the pastor's wife and children to draw water. The first attempt failed completely. Through prayer and hard work, a better pump was designed, and a new experimental pump model was installed. On the first working day of the pump, a long line of people formed. Water was pumped from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 a.m. People filled 600 jerry cans. After that, whenever the town's water was out, large crowds would gather at the pastor's door. Eventually a pipe cracked from the excessive use. A local water company worker came to fix it for the pastor, free of charge. "You helped us a lot when we were having problems," he said. Other neighbors who might not normally set foot on property belonging to Christians also expressed deep gratitude. When the pastor, who could have used extra income, was asked if he charged for the water, he said happily, "Not at all. It's just another way we can preach the gospel of living water."

III. Connecting with churches: Our Journey

A. World Renew church relations program

1. Offerings

Because World Renew does not receive CRC ministry shares, CRC congregations hold four designated offerings for World Renew during the church year. In 2015, these synodically approved Sundays included the World Hunger Campaign, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and DRS Sunday. World Renew also recommends the additional offerings of Refugee Sunday (held only in Canada), Maternal and Child Health, FRB Sunday, and CFGB Sunday. Since synod approved World Renew's hunger and poverty focus in 1979, the annual World Hunger Campaign has been well received by Christian Reformed and other churches, involving congregations in worship, family and individual devotions, giving, and learning about a Christian response to global poverty.

DRS Sunday involved numerous churches in the United States and Canada and benefited from the support of DRS volunteers in celebration of this part of World Renew's ministry. CFGB Sunday highlighted the work of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, of which World Renew is a major member. Likewise, FRB Sunday highlighted the work of Foods Resource Bank, of which World Renew is also a member. World Renew's Annual Gift Catalog and its Free a Family® programs are both major fundraising and learning tools.

In 2015 World Renew moved to a maternal and child health focus as field and partner staff folded HIV and AIDS programming into larger primary

health care efforts. Each year, CRC members give regularly and generously in each of these offerings, providing key funding for World Renew's development, disaster response, and justice programs in communities of poverty around the world. World Renew is deeply grateful for the faithful support, involvement, and prayers of CRCs and their members.

2. Classical support

In relating to churches, World Renew gives close support and encouragement to its board delegates and their efforts as World Renew representatives in their classes. The goal of these ambassadors is to increase the visibility of World Renew in CRC congregations by equipping classical delegates with ideas, connections, and information. World Renew also provides stated clerks of classes with a report for classical agendas. Delegates receive both a report and talking points for their presentations.

World Renew Church Relations continues to encourage more individuals in their churches to become engaged in the work of World Renew. These ambassadors are resourced well and encouraged frequently. Recent efforts have resulted in an increased number of ambassadors taking a lead in organizing World Renew campaigns in their churches. Church Relations additionally provided 170 ambassadors and over 50 delegates with a monthly communication called the Ambassador Dispatch, a one-page email offering suggestions and encouragement. The ambassador program also has a presence on social media to connect churches and congregants with the work of World Renew online.

In 2015 a major campaign called the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Baby Shower program helped fund World Renew's international maternal health programs around the world. When it became clear that World Renew might not make a \$230,000 goal successfully, one volunteer offered to call every CRC in Canada to encourage them to hold a baby shower. As a result, World Renew surpassed its goal by \$10,000.

3. Ministry Partner Program

World Renew's Ministry Partner Program (MPP) structurally connects congregations to various countries where World Renew operates. In 2015, there were about 250 partnerships in place between CRCs and the developing countries where World Renew program staff are working. One consistent goal of these church and country partnerships is a growing understanding between the partners. Another key element of the MPP program is a personal connection between field staff and specific North American CRCs. During 2015 ten field staff persons were in North America to speak with churches, church groups, schools, and other groups and individuals.

4. Connections

Field staff on deputation, home office staff, and board members made presentations in congregations, schools, small groups, and colleges and universities during 2015. (Board members included young adult university board members-at-large who represent five Christian Reformed and Reformed universities and colleges across North America.) An increasing number of constituents in Canada also mobilized to connect with their elected federal representatives through the Good Soil Campaign advocacy opportunity.

5. Events

World Renew's Church Relations staff managed an increasing number of events to engage CRC constituents in the work of World Renew in 2015, including two week-long Sea to Sea bicycling tours in Ontario and Alberta. A U.S. ride will occur in Iowa in 2016 and there will be a major bicoastal event in 2017.

World Renew also sponsored seven conferences in the United States and Canada last year, which included an ongoing partnership with the All Ontario Youth Convention. World Renew had a presence at the Faith and International Development Conference at Calvin College, the Annual Christian Community Development Association West Michigan Regional Conference (CCDA), the CCDA National Conference, the *Live It!* Youth Unlimited Conference, the Inhabit Conference in Seattle, the Wild Goose Festival in North Carolina, the West Michigan Missions Forum, MissionFest, the Foods Resource Bank annual meeting, and about 30 more. World Renew's presence at these events often included a display and the delivery of a workshop, learning session, or sponsorship lunch. The goal of these efforts is to build a wider ecclesiastical base and increase World Renew's visibility within Christian Reformed churches.

6. Other resources

World Renew Church Relations distributed three issues of a 16-page journal called *Through the Dust* to CRC congregations and World Renew delegates and ambassadors in 2015. This valuable resource contains World Renew ministry highlights, an event calendar, and stories from the field—and it introduces new videos, offering materials, study guides, and children's projects to church staff and lay leaders. The resource also equips church leadership with information and knowledge for making decisions regarding their congregations.

B. *Communities First Association*

World Renew supports the work of Communities First Association (CFA) in U.S. development programs. Communities First Association holds biannual gatherings that draw a diverse group of practitioners, coaches, and Christian community development enthusiasts from across North America. What connects them is the passion to engage in God's redemptive work in their contexts using Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

2015's Fall Gathering featured the first intake process for the Community Advancement Coaches (CAC) fast-track process. Four new CACs began their journey with CFA, and the organization plans to walk side by side with eight more new coaches this spring. CFA has a rigorous vetting process for candidates who are skilled practitioners in the work of faith-based ABCD and are eager to become a part of this professional development network.

CFA is quickly becoming the place where community developers from across the U.S. come to receive a nationally recognized ABCD certification. The training is designed not only for the experienced developer but also for those who are newer to ABCD concepts and principles. It focuses on the holistic development of servant leaders who have been called to work with local churches, and of education leaders in North American communities who want to uncover God's gifts and presence there.

IV. Board matters

An important support to World Renew's ministry is its board. The primary function of the board is to set World Renew's vision and mission and to encourage and track progress in these regards.

World Renew's governance structure is made up of delegates from each CRC classis and up to 27 members-at-large, who together constitute the Board of Delegates of World Renew. The delegates serve as a vital communication link with classes and churches. They select seven-member national boards for both the United States and Canada. The two boards together form the fourteen-member Joint Ministry Council, which provides governance for World Renew as a whole.

Board of Directors of World Renew-Canada

Mr. John DeGroot, president

Mr. Raymond Prins, vice president

Ms. Marguerite Ridder, secretary

Mr. Jason DeBoer, treasurer

Mr. John DeWilde

Mr. James Joosse

Rev. Rita Klein-Geltink, pastoral advisor

Board of Directors of World Renew-U.S.

Ms. Jodi Cole Meyer, president

Mr. Lyman Howell, vice president

Ms. Joy Anema, secretary

Mr. Steve Westra, treasurer

Ms. Hyacinth Douglas-Bailey

Ms. Erika Izqueredo

Rev. Thea Leunk, pastoral advisor

A. Board nominations, reappointments, terms completed

1. Canada members-at-large

The board of World Renew requests that synod appoint each of the following single nominees to a three-year term as Canada member-at-large:

Mr. Jerry Aydalla is a member of Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ontario. He moved with his family in 1994 from the Philippines to Canada and currently works as a computer systems analyst. His interest in missions developed when he became a Christian in university and subsequently became an active participant in the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Mr. Aydalla's interest in World Renew grew while one of his daughters served as a volunteer with us.

Mr. Daniel Muthui is an active member of Fellowship CRC in Edmonton, Alberta. He has been working as a research and policy professional in various positions in public and charity sectors. He and his family moved from Kenya to Canada several years ago, bringing an understanding of community development and a passion for addressing justice issues. His interest in World Renew grew during a Discovery Tour to Bangladesh with the Micah Center of The King's University and during a trip to Honduras to participate in discussions with CRCNA partners regarding violence and social breakdown. Mr. Muthui has also served as a regional organizer for the Climate Witness Project organized by the CRC Office of Social Justice.

2. Reappointment of Canada member-at-large

The following Canadian delegate is completing her first term on the board and is being recommended for a second three-year term: Ms. Marguerite Ridder.

3. Reappointment of Canadian classical member

The following Canadian delegate is completing his first term on the board and is being recommended for a second three-year term: Mr. Hans Vink (Classis Quinte).

4. Canada members completing terms

World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following at-large Canada board member for completing his second term of service: Mr. John DeWilde. The board of World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board member who is completing his first term of service and cannot continue for a second term: Mr. Don Miedema (Classis Lake Superior-Canada).

5. Reappointment of U.S. classical members

The following U.S. delegates are completing their first term on the board and are being recommended for a second three-year term: Ms. Hyacinth Douglas-Bailey (Classis Atlantic Northeast), Mr. Roy Heerema (Classis Hudson), Ms. Cherie Dykstra (Classis Kalamazoo), Ms. Mary Rupke (Classis Lake Erie), Ms. Kendra Bengelink (Classis Pacific Northwest), Ms. Erika Izquierdo (Classis Southeast U.S.).

6. Reappointment of U.S. members-at-large

The following U.S. members-at-large have completed their first term on the board and are being recommended for a second three-year term: Ms. Sarah Rinsema-Sybenga, Ms. Mary VanBuren.

7. U.S. members completing terms

The board of World Renew-U.S. would like to recognize and thank the following board members completing their service: Mr. Steve Westra (Grandville), Rev. John Algera (Hackensack), Mr. Cornelius Van Tol (Muskegon), Mr. William Janssen (Northcentral Iowa), and Rev. Thea Leunk (member-at-large, pastoral advisor).

The board of World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members who are completing their first term of service and cannot continue for a second term: Ms. Gail Hanson (Grand Rapids East) and Mr. Nathan TerBeek (Thornapple Valley).

B. Finance

1. Salary disclosure

In accordance with synod’s mandate to report executive salary levels, World Renew reports the following:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
18	2	1	1
16	4		4
15	7	1	6

2. Detailed financial information

Detailed financial information and budgets will be submitted to synod by way of the *Agenda for Synod 2016*—Financial and Business Supplement.

C. *Human Resources management*

World Renew’s Human Resources (HR) management function provides HR support to functional and ministry teams, including but not limited to recruitment and selection, performance management, employee relations, HR systems, and HR advisory support for all team leaders and directors.

World Renew’s HR staff continue to focus on achieving gender and racial diversity among the organization’s employees. World Renew is committed to the process of gender mainstreaming with the goal of gender equality. As part of its gender plan, World Renew regularly tracks goals for the number of both men and women in leadership positions, staff perception about their team’s commitment to gender equality, and the participation of men and women in decision making. In terms of World Renew’s leadership positions (those with a job level of 14 or higher), 50 percent are held by women. World Renew continues to make progress in increasing racial diversity, including but not limited to its hiring practices and general HR policies.

Annual performance reviews are routine for all World Renew staff. This effort gives staff an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and critically review growth areas. World Renew is thankful for each of its “human resources,” who are essential to providing program excellence in communities in need around the globe.

D. *Resource development report*

Last year World Renew was blessed to receive a total of \$35,804,857 from all sources in the United States and Canada. Of this funding, \$22 million came from churches and individual donors. This was then leveraged through grants, partnerships, and other collaborations. Just over \$2.3 million was received through government grants, and more than \$6.2 million came from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for emergency disaster response and food security programs. World Renew also received just over \$4.6 million in grants from organizations in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, and \$645,000 from its investments.

World Renew directed \$11.4 million of its 2015 financial resources toward core international development programs, and over \$17.5 million went to disaster response. Just under \$400,000 was used for community development in North America, and \$1.46 million went toward constituent education.

World Renew uses about 12 percent of its resources for general management and fundraising purposes—meaning that 88 percent or more of the money you entrust to World Renew helps those who experience poverty, injustice, and disaster with life-saving, life-changing programs that witness to the justice and mercy of Jesus Christ and build up the church worldwide.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Ms. Jodi Cole Meyer, president of World Renew-U.S.; Mr. John DeGroot, president of World Renew-Canada; Ms. Carol Bremer-Bennett, director of World Renew-U.S.; and Ms. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director of World Renew-Canada, when World Renew matters are discussed and need to be addressed.

B. 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.

C. That synod, by way of the ballot, appoint and reappoint members to the World Renew Board of Delegates.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

World Renew

Carol Bremer-Bennett, director, World Renew-U.S.

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director, World Renew-Canada

Calvin Theological Seminary

I. Introduction

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees presents their report to Synod 2016 with gratitude to God for his provision this past year. The seminary has experienced God's faithfulness and looks toward the future with hope and anticipation.

II. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary sessions in October 2015 and via conference call in February 2016; it anticipates a plenary session in May 2016.

The board officers are Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr., chair; Rev. Andrew Vander Leek, vice-chair; and Ms. Teresa Renkema, secretary.

Trustee Dr. Yudha Thianto (at-large) has completed one term of service and is eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod reappoint Dr. Thianto to a second three-year term.

Trustee Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr. (at-large) has completed two terms of service and is eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod reappoint Mr. Jansma to a third three-year term.

Completing terms on the board are Rev. Andrew Vander Leek (Region 1), Ms. Wendy Gritter (Region 3), Dr. Don Belanus (Region 12), and Ms. Susan Keesen (at-large). We are grateful for their service and wise counsel to the seminary and to the church.

The following nominees have been submitted to the classes in their respective regions for a vote. The results of those elections will be presented to Synod 2016 for ratification.

Region 1

Mr. Victor Chen is a retired Sears sales manager and is currently a home repair owner/operator. He is a member of Immanuel CRC in Richmond, British Columbia. He has served two terms on the denominational board of Christian Reformed Home Missions. Mr. Chen currently serves Classis B.C. North-West on its classical ministry interim committee, as chair of its student fund committee, and on its classical ministry leadership team.

Mr. John Franken is a retired Christian school teacher and is currently an owner/operator of a bed and breakfast establishment. He is a member of Telkwa Christian Reformed Church and has served on the council of his church. Mr. Franken has previously served on the councils of Kelowna CRC and Smithers CRC.

Region 3

Rev. Daniel G. Brown is a chaplain at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, having previously served as pastor of John Calvin CRC in Truro, Nova Scotia, for ten years. He has also served on the steering committee for the Halifax Campus Ministry, the Committee for Contact with the Government, and the board of a local Christian counseling ministry as well as on Classis Eastern Canada's finance, Home Missions, and personnel committees.

Rev. Hendrik Bruinsma is a pastor/chaplain who has served Holland Marsh CRC, Newmarket, Ontario; Grace CRC, Chatham, Ontario; and Maranatha CRC, Woodbridge, Ontario; he now serves Heritage Fellowship CRC, Brampton,

Ontario. He is currently vice chair of the Classis Toronto Executive Committee and a member of the Holland Christian Homes Care Committee. Rev. Bruinsma has served as chair of the Classis Toronto hospital chaplaincy committee and as chair of the Chatham Christian Counseling Centre board of directors.

Region 12

Mr. Henry Lane is an attorney who is a member at Fairlawn CRC in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. He has served as a deacon and as an elder, and he served on the synodical Committee to Study the Authority and Functions of Elders and Deacons, which reported to Synod 1987. He currently serves as president of the Fairlawn CRC council.

Ms. Carolann Somers is a paralegal who has worked extensively in the area of human resources and organizational management. She currently works as regional coordinator for Bakke Graduate University. Ms. Somers is a member of Sunlight CRC in Port St. Lucie, Florida, and has served as chair of the deacons in her church.

At-large

To aid in the area of legal expertise, the Calvin Theological Seminary board presents the following nominee for appointment to a first three-year term as an at-large nominee.

Ms. Heather Garretson, a member of Bethany CRC in Muskegon, Michigan, is a graduate of Calvin College and obtained her Juris Doctor degree, *cum laude*, from Creighton University School of Law. She is a member of the State Bar of Michigan as well the state and federal bar in Missouri and Kansas. Ms. Garretson has served as a law clerk, litigation attorney, special assistant to a United States Attorney, law school professor, and legal consultant. Her most recent professional focus has been on the impact of reentry of citizens with criminal records back into society. With the recent startup of the Calvin Prison Initiative (see section VI of this report), we anticipate that this additional expertise would be very helpful to Calvin Theological Seminary.

III. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Jul Medenblik, president; Ms. Jinny Bult De Jong, chief financial and operating officer; Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra, academic dean; Dr. Mary Vanden Berg, associate academic dean; Rev. Alvin Gelder, director of mentored ministries; Mr. Robert Knoor, director of development; Rev. Jeff Sajdak, dean of students; and Ms. Sarah Chun, associate dean of students.

IV. Faculty

The seminary faculty continue to serve the church in numerous ways. Although teaching and preparing students for various forms of ministry continues to be central to their work, members of the faculty also provide education and counsel to many local congregations and broader assemblies, preach regularly, publish scholarly books and articles, attend significant conferences, and, in various ways, seek to stay attuned to developments in ministries in the Christian Reformed Church and the church of Christ worldwide.

In response to Synod 2012's challenge to develop ways to get involved earlier in situations of pastor/church tension, several agencies and ministries (Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, Calvin

Theological Seminary, the Candidacy Committee, Pastor-Church Relations, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, etc.) worked together with a consultant (Dr. Bryan Dik, Colorado State University) to launch a two-year pilot project in 2013 to enhance ministry “fit” for pastors and other religious leaders. This has been an effort to create a pro-active strategy for improving pastor/congregation/ministry relationships. Calvin Theological Seminary has played an active role in this from the beginning. Based on positive results from two pilot projects with nearly 100 participants, the CRCNA has recently hired the first ministry assessment coordinator, Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron, who is working half-time to bring current and potential ministry leaders together with several vetted counseling services to provide a robust assessment and vocational guidance process. We are excited about this development and are trusting that this will contribute to better ministry “fit” and therefore more satisfying, productive, and lasting ministry leadership service. Rev. McCarron plans on being present at Calvin Theological Seminary one day a week in her work to help future leaders discern their calling and particular ministry fit.

At its October meeting, trustees made the following appointments:

Dr. Danjuma Gibson as associate professor of pastoral care for three years, effective July 1, 2016.

Dr. Geoffrey Vandermolen as director of vocational formation for three years, effective July 1, 2016.

At its February meeting, the following actions were taken by the board:

The board noted the upcoming retirement of Rev. Alvern Gelder, acknowledged his years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (2011-2016), conferred on him the title of director of mentored ministries, *emeritus*, effective July 1, 2016, and now requests that synod acknowledge this action with gratitude to God.

The board noted the upcoming retirement of Dr. Arie Leder, acknowledged his years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (1987-2016), conferred on him the title of professor of Old Testament, *emeritus*, effective July 31, 2016, and now requests that synod acknowledge this action with gratitude to God.

The board noted the upcoming retirement of Dr. Calvin Van Reken, acknowledged his years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (1991-2016), conferred on him the title of professor of moral theology, *emeritus*, effective July 31, 2016, and now requests that synod acknowledge this action with gratitude to God.

V. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. *Convergence with the CRCNA ministry priorities*

In fall 2013, Calvin Theological Seminary faculty, with input and final approval from the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, produced a “Vision Frame” document, outlined as follows:

Mission—What are we doing?

Calvin Theological Seminary is a learning community in the Reformed Christian tradition that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Values—Why are we doing it?

Reformed theology—All our teaching and formation grow from a shared understanding of God’s Word as articulated in the Reformed confessions.

The church—We are formed by and serve the church, God’s agent of hope for the world.

Cultural context—We give our students tools to sow the gospel in a multicultural world. We challenge one another to have hearts that engage the broader world God so loves.

The whole person—We cultivate meaningful relationships with our students to foster personal and spiritual growth throughout our learning community.

Strategy—How are we doing it?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit,

- we are known for academic excellence and scholarship.
- we provide innovative learning environments.
- we pursue synergy with our graduates and other ministry leaders.
- we nurture a community of hospitality.
- we enrich the student experience through vital partnership.

Measures—When are we successful?

When graduates of Calvin Theological Seminary

- preach and teach the Bible (message).
- grow in their pastoral identity (person).
- discern and engage ministry contexts (context).
- cultivate and lead communities of disciples (goal).
- equip the church to renew communities for the glory of God (purpose).

A scan of this material shows significant convergence with the ministry priorities of the Christian Reformed Church in North America:

Faith Formation—Calvin Theological Seminary seeks to train disciples who become the trainers of more disciples of Jesus Christ.

Servant Leadership—Calvin Theological Seminary is seeking to identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God. From *Facing Your Future* (high school students) to its resident and online education programs followed by continuing education programs and resources, Calvin Theological Seminary is training leaders.

Global Missions—The world is at our doorstep. Every year over twenty different nations (30% outside the U.S. and Canada) are represented in the student body of Calvin Theological Seminary. The training for global missions takes place not just in classrooms but also over lunch in the Student Center.

Loving Mercy and Doing Justice—Calvin Theological Seminary trains students through cross-cultural internships and exposure to environments that help form the hearts of Christian disciples. For example, experience with prison ministry through Calvin Theological Seminary has led students to witness the need for ministry to prisoners and to understand the structures of society that need to be addressed.

Gospel Proclamation and Worship—Along with Servant Leadership this is probably our leading edge within the CRC ministry priorities. Our core degree is the master of divinity degree, which helps to form preachers and teachers of the gospel. In addition, we celebrate this year the tenth anniversary of the Center for Excellence in Preaching (cep.calvinseminary.edu). This ministry tool has served church leaders in one-on-one settings with thousands of web-site resource users every month.

B. Connecting with churches: Our Journey (the Ministry Plan)

Making and maintaining connections with churches is a foundational component of education for Calvin Theological Seminary. Whether this involves church-based internships or assignments related to the local church environment, the local church is the key partner for nurturing, developing, and training students.

Calvin Theological Seminary’s Institute for Global Church Planning and Renewal has deepened our connection with churches by developing a new pilot program, the Church Renewal Learning Laboratory, which helps cohorts of approximately ten churches learn together how to provide effective ministry in their contexts. We hope that our learning from this pilot program will enable us to serve the broader Christian Reformed Church and beyond.

Finally, Calvin Theological Seminary is glad to announce a Continuing Education opportunity open to pastors and lay leaders alike that will take place from July 19-21, 2016. Former Fuller Theological Seminary President Richard Mouw will keynote a conference titled “*What Does It Mean to Love My Neighbor Today?*” Besides Dr. Mouw, faculty members of Calvin Theological Seminary will be presenting on this important and timely topic.

VI. Program highlights

Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) has been involved in the training and teaching of students for ministry for 140 years since 1876.

We continue to be blessed by strong support for our Distance Education master of divinity degree program. In fall 2015 a new group of 15 students joined the program, which allows students to remain where they are while receiving a Calvin Theological Seminary education through mentoring, cohorts (small groups), and distance classroom experiences. In the 2016 spring semester, three new students are expected to begin the program, bringing total enrollment in the program to 65. The launch of the distance M.Div. has created a great deal of interest in CTS, and we are now offering a distance delivery format for M.A. and M.T.S. degree programs.

The seminary is grateful for overall enrollment numbers for the 2015-2016 academic year, with 71 new students, including 38 M.Div. students (23 residential and 15 in the distance education program). At the same time, we urge the churches to encourage and support men and women who seek additional training for ministry to consider Calvin Theological Seminary.

The following data for the Center for Excellence in Preaching compares the first full year of visits, pages viewed, and unique visitors in 2006 with those of this past year, demonstrating the growth of this ministry and illustrating that it is one of the premier Reformed preaching websites:

Year	Total visits	Total pages viewed	Avg. unique visitors per month
2006	86,411	242,871	5,649
2015	266,744	1,313,377	13,564

Calvin Theological Seminary recently received a grant from the Lilly Endowment for \$250,000. Its focus is to assist the seminary in developing approaches and programs that address financial issues facing its students.

Calvin Theological Seminary is one of fifty-one theological schools that have received this grant as part of Lilly's Theological School Initiative to Address Economic Issues Facing Future Ministers. The seminary is using the grant for its three-year program proposal. In addition to the Lilly grant, a major individual donor gift of \$60,000 has been given to the seminary to particularly support the development of the "financial formation" curriculum proposed in the grant.

The following four goal areas were identified for the seminary in the proposal:

- Understand its current financial situation and that of students.
- Provide significant "financial formation" for students.
- Provide vocational development services for students.
- Develop new financial and scholarship resources for students whose financial needs we are currently least able to meet.

The seminary was blessed with a number of key appointments during the past year. We give thanks for new faculty member Dr. Cory Willson, assistant professor of missiology and missional ministry, who began his teaching ministry this past July. This coming July, Dr. Matt Tuininga will begin his work and ministry as assistant professor of moral theology. Both of these individuals were interviewed and affirmed at Synod 2015.

The seminary has also been blessed to see the continued development of a new institute. Just as the Center for Excellence in Preaching continues to serve the church in providing preaching resources, the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal (IGCPR) seeks to be a resource and catalyst to churches in the work of church renewal and church planting. This institute was led in the recent past by now retired Professor Carl J. Bosma and is now directed by Dr. Cory Willson.

We recently held a major conference titled "Living Scripture Missionally" with speakers such as Dr. Chris Wright, Dr. Mike Goheen, and Ms. Ruth Padilla DeBorst. The conference took place on November 18-19, 2015, and sessions of the conference can be found on the CTS website. This major conference is just one element of the growing work of IGCPR.

We are currently in the third year of the West Michigan Renewal Lab with Rev. Keith Doornbos as project program director. The program uses focused learning intensives, peer groups, the assistance of seminary interns, and the involvement of local church leadership. Over twenty churches are currently involved in cohort learning, and the initial results of this laboratory experiment are promising.

On September 8, 2015, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary were blessed to open prison doors by the beginning of classes at Handlon Correctional Facility as part of the Calvin Prison Initiative. Twenty students from within the prison system came together to begin a five-year bachelor's degree program accredited through Calvin College. This program was begun at the request of the State of Michigan and is a coordinated effort of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. It is our hope that this "seminary behind bars program" will be used by God to affect not only the students in the classroom but also the prison system as these students are deployed within the prison system. In addition, we would testify that Calvin College and CTS professors and students are changed and affected by their involvement in the lives of students at Handlon.

We are grateful for partnerships with congregations and pastors in the training of our students. Seventeen of our twenty-three Mentored Ministries Group Leaders are pastors (the other six are seminary faculty members): Rev. Mike Abma, Rev. Ruth Boven, Rev. Roze Bruins, Rev. Lynn Barger Elliott, Rev. Don Byker, Rev. Peter Byma, Rev. Doug Fauble, Rev. Doug MacLeod, Rev. Daniel Mouw, Rev. Kenneth Nydam, Rev. Allen Petroelje, Rev. David Poolman, Rev. William Renkema, Rev. Kent Rottman, Rev. Henry Schenkel, Rev. David Struyk, Rev. Elizabeth VanderHaagen, Rev. Paula Vander Hoven, and Mr. Karl Westerhof. In this program, another close tie to congregations and ministry leaders consists in linking each M.Div. and M.A. student with a vocational mentor.

We are also grateful to pastors and others for recommending great students for the Facing Your Future program. We celebrate seventeen years of this opportunity to train young people and expose them to ministry. During the summer of 2015, twenty-nine high school students experienced theological education at the seminary, followed by ministry in either Austin, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; or the Roseland area in Chicago, Illinois.

During this current summer, Facing Your Future is taking a “summer of rebuilding” break. The ending of funding from the Lilly Endowment and a desire to reframe how we may better connect with students in the twenty-first century is leading us to work on updating the programming and budget structure so that the program can be financially sustained and effective for the church. We look forward to Facing Your Future Version 2.0 being up and running in the summer of 2017.

Two special opportunities for giving that continue to grow are The Presidents’ Legacy Society and Mission Builders. Both have proven fruitful in raising the level of financial support for Calvin Theological Seminary.

In response to an overture that raised concerns regarding the teaching of science and theology, Synod 2014 passed a motion asking the denomination’s Board of Trustees to

encourage Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, in concert with other CRC-related institutions of higher education, to (a) make available to a future synod a list of resources on the relationship of science and theology, especially as they relate to the doctrines of creation, the fall, original sin, and the atonement, and (b) to organize one or more conferences or open conversations on these same topics.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 567)

Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary have formed an ad-hoc committee of representatives from each institution to respond to this request. Prior to Synod 2016, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary faculty members will lead a workshop conversation on this matter at a pre-synod gathering in Grand Rapids. The presentation is titled “Engaging Science and the Bible.” Resources presented during this session will also be noted and then made available at synod. We also anticipate that this resource list will continue to be developed and refined and then hosted at the Ministry Theorem site, which can be found at ministrytheorem.calvinseminary.edu.

The Ministry Theorem seeks to remind pastors and other leaders in the church that an appreciation of science lies deep within the Reformed tradition as well as within the Christian tradition generally. From a biblical-theological standpoint, Christians rightly view science as a partner in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church, increasing our wonder over God’s works and so enhancing our worship of the Creator God. Developed jointly by the Center for Excellence

in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary and the Science Division of Calvin College, the Ministry Theorem serves to promote an enhanced awareness of contemporary science and to provide resources and encouragement for engaging science in the ministries of congregations everywhere. The resources provided on the website will be of help to pastors, church school teachers, youth leaders, worship planners, and others in our congregations.

VII. Students 2015-2016

The composition of the seminary's student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics suggest the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

Denominational affiliation

Christian Reformed students: 140 (46%)

Non-Christian Reformed students: 160 (54%)

Presbyterian: 63

Other Reformed: 26

Baptist: 17

Other: 54

Geographical information

U.S. students: 185 (61%)

Canadian students: 32 (11%)

International students, other than Canadian: 83 (28%)

Korean: 51 (17%)

Chinese: 9 (3%)

Other: 23 (8%)

Total countries represented: 23

Student body

Male students: 228 (76%)

Female students: 72 (24%)

Programs and students enrolled

M.Div.: 141

M.A.: 18

M.T.S.: 21

* EPMC: 23

Th.M.: 49

Ph.D.: 28

Distance Learning: 65 (this number does not reflect residential students taking a distance class)

Certificate/diploma: 6

Unclassified: 14

*Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy

It should be noted that we currently have twenty-four students in the Hand-lon Correctional Facility who are also considered non-credit students of Calvin Theological Seminary. In addition, we have fifty-two students registered in our Hispanic Ministry Certificate Program.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr., chair, and Rev. Julius T. Medenblik, president, when seminary matters are presented.

B. That synod, by way of the ballot, ratify the election and reappointment of trustees from the slate of nominees presented.

C. That, following a successful interview, synod ratify the appointment of Dr. Danjuma Gibson as associate professor of pastoral care for three years, effective July 1, 2016. (The curriculum vitae for Dr. Gibson is found in Appendix A.)

D. That, following a successful interview, synod ratify the appointment of Rev. Geoffrey Vandermolen as director of vocational formation for three years, effective July 1, 2016. (The curriculum vitae for Rev. Vandermolen is found in Appendix B.)

E. That synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Rev. Alvern Gelder and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: director of mentored ministries, *emeritus*, effective July 1, 2016.

F. That synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Dr. Arie Leder and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: professor of Old Testament, *emeritus*, effective July 31, 2016.

G. That synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Dr. Calvin Van Reken and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: professor of moral theology, *emeritus*, effective July 31, 2016.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees
Teresa Renkema, secretary

Appendix A

Curriculum Vitae: Danjuma G. Gibson

Profile

Lecturer, Pastoral Theology/Care, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Psychotherapist, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Current and past teaching experience

- Lecturer in Pastoral Care, Calvin Theological Seminary (present)
- Sample of courses taught:
 - Foundations for Pastoral Care
 - Counseling

- Pastoral Care and the Urban Context
- Pastoral Theology/Care and the Encounter with Trauma and Radical Evil
- Human Suffering and Pastoral Theology/Care
- Calvin Theological Seminary Prison Ministry (Spring 2015)—Introduction to Pastoral Care
- Adjunct Professor, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Psychology of Religion (Spring 2014)
 - Thirteen-week semester/course reflects on the intersection of religious and psychological discourses across various cultures and examines various issues such as conversion experience, god-images, mysticism, etc., and the impact on church and ministry, and personal/community subjectivity
- Adjunct Professor, Loyola University, Chicago (Institute of Pastoral Studies)
Ethics for Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction (Spring 2014)
 - Fourteen-week semester/course reflects on methodologies and canons of professional ethics for counselors and spiritual directors
- Part-time Instructor, DePaul University
Religion and Psychology (Fall 2013, Winter 2014, Spring 2014)
 - Ten-week quarter/course objectives include introducing students to various discourses in psychology and religion and how such discourses intersect and converse with each other to enhance understanding
- Adjunct Professor, North Park Theological Seminary
Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling (Spring 2013)
 - Fourteen-week semester/course objectives included preparing students to construct a theological, theoretical, and contextual framework for reflecting upon and implementing pastoral care and counseling across various cultural settings

Articles and reviews

- “Trauma of the Heart: Augmenting the Family Paradigm to Stem the Spread of HIV/AIDS and to Facilitate Healing and Recovery in the Wake of HIV/AIDS.” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 25; 1, Spring 2015.
- “The Beauty of Intentional Multiplicity.” KERUX—A Calvin Theological Seminary Student Publication, February 2015.
- Review of Acolatse, E. E. (2014), *For Freedom or Bondage? A Critique of African Pastoral Practices* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), for *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 25; 1, Spring 2015.

Papers and presentations

- *Depression and the African American Community*. Visionary Care: Black Mental Health and Economic Justice Conference, Chicago, Ill., September 12, 2015.
- Depth Psychology as a Tertiary Hermeneutical/Epistemological Lens to Address Ecclesial Conflict and Dysfunction. American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, San Diego, Calif., November 2014.
- Hidden in Plain View: Natural Therapy in Black Religious Experience. Embodiment Study Group—Society for Pastoral Theology Annual Conference, Denver, Colo., June 2011.

Education background

- Doctor of Philosophy (Pastoral Theology, Personality, and Culture—clinical track), Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (May 2014)
- Master of Arts in Christian Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (December 2011)
- Master of Arts in Urban Ministry, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (2009)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA), DePaul University (2001)
- Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration (Finance), Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia (1995)
- Advanced Certificate in Psychotherapy and Religion, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago (2013)
- Urban Clinical Pastoral Education—1 unit (Spring 2009)

Professional work experience

- Lecturer in Pastoral Care, Calvin Theological Seminary (present)
- Psychotherapist (present)
 - Pastoral Psychotherapist, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago (present)
- Resident, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago (2013-2014)
 - Fellowship, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago (2012-2013)
 - Internship, Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago (2010-2012)
 - Internship, Access Community Health Center / Infectious Disease Clinic (2010-2012)
- Senior Pastor, Zion Faith Center Bible Church (16.5 years: February 1999 to September 2015)
 - Senior pastor / urban inner-city nondenominational Christian faith community (+120 membership)
 - Engaged in traditional pastoral responsibilities including counseling, pastoral care, church administration, crisis intervention, teaching, preaching, strategic planning, leadership development, spiritual formation, Christian education, visitation, administering of sacraments, etc.
 - Ministries within faith community consist of Christian education, mentoring, pastoral counseling, men's ministry, women's ministry, youth ministry, etc.
- Harris Bank / Bank of Montreal—Vice President (12 years: 1997-2009)
 - Vice President, Commercial Banker—commercial and industrial middle market sector
 - Banking and finance responsibilities included portfolio management, underwriting loans, and cross-selling corporate and investment banking products
 - Responsibilities included portfolio management of several middle-market sized companies (revenues between \$50 million and \$1 billion) with a combined loan volume of \$135 million
- Chubb Insurance Company—Property and Casualty Underwriter (2 years: 1995-1997)
 - Underwrote property and casualty insurance for middle-market sized companies with revenues between \$50 million and \$600 million.

Appendix B

Curriculum Vitae: Geoffrey A. Vanderمولen

Executive Profile

I am a child of Abba, a husband, and a father. The Holy Spirit has graciously gifted me for leadership, teaching, and mentoring. I have a track record of effective biblical teaching, skilled pastoral leadership in both established and emerging church contexts, and capable administrative and organizational leadership. I am keenly aware of organizational systems and operate effectively within them. I am prayerfully committed to Jesus Christ and following him in every way.

Core accomplishments

Church planting

- Prayerfully gathered a ministry team for the effective launch and sustained life of a new church development for ten years

Staff development

- Team building in every ministry setting
- Skilled mentoring and development of teams of emerging leaders in both skills and character, resulting in high impact ministry
- Effective formation of spiritually cohesive and vision-directed teams
- Cohesive teams engagement toward comprehensive horizontal, mission engagement

Visionary leadership

- Effective organizational and spiritual leadership of a protracted two- to three-year vision renewal process, resulting in increased vision clarity for an established congregation, and a shared vision for ministry in the future
- Prayerful creation and casting of visionary leadership for a new church development

Mentoring leadership

- Active mentoring of emerging leaders
- Active engagement in peer, pastoral relationships
- Engagement as leader and participant in a multiyear, interdenominational peer leadership group
- Commitment to receive regular and ongoing mentoring by more senior leaders

Professional experience

Lead pastor

September 2010 to present

ClearView Christian Reformed Church, Oakville, Ontario

Team leader of a ministry team within a staff-driven ministry context.

Provided more than 80 percent of the preaching and teaching, as well as prayerful and visionary leadership in partnership with the council. Over-saw and monitored goal-setting and supervised all staff and employees.

Classical Home Missions—Calgary and Oakville

Served on the Western Canadian Church Planting Team and served as chairperson of the Classis Toronto Home Missions Committee.

Synodical delegate—Grand Rapids, Mich.

Served as a synodical delegate as well as an alternate.

Church planter/lead pastor

August 2000 to August 2010

Hillside Community Church, Calgary, Ontario

Prayerfully envisioned a new church for a developing community.

Gathered and equipped teams and their leaders for ministry deployment.

Faithfully engaged 90 percent of all teaching and preaching. Gave primary leadership to the ministry board and staff team.

Associate pastor of discipleship and small groups

September 1996 to July 2000

First Christian Reformed Church, London, Ontario

Accountable for half of the Sunday preaching as well as the vision clarity

and rollout of a newly launched Saturday evening “seeker service.” Over-saw the creation and rollout of an effective discipleship ministry, including small groups, leadership training, discipleship classes, Alpha, etc.

Education

Doctorate of Ministry, Leadership

2015

Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia

Thesis: “The Primacy of Functional Ontology in Pastoral Leadership Succession”

Leadership Development—Emerging Stream

2009

Arrow Leadership Development Program—Vancouver, British Columbia

Certified Leadership Coach

2007

Church Planting Canada—Calgary, Alberta

Masters of Divinity, Theology

1996

Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Worship Ministries (Rev. Joyce Borger, director)

I. Introduction

Worship Ministries seeks to support and encourage biblically grounded and theologically Reformed worship in the Christian Reformed Church, celebrating the great diversity of styles and gifts present in the worship of our denomination while encouraging continued creativity, discernment, spiritual vitality, and the faith formation of worshippers.

An advisory board has been formed to help staff discern the best means for working out that mission. Members include the following individuals:

Pastor Elly Boersma, Classis Niagara
Rev. Gary Bomhof, Classis Alberta North
Rev. Sung Hur, Classis Hanmi
Ms. April Jackson, Classis Greater Los Angeles
Ms. Joyce Jackson, Classis Hackensack
Ms. Darlene Silversmith, Classis Red Mesa
Rev. Sandra Van Opstal, Classis Chicago South
Rev. David Vroege, Classis Eastern Canada

II. Reflecting Our Calling

A. Faith formation

The office of Worship Ministries continues to work closely with the staff of Faith Formation Ministries and in support of the *Building Blocks* initiative (see Faith Formation Ministries report, p. 155). In addition, Worship Ministries staff serve as the CRC liaison for the Children and Worship program, writing network posts and facilitating webinars and workshops in support of that program. Staff also collaborated with Christian Reformed Home Missions in a webinar about the Little Lambs/Story Hour program.

B. Servant leadership

Worship Ministries is collaborating with the Office of Pastor-Church Relations and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in the area of worship in difficult times. Sixteen peer learning groups were formed to study the book *Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times* by Rev. Kathleen Smith. Sixty-five participants from the United States, Canada, and the Ukraine gathered either in person or online; some were ordained pastors, but the majority were worship staff or volunteers. In addition to the learning group meetings, a session on the same topic took place at the Calvin Symposium on Worship.

C. Global missions

Worship Ministries is working with the Home Missions Korean ethnic advisor to translate key worship resources into Korean.

D. Loving mercy and doing justice

Worship Ministries has been working with the Office of Social Justice, Race Relations, Faith Formation Ministries, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and the Center for Excellence in Preaching to create a complete list of existing resources on the Belhar Confession, to be assembled for easily accessible use by the churches. In addition, Worship Ministries continues to make use of the Belhar Confession in worship services and published articles.

All Worship Ministries staff have participated in the Blanket Exercise, and one staff member received training in restorative practices.

E. *Global proclamation and worship*

To support the work of worship leaders and pastors in the CRC, a new website (crcna.org/worship) was created to provide efficient access to key worship related information. An e-newsletter is sent out monthly to support worship leaders by providing timely resources and articles from within the CRC and beyond. A Facebook page was also set up for worship leaders in the CRC to connect with one another.

Worship Ministries has continued resourcing the church in the following areas for worship:

1. *Liturgical forms*—The committee working on new forms for the Lord’s Supper, baptism, profession of faith, and ordination of commissioned pastors, chaplains, elders, and deacons has completed its work and is presenting these forms by way of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA report for approval by Synod 2016. Committee members, in addition to staff, include Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Rev. Sheila Holmes, Mrs. Eunice Kim, Rev. José Rayas, Dr. David Schuringa, Rev. Kathy Smith, Dr. Mary Vanden Berg, Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, and Rev. David Vroege. We are grateful for the feedback received from many councils and individuals.
2. *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* and *Psalms for All Seasons*—Sales of both of these works are as expected. We are making final corrections to all versions of both of these products and provide support to users of these resources.
3. *Reformed Worship*—This quarterly journal, published by Worship Ministries, will celebrate its 30th anniversary in the fall. This publication continues to be a significant means for supporting the worship of many CRC churches and beyond, with 1,800 subscribers to the print journal, 3,000 subscribers to the monthly e-newsletter, and 4,000 followers on Facebook. *Reformed Worship* works hard to support each area reflecting the CRC’s calling, printing resources and articles that connect with missions, faith formation, justice, and leadership as they intersect with worship. Finally, with support from the Information Technology (IT) office and Ministry Support Services, *Reformed Worship* anticipates moving to a new subscription system this fall, which will allow for additional online capabilities.

III. Connecting with churches

A. *The local church*

Besides supporting local churches with the work mentioned above, staff are committed to visit at least one CRC church a month. Many of these visits become the fodder for *Worship Spotlights*, a series on the Network that provides glimpses into the worship of CRC churches across the denomination.

B. *Other partners*

Worship Ministries is grateful for many partnerships. The Center for Excellence in Preaching provides a column “For Preachers” in each issue of *Reformed Worship*. The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) continues to be a source for many rich experiences and deep discussions on topics related to

worship. This past year, along with attending and providing leadership at the annual symposium on worship in collaboration with CICW, staff participated in consultations on the creation of resources for bilingual Latino churches and urban worship.

Staff also maintain ecumenical relationships through membership in the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, the Consultation on Common Texts, and the Association of Reformed and Liturgical Worship; by attending worship conferences put on by various organizations; and through personal relationships with worship leaders in other denominations, particularly the Reformed Church in America.

STANDING COMMITTEES

I. Introduction

Synod 2004 established the concept of the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee, which is now known as the Candidacy Committee. The committee began meeting in late 2004 and was provided with a full-time staff person in late 2007. The committee mandate is available in a document titled "Journey Toward Ordination," available on the Candidacy Committee website (www.crcna.org/candidacy). The members of the committee meet three times per year. As with other denominational committees, Candidacy Committee members serve a potential of two three-year terms.

As a committee we are trying to be sensitive to the voice of the church as we review, implement, and suggest modifications for our pastoral ordination processes. It is our assessment that over the past decade there has been growth in a spirit of collaboration between the classes and the denomination in the ordination discussions and policies, and for that we are grateful. We are aware that our discussions and our adjustments will have to continue, and we are committed to the task.

II. Committee membership

The following members currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Pastor James M. Jones (2018/1), Rev. Susan E. LaClear (2018/1), Rev. Joel E. Kok (2018/2), Rev. Chang Guk "Joseph" Byun (2017/1), Dr. Amanda W. Benckhuysen (2017/2), Dr. LaVerne Jordan (2016/1), Rev. Fernando Valencia (2016/1), Rev. Kenneth D. Koeman (2016/2), Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma (2016/2), Rev. Julius T. Medenblik (ex officio as Calvin Theological Seminary representative), Mr. Colin P. Watson, Sr. (ex officio representing the executive director), and Rev. David R. Koll (non-voting staff).

Dr. LaVerne Jordan and Rev. Fernando Valencia are willing to serve a second term. Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma and Rev. Kenneth D. Koeman are completing their second terms. Thus, the committee presents to synod the following slates of nominees to fill the two open positions:

Position 1

Rev. Bert Slofstra, ordained in 1980, currently serves as senior pastor of Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, British Columbia. He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Slofstra has been active in his local classis, has served as a regional pastor for the past nineteen years, and has served as a synodical deputy. He has also served on the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA, including time on its executive committee, and has been a frequent delegate to synod.

Rev. Andrew G. Vander Leek, ordained in 1986, currently serves as lead pastor at East Hills Community CRC in Vernon, British Columbia. He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Vander Leek has served on various classis committees, including the student fund committee, the campus ministry committee, the Home Missions committee, and the classis ministry committee. He has served on the board of Christian Reformed Home Missions, is completing a second term on the Calvin Theological Seminary board, and has served as a synodical deputy.

Position 2

Rev. Martin Boardman, ordained in 2009, currently serves as pastor of Brooks CRC, in Brooks, Alberta. He is a graduate of Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, and has completed the EPMC program at Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Boardman is a second-career pastor, having spent time as a research assistant and as a microbiologist. He serves as chair of the Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan ministerial leadership committee and as classis prayer coordinator. Rev. Boardman also serves on the board for Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International.

Rev. Mark W. Hilbelink, ordained in 2009, serves as lead pastor of Sunrise Community CRC, Austin, Texas. He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Hilbelink currently serves as the stated clerk of Classis Rocky Mountain and has served in a number of denominational projects, including the Young Adult Leadership Team, the planning team for the Prayer Summit, and the planning team for the Exponential CRC/RCA gathering.

We recognize as we advance these nominees that all four are male and all are pastors. We reflected on these matters as a committee in our selection and in our consideration of potential nominees. We recognized that in the coming year, even with selections from this nomination pool, our committee of nine will still have three women and also three who represent ethnic minority groups. Our sense is that we are able to keep a healthy balance of diverse membership and perspectives with these slates of nominees, and our promise is to continue to be conscious of the values of diversity in various expressions as we fill future vacant positions.

III. Review of the committee's work

A. Development of the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy

One major feature of our report to synod a year ago was a description of refinements to the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC). We have continued to review the program so that it can serve both the church and participants well. The refinements described last year had to do especially with the areas of course selection and requirements. They have been implemented and are being well received.

The EPMC program continues to be a well-used route to candidacy. Approximately 40 percent of our candidates are now attending seminaries other than Calvin Theological Seminary. Such students are the target audience for the EPMC program. The Candidacy Committee continues to encourage students to consider Calvin Seminary as they select a seminary, but a large variety of factors comes into play in the decisions students make in this regard. We are grateful for the growth in flexibility being shown by Calvin Theological Seminary as it has developed a non-resident M.Div. degree. Our committee continues to monitor these trends in seminary selection, and we welcome any wisdom and any questions that the church may offer in this area of our life together.

B. Implementing a two-year candidacy process

Another feature of our report a year ago was that of implementing a requirement that all potential candidates be required to have a monthly vocational mentor relationship for two years, and that they have an active engagement with a classis for that period. The proposal of the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2015

was approved for implementation, with the understanding that it will apply to all candidates presented to Synod 2018 and following (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 590-91).

In this past year we have been engaging with the appropriate committees of each of the forty-eight current classes in order to identify and contact all persons who are on the journey toward candidacy. We have also prepared report forms and orientation materials for the vocational mentors, student participants, and classis leaders who will be part of this new candidacy protocol. Meetings with and communications to seminary students are planned for the spring of 2016 in the hope that the new expectations will be clearly recognized and implemented in such a way as to meet the promise to synod regarding candidates who will be presented to Synod 2018.

C. *Church Order Article 23 questions for clarification*

Synod 2015 received an overture raising various questions about areas of implementation of Church Order Article 23, with requests for clarification. The overture was referred to the Candidacy Committee, and the Candidacy Committee has prepared an extensive response, as found in the report in Appendix A. We call the attention of synod to the two recommendations at the end of the report:

That Synod 2016, considering the request for clarification regarding Church Order Article 23 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 640-41),

1. Receive the report on Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23 (Appendix A) as presented by the Candidacy Committee, and recommend it to congregations and classes for review as helpful advice in the administration of Church Order Article 23.
2. Call attention to the list of suggestions for potential areas of modification to Church Order Article 23 and invite continued reflection and potential overtures in order to enable our Church Order to serve us well in the administration of the office of commissioned pastor.

D. *Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors*

Synod 2014 considered the issue of continuing education for pastors in response to a request by the Candidacy Committee that a collaborative committee be formed in order to advance this priority. The specific motion passed by Synod 2014 follows:

That synod instruct the denominational Candidacy Committee to work with Calvin Theological Seminary and the Office of Pastor-Church Relations in developing a plan for continuing education of pastors that includes opportunity for growth in familiarity with our denominational ministries, our confessional commitments, and our polity, and that this plan be presented to Synod 2016.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 544)

The requested committee was formed in 2014 and presents to Synod 2016 an extensive report. On behalf of this Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors, the Candidacy Committee requests that synod review the report as found in Appendix B and approve the recommendations as presented in the report.

E. *Other initiatives*

The Candidacy Committee is pleased to note a number of continuing initiatives being carried out as ways to support the church in preparing persons for pastoral ordination in the Christian Reformed Church.

1. An assessment project has been described in the reports of the Candidacy Committee over the past three years. The project is a joint effort of Pastor-Church Relations, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, Christian Reformed Home Missions, and Christian Reformed World Missions, with a focus on creating a mechanism for pastors at various points of their journey to be assessed as to their best potential fit for ministry. We are happy to note that the project is now officially under way after completion of a pilot phase in which over eighty pastors were assessed. A staff person has been appointed to coordinate the work of pastoral assessment, Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron. She began her work in February 2016 and will split her half-time position between time at Calvin Theological Seminary and time in the denominational office. It is the hope of all the participating partners that this effort will alleviate some of the pain caused through disruptive Article 17 separations between pastors and congregations, and will enhance healthy expectations of pastors and churches.
2. The Korean Institute in Ministry (KIM) is now in its tenth year. This program offers Korean-language orientation to pastors affiliating with the CRCNA, and it has served over one hundred pastors.
3. A newer program, Ethnic Pastor Orientation, offers a learning opportunity and instruction in the values, history, and ministry of the Christian Reformed Church to persons entering pastoral service in the CRC as either a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor. The program is now in its third year and is planned for the spring of 2016 in Rehoboth, New Mexico. In previous years the program has been conducted in western Michigan and in southern California. There is significant energy and appreciation as ethnic minority pastors meet and learn in a setting where they are “majority participants.”
4. Each spring the Candidacy Committee coordinates and implements an approval process with sermon evaluation and an interview by a team of pastors. Approximately one-half of the candidates are interviewed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, while the others are interviewed in various regional settings appropriate to their location. We are tremendously grateful for the commitment and work of the many pastors who make this process possible.
5. Pastors entering service in the Christian Reformed Church participate in an approved learning plan appropriate to their ministry setting. This includes pastors who affiliate via Church Order Article 8 and pastors who will serve as solo or senior leaders in the position of commissioned pastor. Approximately twenty persons have completed a learning plan in the past year, and another twenty are in various stages of completing a plan.
6. A major task of the Candidacy Committee and their director is to consult with and facilitate the work of regional leaders who play significant roles in the various ordination processes. These include members of Classical Ministry Leadership Teams (CMLTs), other classis functionaries, and individual pastors who serve as mentors and advocates for those entering ordained ministry. It is our hope and prayer that the office of candidacy can maintain a responsive and hospitable posture that serves the local and regional church in the tasks surrounding ordination.

7. One unique project this past year has been that of helping to prepare updated guidelines for the Affiliation Process for Congregations. The most recent document was approved by Synod 2006. There was a need for the document to reflect the changes that have been approved by synod since 2006 and for an opportunity to simplify the descriptions of the processes. An updated document is being presented to synod via the Board of Trustees report.
8. In our relationships with administrators who coordinate ordination processes in the Reformed Church in America (RCA) we have discovered a common need to serve emerging leaders who use Spanish as their primary language. We have entered into initial consideration of a Spanish-language program that could lead to candidacy as a minister of the Word. We have also continued a review of Spanish-language programs that prepare persons as commissioned pastors. Our hope is that we can find ways to do joint programming that serves both the RCA and CRC processes, so that a given program can have a critical mass enabling vital learning.
9. We have been very grateful to participate in the creation of a joint RCA-CRC proposal, led by Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, that will result in Clinical Pastoral Education being available across North America. The proposal has been approved and will make use of online learning and regional cohort teams, with pastors and seminarians from the RCA and CRC learning together.
10. The Candidacy Committee office attempts to follow the progress of candidates as they await a call and ordination and to facilitate support and encouragement for such candidates. Our calling process takes longer than in previous years, and the number of candidates approved in recent years is more than that of a generation ago. We pray that these trends can prompt us to pray and support candidates ready to enter ministry as they find their way. We also find it appropriate to rejoice at the new opportunities for ministry that these persons represent and to learn ways as a denomination to send them into ministry.

IV. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. David R. Koll (director of Candidacy) and to an additional member of the Candidacy Committee, if present, when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.
- B. That synod by way of the ballot appoint two new members to the Candidacy Committee from the slates of nominees presented and reappoint Dr. LaVerne Jordan and Rev. Fernando Valencia to second three-year terms.
- C. That synod, considering the request for clarification regarding Church Order Article 23 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 640-41),
 1. Receive the report on Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23 (Appendix A) 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.
 2. Call attention to the list of suggestions for potential areas of modification to Church Order Article 23 and invite continued reflection and potential

overtures in order to enable our Church Order to serve us well in the administration of the office of commissioned pastor.

D. That synod note the report by the Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors (Appendix B) and approve its recommendations as presented in the report.

E. That synod take note of the various initiatives and challenges identified by the Candidacy Committee in this report.

Candidacy Committee
David R. Koll, director

Appendix A Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23

I. Introduction and Observations

Synod 2015 received an overture from Classis Hamilton requesting that synod provide further explanation and clarification regarding five areas associated with Church Order Article 23 (see *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 434-36). In response Synod 2015 instructed the executive director “to work with the Board of Trustees and the Office of Candidacy, including Rev. David Koll, to provide clarification regarding Article 23 and report to Synod 2016 with recommendations” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 640-41).

This document, written in response to this instruction of Synod 2015, seeks to offer the clarification requested. At the outset, we wish to make some observations:

1. We note that the request of the overture, and of synod, is for “explanation and clarification,” not for proposed changes to the Church Order. This document will seek, then, to honor the mandate of providing explanation and clarification. At the end of the report, however, we do include some suggestions for potential areas of modification to the Church Order, should Synod 2016 wish to commission such modifications.
2. We observe that although five areas are specified in the overture from Classis Hamilton, some of the areas specified actually raise more than one question. Further, there are at least two other areas of confusion that have been identified in recent months, as expressed through questions to the Office of Synodical Services and the Candidacy Committee. Thus, more than five items will be discussed in order to serve the church with the clarification it has requested.
3. We recognize that our usage of Article 23 continues to evolve. The report of the Candidacy Committee (then called the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee) to Synod 2007 stated, “The SMCC believes that the CRC is blessed to have the highly versatile office of ministry associate [now called “commissioned pastor”] and can more effectively meet its congregational leadership needs if the office of ministry associate is more valued, used, and supported” (*Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 299). As Synod 2007 approved the Candidacy Committee report, it committed itself to a strategy in which the value, use, and support for Church Order Article 23 would grow as it applied to persons who

might otherwise seek ordination to the ministry of the Word by way of Church Order Article 7. (See *Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 294-303; *Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 651-53, 664-67.)

4. We see the current request and this document as one more step in shaping the office of commissioned pastor in the light of Synod 2007's guidance to give this office greater value, use, and support.

II. Areas of Clarification

1. Regarding the intended purpose of Article 23

The overture from Classis Hamilton observes that some have the impression that the change of the name of the office by Synod 2012 (from *ministry associate* to *commissioned pastor*) indicated a desire to keep commissioned pastors marginalized in some sense. In the words of the overture from Classis Hamilton, some believe the intent was to see the commissioned pastor as a "mini-minister" or a "minister lite."

The reality is, as the Hamilton overture observes, synod intended "to provide *limited* but *real* ecclesiastical authority for a *specific* ministry role . . . for a *particular* area of ministry in God's kingdom (be it the local church, mission field, educational institution, etc.)" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 434). The grounds for the decision of Synod 2012 speak to this matter with clarity:

- a. Such a change [in naming the office] will give encouragement and support to those serving in this office.
- b. Such a change will show a positive response to many who have expressed a feeling of marginalization because of the current title.

(Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 741-42)

The grounds of synod's action in 2012 go on to cite the statement of Synod 2007 regarding giving "more value, more use, and more support" to those serving in the office.

Observations for our practice

It seems wise for each classis, each officebearer, and each ministry context to recognize the affirmations of Synods 2007 and 2012 relative to the office of commissioned pastor.

Commissioned pastors represent one of two pastoral offices recognized by our denomination (the other being minister of the Word). The differences between the two offices involve (a) limits on the scope of ministry for a commissioned pastor, (b) less specific educational qualifications required for commissioned pastors in solo pastor positions, and (c) no denominationally specified educational requirements for other commissioned pastors.

These differences delineate what the overture is asking synod to reaffirm—that commissioned pastors are not the same as ministers of the Word.

2. Classis approval relative to timing

The overture from Classis Hamilton reports a lack of clarity in how a classis approves the position and the person seeking ordination under Article 23. In our use of Article 23 two actions are required by classis (approval of the position, and examination and approval of a person to fill the position). Classis Hamilton's overture suggests that a proper approval process should ordinarily involve two

classis meetings in order to avoid an awkward situation in which a position is not approved but a candidate is standing ready to be examined to fill the position. Classis Hamilton goes on to request in the overture that “synod clarify that a candidate cannot be called to a position that has not been approved by classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies” (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 435).

In offering advice, our committee observes that the Church Order is clear in the area of a two-step process of approval, but is perhaps not clear in the way some persons would like. The Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a (General Regulations), states, “Before examining a person for the office of commissioned pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained commissioned pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001.” The two steps are clearly defined, although there is no reference to two meetings being required.

Observations for our practice

- a. It may indeed be wise in some cases for a classis to be sure that the matter of a job description be dealt with in a meeting distinct from a meeting in which a potential commissioned pastor filling the proposed position is examined.
- b. It is surely wise for any person who has been called to a position as a commissioned pastor to recognize the tentative nature of the call. The call is conditional upon successful examination, as is also the case for candidates for the office of minister of the Word. The call is also conditional upon the approval by classis of the job description.
- c. Frequently the proposed job description is intimately tied to an individual. In such cases the approval process can unavoidably get personal and potentially awkward.
- d. Circumstances may sometimes require that both approvals occur at the same classis meeting. Sequentially, of course, consideration of the issue of a position approval would precede the examination of a potential person to fill a position. It may in fact show wisdom on the part of classis and its leadership to schedule both the approval of the position and the examination of the potential pastor at the same meeting. There are many cases in which classes meet only twice a year, so requiring extended approval time could impede ministry. Funding and approval processes may require more swift action than could be taken over the course of two meetings of classis.
- e. It is vital to the *highly versatile* nature of the office of commissioned pastor (see the SMCC report to Synod 2007) that the leadership of each classis wrestle with these issues associated with timing, the conditional nature of calls, and the ways best to serve ministry opportunities with responsive nimbleness.
- f. It also seems wise for the appropriate classis team and the mentor involved in a given case to adequately prepare a person who will be examined by classis for the office of commissioned pastor. Preparation includes completion of an appropriate and agreed upon learning plan. (Remember that in the case of commissioned pastors serving as solo pastors this plan must be created in consultation with the Candidacy Committee.) It is also a gift to provide adequate coaching of a potential commissioned pastor so as to handle with grace

the dynamics of a classis meeting and examination. The coaching practice can mitigate some of the awkwardness described by the overture of Classis Hamilton. (See also section II, 11 below.)

3. Classis approval relative to job descriptions

The next issue articulated by the overture from Classis Hamilton has to do with assistance in evaluating a proposed job description for a commissioned pastor position. The overture requests such assistance, and the Candidacy Committee refers the church to existing statements that offer such assistance.

The following statement was adopted by Synod 2001 as a guideline for classes and synodical deputies in deciding whether a job description is appropriate for the office of commissioned pastor*:

The office of evangelist [commissioned pastor] may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension. Evangelists extend the work of pastoral leadership by founding and working in new congregations and by extending the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism (cf. Church Order Article 24). By the broader application of the office of evangelist, with its existing regulations, to a variety of ministry positions, the church avoids the multiplication of offices and provides a way of recognizing and regulating a variety of pastoral positions in our churches. These positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness such as chaplain, pastor of education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth.

(Acts of Synod 2001, p. 506)

*Note: In 2001 the office was known as *evangelist*. The title was changed to *ministry associate* by Synod 2003 and to *commissioned pastor* by Synod 2012.

Note also that Church Order Article 24 offers some guidelines regarding the nature of the work that can be done under the “commissioned pastor” ordination.

Leading up to Synod 2012 the Office of Synodical Services received inquiries from synodical deputies seeking help in the task of determining the elements of an acceptable job description. The Candidacy Committee office occasionally received similar requests from classes and local ministries. Synod 2012 therefore added the following statement to the Church Order Supplement, Article 23, and to the Ministry Associate Handbook:

Elements of a Good Job Description

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement 23-a).
2. A description of the supervision and lines of accountability for the position.
3. Specific notation of whether preaching and/or administering the sacraments are to be included in the position.

Observations for our practice

The Candidacy Committee observes that the material already provided the church is more than sufficient for the evaluation of appropriate job descriptions. The material cited above already has been gathered into a document called “The Commissioned Pastor Handbook,” available through the Candidacy pages of the denominational website (crcna.org).

Having said this, we also believe that the church will be well served if a few particular concerns about job descriptions are also addressed in this current document. This advice is offered in the context of parallel guidance for approval of job descriptions for minister of the Word as presented in Church Order Articles 12-b, 12-c, 13-b, and 13-c.

- a. When approving a job description that involves a commissioned pastor serving in a position outside of North America, it would be wise for the classis, the calling church, or the potential commissioned pastor to secure a letter of endorsement from our denominational missions agency. World Missions has developed a straightforward protocol for such endorsement, which will assure all parties concerned that the ministry proposed will be done responsibly. It will also enable such commissioned pastors to receive the support and encouragement of our regional missions teams across the globe.
- b. When approving a job description involving a commissioned pastor serving in a position that has chaplaincy embedded in the work, it would be wise for the classis, the calling church, or the potential commissioned pastor to secure a letter of endorsement from the denominational Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministries. Such a letter would be a blessing to the chaplain and the church as it would enable a connection to the growing cadre of endorsed CRC chaplains.
- c. With the current and broadening use of the office of commissioned pastor it becomes clear that a common description of a commissioned pastor position as “confined to the boundaries of the classis that ordains them” is erroneous. Church Order Article 23-e states that “commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure approval of their consistories and classes.” The boundaries or limits placed on a commissioned pastor are determined by the field of labor as defined in the job description, not by geography.
- d. We suggest that it would be wise for a job description to state explicitly whether a commissioned pastor will preach, and whether the preaching will occur in the form of occasional service as a “pulpit supply pastor” in neighboring churches. There is an erroneous belief that any commissioned pastor who preaches has license to preach anywhere in the classis. The Church Order in Article 23 does not specify this. Rather, limits and boundaries of the work of a commissioned pastor are specified in the job description. If the preaching responsibilities of a commissioned pastor are intended to enable this person to serve as pulpit supply at other churches in the classis, it would be best for the job description to say so and for the classical examination to be of the same nature as those given before granting such licensure.

4. Classis approval relative to changing job descriptions

The overture from Classis Hamilton observes that after a job description has been approved by classis, the position approved sometimes begins to change and evolve into something different. The overture correctly states that neither the Church Order nor the Supplement provides guidelines for how classis should be involved in such a transition.

Observations for our practice

The Candidacy Committee suggests that this is one of many areas in church life where spiritual discernment and common sense need to guide us, rather than increased procedure and rule. We have observed a number of cases in which a classis interim committee has responsibly deliberated regarding a changing job description, determining whether it has become something new which needs approval by classis, or whether it remains the same at its heart. Classis interim committees are free to share their decisions with classis, or even to present a motion that their judgment regarding a changing job description be approved. Synodical deputies can also be consulted, formally or informally, and they would, of course, be invited to the conversation if indeed a job description were to change so much as to be judged “new.”

5. Supervision of commissioned pastors

The overture from Classis Hamilton stated that there is “lack of clarity over how a commissioned pastor is supervised with integrity” (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 435). The potential lack of clarity is attributed to confusion that arises when a commissioned pastor serves outside the boundaries of a local church (in a para-church agency, or even with multiple ministries). The overture also suggests that local churches need help in understanding their role in supervision. Specifically cited is the challenge of supervising a missionary living in a foreign country.

The Candidacy Committee recognizes the need for clarity in supervision. As is recognized by the overture of Classis Hamilton, such complication in supervision is faced in certain ministry assignments of ministers of the Word as well as in those of commissioned pastors. Whenever an ordained pastor’s work brings them outside the bounds of a local congregational ministry, there are challenges in supervision that need to be addressed. Such challenges should be embraced in the spirit of Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, which gives us the following direction: “The classis shall also ensure that commissioned pastors, especially those working at some distance from their calling congregations, will have proper supervision and support for their ministry.”

Observations for our practice

Here are a few thoughts intended to lead toward good practice:

- a. Church Order Article 13 addresses this matter for ministers of the Word who serve in a ministry other than their calling church. A distinction in roles is called for wherein the local council supervises “doctrine and life” and the other ministries, institutions, and/or agencies involved supervise the ministry duties and performance. The Church Order article offering direction for ministers of the Word calls for an implied communication as required by circumstances between the council of the calling church and the supervising agencies that may be involved. We suggest that this very same principle provides adequate guidance for church councils and classes as they face the challenges implicit in supervising commissioned pastors who work beyond the bounds of their calling church.
- b. It seems wise, then, that a job description should clearly delineate who the appropriate ministries and supervisors are in the case of a commissioned pastor role taking place outside the bounds of a calling church. This point is stated rather explicitly in the 2012 addition to the Church Order Supplement

to Article 23-a dealing with “elements of a good job description.” For supervision of doctrine and life it may be helpful to specify in a letter of mutual covenant the frequency and nature of expected reports and visits to the calling church. Ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors who serve outside the bounds of the local church, along with their calling churches, will be enabled to enjoy a meaningful relationship through such explicit statements of understanding. The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministries has a template for such a letter, called a “Covenant of Joint Supervision,” and it is available on their website.

6. Termination of ministry for a commissioned pastor

The next concern cited in the overture from Classis Hamilton pertains to the termination of a commissioned pastor. Termination, or the conclusion of service in a ministry, can happen either voluntarily or involuntarily. The overture seeks clarity regarding the change of status that occurs when a commissioned pastor leaves a ministry.

The assumption of the Church Order is that immediately upon the conclusion of a ministry position, the commissioned pastor is no longer ordained. In contrast, a minister of the Word is normally given one or two years to find a new ministry position, with the possibility of yearly extension. (See Article 14-d for the case of ministers of the Word who leave ministry entirely, and see Article 17-c for those who leave a ministry assignment hoping to enter a different ministry assignment.)

Observations for our practice

This is an area in our practice of commissioned pastor ordination where pastoral sensitivity and spiritual wisdom are needed. Each case will have different dynamics, and the relevant supervising bodies and classis leaders need to be in open communication in order to serve the church well. Here are some thoughts that may be helpful:

- a. It is important to recognize the potential damage that could be done to the spirit of a commissioned pastor who is told that the very next day after leaving a ministry position they are no longer ordained. Though this should not come as a surprise, it may well be experienced as such. Such cases require much gentleness, and we urge that they be treated tenderly.
- b. It is also important to recognize the commitment we have made to tie ordination to a ministry calling, making it rather hard to comprehend the situation of a commissioned pastor without an active call.
- c. It is possible for classis leaders to pastorally provide time by declaring that the official conclusion of the ministry does not occur until classis has declared it concluded. Thus, there can be a period of adjustment between the action of leaving a ministry and classis’ approving the conclusion of that ministry assignment. This is in keeping with a statement in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, which says, “A calling church that terminates the service of a person in an approved commissioned pastor position must seek the concurrence of the classis in which approval was given.”
- d. Particularly for a person in a chaplaincy position as commissioned pastor, it may happen that the position is terminated but the commissioned pastor may

actively search for and be able to find a new chaplaincy position. In such a case the commissioned pastor in question, the calling church, and the classis leaders need to be in conversation regarding whether the original call is still in place, adjusted, or terminated. Such a process would not be concluded until completion is affirmed by classis. The ordination of the commissioned pastor could thus be assumed to remain in effect until both the church and the classis rule it otherwise.

- e. Any commissioned pastor who leaves a ministry assignment and who intends to begin another ministry assignment should be encouraged to express their intentions and desires to the classis leadership. The classis leaders may then decide to postpone their declaration of a “ministry conclusion” for an agreed upon period of time while the commissioned pastor involved searches for a new ministry assignment. Should this raise issues regarding title or compensation during a period of transition, we trust that such matters would be handled by the classis.

7. Further concern regarding termination of ministry

It is good to reflect further on the statement cited above, added to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, by Synod 2013: “A calling church that terminates the service of a person in an approved commissioned pastor position must seek the concurrence of the classis in which approval was given.” Although termination can be voluntary or involuntary, the sad reality is that there have been cases in which a commissioned pastor has not been treated fairly in the conclusion of ministry service. Especially when the ministry service is at a local church, our corporate covenants require that we confer together to be sure that the pastor has been treated fairly when terminated. We are all well served by the reminder that, since commissioned pastors are ordained to office, they may not be simply dismissed as at-will employees.

Observations for our practice

What follows are some further observations and suggestions regarding the practice of approving a release or termination of ministry service for a commissioned pastor:

- a. Our Church Order specifies a protocol to be followed when a minister of the Word is released from a ministry assignment. This protocol is described in Church Order Supplement, Article 17-a, and it involves both the local ministry leaders and the classis in a conversation and journey that seeks to lead toward honorable treatment of a released minister of the Word as well as healing for the congregation. The Candidacy Committee views this protocol as containing elements that can wisely guide a commissioned pastor’s release from service.
- b. Certainly the circumstances in each case will vary, including the needs of the commissioned pastor, the responsibilities that were given to the commissioned pastor, the length of service, and other factors. For example, a full-time ministry position is likely more appropriately offered a severance package than is a part-time position. These issues need to be weighed as severance is discussed, and as readiness to recommend for future ministry is decided upon. A well-worded note in the minutes of classis describing the reality of concluded service and any appropriately public provisions will serve both the church

and the commissioned pastor. This will also provide helpful documentation for denominational records and for potential future ministry.

- c. In all cases of “termination” (conclusion) of a commissioned pastor’s service it is assumed that classis will take note of the change in status through its official minutes.

8. Transfer of ministry for a commissioned pastor

Another matter raised at this point by Classis Hamilton’s overture has to do with “transfer” of service and ordination in a new ministry. Classis Hamilton asks, “Under what circumstances should a commissioned pastor be reexamined in order to enter a different position under Article 23?” (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 436). Technically, the Church Order does not allow for a “transfer” of ordination for a commissioned pastor. Ordination in each position is linked only to that position.

This is another area in which the development of use in the office of commissioned pastor brings questions that test our integrity and creativity. Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, suggests that a classis has some latitude in deciding whether or not to reexamine a commissioned pastor who has previously served in a different ministry: “Before examining a person for the office of commissioned pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained commissioned pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. In addition, the candidates for the office of commissioned pastor must have proven ability to function in the ministry to which they are being called.”

The Supplement to Article 23-a also says, “When the commissioned pastors accept another call, their ordination shall require the approval of the classis to which their calling church belongs, to which the commissioned pastors shall have presented good ecclesiastical testimonies of doctrine and life given to them by their former council and classis.” Notice that this statement refers to ordination in the new position. Ordination does not transfer; the person can bring testimonies, but ordination is new with the commissioning to each position. We trust that these reminders from the Supplement will help us to manage whatever uncertainties classes may face from case to case.

Observations for our practice

Rather than design or offer a blanket process or recommended procedure in response to this question, the Candidacy Committee suggests that the appropriate leaders of classis weigh each given case of “requested transfer” and decide how best to proceed. Here are a few words of guidance:

- a. Practically speaking, the first official step in any change to a new assignment is to ascertain that the relevant job description is approved. If it has not been approved previously, such approval requires an action of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.
- b. Then, judging on the similarity of the previous service of the potential commissioned pastor and the new proposed service, and judging on the effectiveness of the potential commissioned pastor in their previous ministry, the

classis leadership could propose that classis offer permission to move toward ordination based on the examination conducted for the previous service.

- c. A letter of recommendation (see the reference to “good ecclesiastical testimonies of doctrine and life” in Supplement, Article 23-a) from a previous ministry and from a previous classis of service is required and should serve usefully for a commissioned pastor to present to a classis leadership team seeking to discern the nature and need of a “reexamination” for a new position in the same or in a different classis.
- d. Keep in mind that the “default practice” is that of examining a person for each commissioned pastor assignment.
- e. Recognize the option that a briefer examination, more akin to an interview, may be a useful substitute to a full examination. This would enable the classis to get to know the new commissioned pastor and give occasion to offer prayer for the person and the ministry involved. It occurs to the Candidacy Committee that although this option is not prescribed in the Church Order for either a commissioned pastor or a minister of the Word who is new to a classis, it might be a beneficial practice at classis for both.

9. Moving credentials from one calling church to another

Classis Hamilton asks through its overture to clarify the conditions under which a transfer of credentials can take place for a commissioned pastor who changes calling churches, presumably keeping the same ministry assignment. The overture describes a three-step protocol that could be followed. The cases being addressed here are presumably those in which a given commissioned pastor is serving a ministry outside of a local church, and this pastor desires to have a new church of membership and a new council to whom there will be accountability in doctrine and life.

The cases in which such a protocol may be needed are rather rare, but with the evolving use of the office of commissioned pastor they may become more common. The protocol suggested in the overture of Classis Hamilton mirrors the accepted practice of ministers of the Word who transfer their credentials from one congregation to another while remaining in their same ministry role (outside of a given congregation, in missions, chaplaincy, or some approved agency work). This practice requires statements of agreement from both the current calling church and the new calling church. It also presumes that the job description is not changing. Finally, the transfer is noted in the minutes of whichever classes are involved (for appropriate record-keeping, awareness, and accountability).

Observations for our practice

The Candidacy Committee observes that the protocol for commissioned pastor transfers described by Classis Hamilton is appropriate. It is indeed normally followed throughout the denomination in cases of ministers of the Word transferring from one calling church to another while retaining their same ministry assignment. Our hope and expectation as a committee is that other classes, faced with this issue, would implement the very same protocol. This would honor the covenants and responsibilities entrusted to calling churches relative to commissioned pastors who wish to transfer their credentials.

10. Retirement status for commissioned pastors

Under our current Church Order there is no provision of a “ministerial status” for a commissioned pastor who retires. Church Order Article 18 offers provision for “emeritus” status for ministers of the Word who retire, allowing them to continue performing official acts of ministry.

As we seek to place more value on the office of commissioned pastor and offer more support to those who serve in this office (remember the words of Synod 2007), we recognize that it is a worthy challenge to look for ways to honor and continue to make use of commissioned pastors who retire after having served well. Perhaps not all job descriptions or all persons serving in the office would appropriately lead toward some sort of “emeritus” status. Yet surely those who have served in a solo pastor role, and those who have served in a full-time capacity for a number of years would be appropriately honored in this way. The church could be blessed by their ability to continue as ordained pulpit supply, and they would be blessed as they retained a pastoral identity.

At least two of our classes have taken the step of creating a category called “commissioned pastor emeritus.” In doing so, they confer this title on respected commissioned pastors in their retirement. The minutes of the classis record this status and indicate that the commissioned pastor has authority to do the official acts of ministry (preaching, administration of sacraments, officiating at weddings, etc.) as long as they are mentally and physically able. These classes are extending the intent of Church Order Article 18 to their treatment of commissioned pastors.

Observation for our practice

Although this practice is not currently in the Church Order, the Candidacy Committee judges that the practice of conferring “commissioned pastor emeritus” status on a retiring commissioned pastor is within the classical scope of authority and that a classis might well consider doing so. It may well be that the practice may increase and may result in an eventual overture to synod that more officially recognizes the practice.

11. Supervision of learning plans and preparation for classis examination

The next area of discussion and comment has to do with preparation for examination of a commissioned pastor. The Candidacy Committee has received questions over the past years regarding the nature, the design, the implementation, and the timing of learning plans. Relevant questions have to do with who supervises the construction and implementation of a plan, and how a classis can be assured that a potential commissioned pastor is prepared to do well when brought to classis for examination.

Observations for our practice

- a. Note that Synod 2013 added a paragraph to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a (second paragraph), that requires “a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee,” for all persons who will be examined for a position involving solo pastoral work in an emerging or organized church. For these persons the learning plan needs to be completed before an examination takes place, and the learning plan is

to be developed in consultation between appropriate classis leaders and the Candidacy Committee.

- b. Note also that since 2004 Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, has included an extended description of ministry standards that classes can use in judging readiness for ministry as an ordained commissioned pastor. These can surely guide the preparation phase for anyone contemplating this ordination.
- c. Previous study reports of synod have referred to a “principle of proportionality” relative to the preparation and readiness for commissioned pastor ordination. A potential commissioned pastor should demonstrate a given area of knowledge and skill in proportion to the degree that such knowledge and skill are part of the approved job description.
- d. The Candidacy Committee has created a list of training programs and ministries aimed at potential commissioned pastors. The list is included in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook on the Candidacy pages of the denominational website (crcna.org). There is opportunity to add to this list, and it has been prepared in the hope that it might be of service to churches, classes, and potential commissioned pastors as they contemplate learning plans.
- e. A consult meeting sponsored by the Candidacy Committee in the fall of 2011 resulted in the agreement by various advocates of the commissioned pastor office that classis has often proceeded too quickly toward an examination for ordination. It is much more wise, the group decided, for classis to prescribe a series of steps by which a potential commissioned pastor meets members and functionaries of the classis a few different times before a scheduled exam.

12. Commissioned pastor ordination as a “bridge ordination”

Finally, we seek to name a practice and use of Article 23 that we are noticing as a Candidacy Committee. The office of commissioned pastor is in some cases serving as a “bridge ordination” for persons who are preparing for ordination as minister of the Word but who also want to be involved in active ministry as they study. The practice is not really in conflict with the Church Order, but it bears some purposeful reflection and perhaps some advice.

There have been a few cases in the past few years in which an organized congregation has become connected to a current commissioned pastor or a current seminary student. The relationship between congregation and potential pastor has been so compelling that the congregation has sought for ways to engage the person’s service before they are eligible for candidacy as minister of the Word.

Church Order Article 23-d and its Supplement allow for an organized congregation to call a commissioned pastor to serve them, under a specific set of circumstances, requiring classis approval and concurrence of synodical deputies.

Observations for our practice

As the Candidacy Committee has been consulted in cases of this nature, it has offered a few suggestions:

- a. It is wise for the appointed church counselor to direct the attention of the organized congregation desiring to call a person to serve as commissioned pastor to the reality that we have a considerable number of fully qualified and

ready candidates for minister of the Word and currently ordained ministers of the Word eligible for call.

- b. Further, the church counselor is responsible to direct the congregation to the unique criteria cited in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-d. The decision to take this step is not only that of the local council or congregation. It also requires the support of classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies.
- c. Having offered these first two items of reflection to those inquiring about this matter, the Candidacy Committee has suggested that any such arrangement to call a commissioned pastor to a lead position in an organized church be done with an explicit condition that the commissioned pastor make progress toward attaining an M.Div. degree and approval as a candidate for minister of the Word. The condition can be written into the motion of approval relative to the use of Article 23-d, with a suitable time line, with expectations of reporting, with expectations of support by the calling church, and with recognition that the approval can be reversed at a given point if the conditions are not met. With such understandings as have just been cited, there are some effective relationships currently under way in which a commissioned pastor is serving an organized church while also making progress toward ordination as a minister of the Word. At the appropriate time (i.e., when the person is declared a candidate) these commissioned pastors receive a call to continue to serve, as a minister of the Word, and all the appropriate and normal steps of classical examination are conducted. We continue to monitor how such arrangements are faring, and, should they prove beneficial to both the commissioned pastor and the congregation, our committee may eventually recommend that they be codified as a provision in the Church Order.

III. Suggestions for potential areas of modification to Church Order Article 23

As we stated at the beginning of this document, we wish to specify some particular areas in which modification of the current Church Order might be helpful. The Candidacy Committee does not wish at this point to propose any of these modifications, but we do wish to lay them before the churches and before synod for their consideration. We at this point do not have investment in seeing these changes come about, but we do recognize the potential that the church may desire these changes. The Candidacy Committee would gladly accept an assignment to develop more specific proposals for synod to consider, with rationale and grounds, relative to any of the following areas. Overtures from the churches could also be recommended, if these changes seem advisable.

1. Create a provision for an “emeritus” status of retired commissioned pastors, so that those approved for such a status can continue to serve the church as is the case for retired ministers of the Word. Church Order Article 18 would serve as a guide for such a provision.
2. Provide more explicit help and required guidance for classes and ministries as they deal with terminations of commissioned pastors so that healthy termination of service may be better assured. The concern may not apply to all commissioned pastor positions, but at least full-time ministry positions at a local church would be considered. Church Order Article 17, which pertains to this matter for ministers of the Word, would serve as a guide.

3. Provide clarity in the Church Order Supplement regarding a protocol for transferring a commissioned pastor's credentials from one classis to another, as discussed in section II, 9 above.
4. Recognize a new use of Church Order Article 23 (called Article 23-f?) which would more explicitly allow the use of the office as a "bridge ordination" toward ordination as a minister of the Word. This use would not pertain to all commissioned pastor positions but would offer appropriate guidance for cases in which it may be desired.
5. Offer proposals for editing Church Order Supplement, Article 23. As Article 23 and its Supplement have evolved over the past thirty years, the Supplement has become extremely long. It may be desirable to remove some of the material in the Supplement and include it, instead, in the document called "The Commissioned Pastor Handbook," which is currently available on the Candidacy pages of the denominational website (crcna.org).

The Candidacy Committee submits this report to Synod 2016 in response to Article 42 in the *Acts of Synod 2015* (see pp. 640-41). It is our hope and prayer that the observations and reflections offered serve the church and fulfill the mandate given us.

Recommendations

We would request that the following two motions be presented to Synod 2016, considering the request for clarification regarding Church Order Article 23 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 640-41),

1. That synod receive this report on Clarification Regarding Church Order Article 23 as presented by the Candidacy Committee, and recommend it to congregations and classes for review as helpful advice in the administration of Church Order Article 23.
2. That synod call attention to the list of suggestions for potential areas of modification to Church Order Article 23 and invite continued reflection and potential overtures in order to enable our Church Order to serve us well in the administration of the office of commissioned pastor.

Appendix B

Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors

I. Report overview and outline

The heart of this report is a rationale for numerous recommendations about the policy and practice of continuing education (CE) for pastors in the CRCNA. Among the recommendations you will find discussion of the significant place of the local church covenant, the regional body (classis), and the pastor. The committee's greatest hope and prayer is that this report can prompt growing attention and action relative to this area of pastoral life and church life.

The outline of this report is as follows:

- I. Report overview and outline
- II. Introduction
- III. Background: History of discussion in the CRC
- IV. Observations and challenges
- V. Practices of other denominations
- VI. Defining continuing education
- VII. Rationale for recommendations
 - A. Affirm previous synodical statements
 - B. Covenants, pastors, and councils
 - C. Covenants for new pastors
 - D. Covenants, pastors, and classis
 - E. Classis engagement with a broadening CE initiative
 - F. Celebrating the development of sabbatical policies for pastors
 - G. Recognize and celebrate current resources
 - H. Create a website for CE
 - I. Appoint a committee and staff
 - J. Provide funding
 - K. CE for pastors in diverse communities
 - L. Nurturing a culture of continuing education
 - M. Partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary
 - N. Celebrating the development of a grant for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
 - O. Report to Synod 2018
- VIII. Recommendations

II. Introduction

The Reformed tradition has always advocated that those engaged in ministry should be educated and trained in ways appropriate to providing effective Christian ministry. Although Reformed churches have provided that education and training in a variety of ways over the years, throughout most of the CRC's existence, those engaged in ordained ministry were, with rare exceptions, required to attend seminary. However, seminary training cannot prepare people for all of the facets of ministry. In reality, seminary training has always been the beginning, not the end, of pastoral education.

Continuing study and lifelong learning are cherished values in our tradition and in our understanding of Scripture itself. Discipleship is a journey of learning and discovery, not an instantaneous change. Pastors, in particular, are called to lead the way in lives of study, contemplation, and learning. We think of Paul's call to Timothy: "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress" (1 Tim. 4:15). In Romans 12:2 we're told that transformation includes the renewal of the mind. Pastors are called to live in accountability to elders, to higher authorities, in order to be pressed and shaped into the tools God intends. Consider Romans 13:5: "It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Though this passage is speaking of government authority, it can be used by pastors as an encouragement to live in partnership with and even under the authority of a church that expects growth and development in character, knowledge, and skill for ministry.

Effective Christian ministry in response to God's call requires the minister to engage in lifelong learning, or continuing education. Continuing education (CE)

has taken various forms over the years, including personal study and mentorship, events held during classis meetings, meetings of peer learning groups, seminars or courses offered formally and informally, and advanced degree programs. The benefits of CE go beyond the lives of pastors into the congregations and ministries that they lead and serve.

For the sake of this report, “minister” and “pastor” are synonymous terms, used for all who are ordained to vocational work in the church and kingdom. For many this work takes the form of service in a local congregational setting, in partnership with a church council composed of elders and deacons. For others the work takes the form of missions, various types of chaplaincy, and other strategic assignments. Although this report often will refer to the work of those in parish ministry and their relationship with a local church council, we invite those from a nonparish ministry setting to use this report creatively in their specific context.

Especially in view of current changes in church and society and the challenges ministers face, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has in recent years recognized and emphasized the vital importance of CE for those engaged in ministry. Just as persons engaged in the fields of medicine, law, education, or skilled trades need to engage in CE to provide appropriate services, so too pastors and others engaged in pastoral ministry need CE in order to strengthen their knowledge of our Reformed, Christian heritage, to provide personal and spiritual formation and renewal, to understand their ministry contexts, and to enhance their skills for cultivating communities of disciples.

Against the background of the need for CE for ministry and of various synodical decisions stretching back to 1992, Synod 2014 gave the following instruction to the Candidacy Committee:

That synod instruct the denominational Candidacy Committee to work with Calvin Theological Seminary and the Office of Pastor-Church Relations in developing a plan for continuing education of pastors that includes opportunity for growth in familiarity with our denominational ministries, our confessional commitments, and our polity, and that this plan be presented to Synod 2016.

(Acts of Synod 2014, p. 544)

In synodical and advisory committee discussion it was made clear that the task of the committee was to build on the work of previous synods, to consider potential forms of accountability, and to consider a broad range of options and strategies for pastoral CE, not only strategies aimed at familiarity with denominational ministries and values. Thus this report is broad in scope, seeking to help our denomination take significant steps in the continuing journey toward effective training and support of pastors.

The Candidacy Committee formed this requested Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors in the fall of 2014. The members of the committee were selected to bring a variety of perspectives and experiences to the work. The following served on this committee:

Dr. Ronald Feenstra (academic dean, Calvin Theological Seminary)
Pastor Ron Hosmar (commissioned pastor in Ottawa, Ont.)
Dr. LaVerne Jordan (retired academic dean at Colorado Christian University
and Candidacy Committee member)
Rev. David Koll (director of Candidacy Committee), chair

Dr. Russ Palsrok (retired pastor and member of the 2001 synodical committee on CE)
Rev. Denise Posie (Pastor-Church Relations)
Rev. Al Postma (pastor in Thunder Bay, Ont.)
Dr. Gary Vander Ark (elder and retired physician in Denver, Colo.)
Mr. Mark Wallace (Home Missions catalytic leader for campus ministry and leadership development)

The committee has been energized by the task. We are grateful for the input and involvement of many consultants, pastors, survey responders, ministry and agency representatives, and others along the way while doing our work. The report is built on the work of past committees and seeks to look to a future in which continuing education for pastors is embedded in our denominational culture. The committee hopes that this report will help pastors, councils, and the larger denomination form vital partnerships that strengthen and enhance the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church at the local level and around the world.

III. Background: History of discussion in the CRC

The Christian Reformed Church has long recognized the importance of continuing education (CE) for pastors and others engaged in ministry in the church. Especially in the past 25 years, the CRC has seen CE for pastors as an important means of helping to revitalize pastors' ministry and prevent pastoral burnout. This chapter of the story begins in 1992:

A. In 1992, synod requested the formulation of a "Mission and Vision Statement" for the denomination. In order to ensure a wide representation of views, the process for developing this statement included participation from CRC pastors, agency employees, and broader representatives. The intent was to develop a statement with goals and strategies.

B. In 1995, synod received a draft of the requested "Mission and Vision Statement" and sent it to the churches for study, discussion, and response. The statement was subsequently revised on the basis of input received from the denomination.

C. In 1997, synod approved a revised "Vision and Mission Statement" for the CRCNA. The statement included an appendix with a table of goals for denominational agencies and others to achieve the vision and advance the mission. Under the heading "Continuing Professional Education," Synod 1997 endorsed the following goal (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 55):

Goal

By 2002, all ordained ministers and other ministry staff serving congregations in the CRC will receive continuing training in effective ministry. A curriculum and a strategy will be developed to provide such leadership training on the congregational level.

Agency Strategies

Calvin Theological Seminary, in consultation with the other agencies, will develop and propose a plan for evaluating, approving, offering, monitoring, and certifying required continuing and professional development experiences annually for all CRC ministers and full-time ministry-staff personnel. This plan will be presented via the Board of Trustees to Synod 1998 for approval. (Continuing education/train-

ing opportunities will be provided on a regional basis at least once per year within each region.)

Agents

Pastoral Ministries, Calvin Seminary

D. In 1998, Synod received a proposal from Calvin Theological Seminary outlining steps toward implementing the goal for CE for pastors and full-time ministry staff (*Agenda for Synod 1998*, p. 280):

The academic dean of the seminary, the director of Pastor-Church Relations, and the general secretary of the CRCNA have collaborated on the plan contained in the following recommendations. . . .

That a ministerial-standards committee be established by December 1, 1998, with the following mandate and organization:

Title: Ministerial-Standards Committee

Mandate: The Ministerial-Standards Committee is to evaluate, approve, monitor, and certify the continuing education required annually of all CRC ministers and full-time ministry-staff personnel.

Composition: General Secretary, academic dean of Calvin Theological Seminary, director of Pastor-Church Relations, two ordained ministers selected by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

Also submitted were plans for organization of the committee, funding, required continuing education units (CEU) per year, and means (course, etc.) for meeting this requirement.

Synod 1998 withheld action on the proposal and approved the following recommendations (*Acts of Synod 1998*, p. 428):

1. That Synod 1998 affirm the value of continuing education for CRC ministry staff, a value raised by the Denominational Strategic Plan and addressed by the 1998 Calvin Seminary supplementary report. . . .
2. That synod ask its officers to appoint a broad-based committee of laity and clergy to study the issues of ministry standards and continuing education, with the mandate of preparing a continuing education proposal to Synod 1999. Such a committee will take into account
 - a. The discussion of Synod 1998 on this issue.
 - b. The issues of local ownership and accountability.
 - c. The means and simplicity of administration.
 - d. Input from church councils and congregations throughout the denomination.

E. In 2000, synod received a report from the committee appointed in response to the decision of Synod 1998. That committee engaged the Center for Social Research at Calvin College to get input from ministers and presented the results of its study. The committee also presented the following rationale and recommendations (see *Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 417-24):

1. Rationale for CE with the following recommendation:
"That synod urge all councils to establish a policy for continuing education and to establish the expectation that their pastor(s) and full-time ministry staff annually engage in an appropriate program of continuing education for ministry."

2. Opportunities for and obstacles to CE with the following recommendations:
 - a. "That synod urge church councils to grant pastors and ministry staff adequate time (up to ten days per year) for annual continuing education and that they budget sufficient funds (approximately \$1,200) to cover this education."
 - b. "That synod establish a denominational continuing-education fund. . . . Such a fund would provide more equitable funding throughout the denomination. Not all congregations . . . have equal resources, and small and less financially established congregations and their pastors are as much in need of continuing education as larger more financially stable congregations."
 - c. "That synod
 - . . . Set a ministry share of \$.50 for this fund. This seems adequate for the initial years of this fund.
 - . . . Request Pastor-Church Relations to appoint a three-person committee to receive and respond to applications . . . requesting assistance for continuing education. . . . The committee will be approved by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.
 - . . . Ask Pastor-Church Relations and the new committee to provide Synod 2001 with a written policy and procedure for granting funds to those . . . that seek assistance."
3. Implementation of CE, including topics and opportunities and sample procedure for councils
4. Accountability with the following recommendation:
 - "That councils hold ministers and other full-time ministry staff accountable both 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."

Synod 2000 adopted all of the above recommendations and the following (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 682):

That . . . the following sample question be included in the revised church-visiting guide in the section pertaining to the work of ministers: What policies have been established in order to provide adequate time, sufficient funds and proper accountability for continuing education for your pastor(s) and ministry staff?

That synod . . . ask Pastor-Church Relations to provide guidance to . . . churches with respect to implementing continuing-education plans and policies.

F. Synod 2001 received a report from Pastor-Church Relations that provided guidance to churches and ministry staff and that included a "Continuing Education Covenant," a "Ministry Staff Worksheet," and a "Church Advice Worksheet," as well as guidelines for church councils and for distribution of denominational continuing-education funds.

G. During the years from 2001 to 2010 a denominational ministry known as Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, funded in large part by a grant from the Lilly Foundation, provided significant opportunity for continuing education events for pastors, especially through the formation of pastor peer-learning groups.

H. In 2011, synod adopted a Candidacy Committee report reminding the churches of existing policy statements regarding CE, encouraging the continuing development of a healthy policy and practice for CE, and instructing the churches and church visitors to make the issue of CE for pastors a standard part of their discussions. Synod 2011 also approved the addition of a line item in the

CRC Letter of Call, giving opportunity to specify an indicated amount of time per year for CE.

I. In 2014, synod, in response to a Candidacy Committee report noting the importance of serving new pastors coming into the CRC from other denominations and pastors from diverse ethnic and cultural traditions, approved the following recommendation (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 544):

That synod instruct the denominational Candidacy Committee to work with Calvin Theological Seminary and the Office of Pastor-Church Relations in developing a plan for continuing education of pastors that includes opportunity for growth in familiarity with our denominational ministries, our confessional commitments, and our polity, and that this plan be presented to Synod 2016.

IV. Observations and challenges

This brief history of the past quarter century of synodical action on this issue leads to the following observations informing the present report:

A. The desire of the CRC to encourage its pastors and ministry staff to engage in continuing professional education is abundantly evident from the lengthy history of synods dealing with this matter. Many of the reports have highlighted the crucial importance of continually updating ministry skills in the midst of a changing world and church. **So, although the CRC's desire is therefore explicitly clear, this desire has not been implemented throughout the denomination. As a result, the CRC has not achieved its goal of having all pastors engaged in annual CE.**

B. Many pastors have already participated in professional education through the use of denominational funds from the Pastor-Church subcommittee, through councils supporting their pastors, through agencies providing funding for employees, and with pastors subsidizing their own growth. **Yet for various reasons some pastors are still not engaged in CE for pastors.**

(It is difficult to obtain exact pastor engagement information; a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence survey with a response rate of slightly over 50 percent indicated that 89 percent of pastoral respondents had engaged in CE. As encouraging as this is, we do not know how many of the nonrespondents engaged in CE, and we have little data on how frequently they engaged, how much council support they had, and what forms of CE pastors engaged in.)

C. Education for pastors is constantly changing, as are the circumstances in which they minister. While most pastors receive an excellent theological foundation for entering ministry, they need to continually refresh and enrich their biblical and theological knowledge, update their professional skills, and engage in spiritual renewal. **Currently there is no individual, committee, or agency in the CRC researching and recommending possibilities for quality CE.**

D. Some pastors have engaged in such programs as Sustaining Pastoral Excellence or smaller accountability and support groups using foundational grant funds. Indications are that these were very helpful for the participating pastors. A grant currently in process for the Clinical Pastoral Education Program at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services could provide useful growth opportunities for pastors. Throughout the denomination and beyond there is a wealth of material, conferences, institutions, and programs that can assist pastors and councils

in finding opportunities to learn and grow. **However, there is no current or consistent plan for continuing and coordinating these growth opportunities.**

E. As pastors in the CRC come from an increasing diversity of educational, cultural, and ecclesiastical backgrounds, the need for developing shared values, knowledge, and skills grows. There are gaps in the current structure, whether at the denominational, classical, or local level, that leave some pastors at a disadvantage as they enter into ministry in the CRC. **There is not a consistent curriculum of instruction for new pastors entering the CRC, nor is there an entity empowered to provide CE guidance for our increasingly diverse clergy.**

F. As the CRC faces continuing and growing challenges in living into the mission God has given us, pastors and congregations realize that every congregation and every ministry needs continual renewal as it faces its unique context. Although self-directed renewal is possible, it is difficult to accomplish renewal without guidance, resources, and colleagues to form a community of learning. **Information about and incentives to engage in appropriate forms of CE (which will be different for different ministry contexts) are needed in order to help pastors grow and remain current so that the church may continue to fulfill its mission from God.**

G. Although Reformed polity anchors accountability for pastors in the pastor/council relationship, many councils are not equipped to assist their pastors in planning CE. Many councils do not provide an annual evaluation, do not provide regular feedback, have not included time for CE or sabbaticals in their Letter of Call, or have not engaged in a covenant-making process with their pastors. Some councils find it hard to arrange pulpit supply during a pastor's absence, and some churches are in locations that make it hard to travel to CE events. **Councils need support and encouragement in discussing and facilitating CE with their pastors.**

H. The lengthy experience of the CRC and many other denominations indicates that developing excellence in CE is difficult, especially where there is no clear accountability and centralized entity to define quality education; evaluate possibilities and progress; and approve, offer, and monitor CE. Councils and classes do not have the means to provide the needed resources and accountability. **Some administrative agent is needed to support councils in their accountability and pastors in their seeking quality CE.**

I. Currently there is no means of defining quality CE or measuring its accomplishment. What is a CEU (continuing education unit) for ministry? How much CE should a pastor engage in during a period of time (such as a year)? Should CE be required? **In order to promote healthy congregations and healthy pastors, the CRC needs a well-designed plan for defining adequate CE, for encouraging pastors, for publicly recording participation, and for establishing accountability for pastors to engage in CE.**

In sum, the future flourishing of the CRC, its individual congregations, and its pastors requires a significant strengthening of CE. For the benefit of both the pastors and the ministries they serve it is important to raise the profile of CE and the offerings available. Our entire denomination will be blessed by enhancing the incentives and accountability for pastors and congregations to ensure participation in CE.

V. Practices of other denominations

One area of inquiry the committee pursued was that of finding out what other denominations are doing in their continuing education (CE) for pastors. We were especially curious about the experiences of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), but we also asked seven other denominations to participate in a survey we conducted. In reviewing the survey responses from eight different denominations in the United States and Canada, it was somewhat comforting to find that we are not alone in looking for solutions to help pastors intentionally and consistently pursue CE in their unique ministry contexts. We share the challenge of managing several polarities, such as whether motivation should be done with a “carrot” or a “stick,” and whether coordination should be driven locally by the church council or by denominational staff or offices.

Although most denominations offer seminary or college courses, they are also using workshops or seminars, sabbaticals, peer groups, mentoring, and webinars. The challenges for pastors include seeing the value of CE and finding the time and financial resources to participate, as well as finding suitable opportunities that are readily available to them. Many bivocational pastors and those serving in places other than churches find it difficult to take time off for CE. The challenges facing congregations also include financing, as well as identifying what education their pastor might best pursue.

Most denominations make funding for CE available via grants or reimbursement. Some are particularly proactive in requiring an annual learning covenant or a requirement for license renewal. One denomination uses a Vocational Growth Tool by which pastors record their annual CE activities; it helps in determining good standing and eligibility for grants. Another denomination also holds an annual retreat for pastors and spouses; congregations are asked to include the costs for this in their annual budget, along with a minimum of 2 percent of the pastor’s salary to be allocated for CE. Finally, accountability varies from denominational or regional recording and oversight for CE to no oversight or tracking at all.

Overall, the survey confirmed our hypothesis that a combination of local and denominational involvement in, and expectations for, CE is required. Across denominations, the best incentives for CE seem to include planning at all levels coupled with making funds available for and contingent upon regular, ongoing learning.

It is very likely that potential opportunities exist for a CE collaboration with the RCA. RCA representatives expressed a willingness to have a conversation about this possibility. The RCA also appears to face many of the same challenges that we do, including accountability, funding, and providing CE that meets the needs of pastors in culturally and ethnically diverse settings.

Our survey of other denominations uncovered some encouraging trends, such as the reality that pastors in many denominations are encouraged from the local and denominational levels to become lifelong learners. But the survey also revealed that often there is no oversight or recording of CE, with pastors individually responsible for their own CE. Some pastors and churches lack funds available for CE. We hope that we can learn from the successes and the challenges of other denominations. We also hope that we can find ways to work together with other denominations, especially the RCA, in enhancing our culture of CE for pastors.

VI. Defining continuing education

Although the topic of CE arises frequently in ministry and in other occupations, it might be helpful to define what this report means in discussing CE. As we do so, we recognize that many occupations speak of CE. Thus physicians, nurses, and teachers need to engage in a certain amount of CE in order to maintain their ability to practice their profession. Many tradespeople need CE in order to maintain licensure to practice. In each instance, CE is an essential means of learning, maintaining, and improving important skills, habits, and dispositions for effective work in the profession or occupation. So too, CE for pastors is essential both for nurturing those who are new to pastoral work and for sustaining the long-term spiritual health and pastoral effectiveness of those who have been in ministry for a number of years.

One of the challenges we face in defining CE for pastors is that there is no agreed-upon definition of how much CE a pastor needs, what counts as high-quality CE, and how to assess whether any given CE exercise has achieved its intended goal. In the recommendations of this committee's report, we offer some suggestions to help pastors, councils, and others come to some understanding of these matters.

A. *How much CE is recommended?*

How much CE would be appropriate each year? Synod 1998 received recommendations that one Continuing Education Unit (CEU), or ten hours of instruction, per year be *required* of all pastors (*Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 280-81). After Synod 1998 decided not to make CE mandatory, Synod 2000 revisited the issue and recommended that pastors and ministry staff receive up to ten days per year for CE. Although it recognizes that each pastor's situation is different, making it difficult to prescribe a certain type or amount of CE, the committee judges that a minimum amount of CE per year would be equivalent to the work required for a two-credit academic course, even though for many people it will not involve taking an academic course. Thus, we would hope that a pastor's annual CE plan would include a variety of activities that would take no less time or effort than would be involved in taking a course (perhaps 80 hours of time spent over the course of a year). This expenditure of time involved would be roughly equivalent to the ten days per year recommended by Synod 2000. We note with joy that many churches are creating sabbatical policies for their pastors to address the need for a significant quantity of time devoted to the broadly defined task of "continuing education."

Although it can be helpful to give guidelines for the amount of work or time that would be expended, the main point is not to accumulate courses or other CE activities as if that were sufficient. The purpose of providing guidelines is to suggest that the CE activities engaged in should be sufficient, both in time spent and in formational quality, so as to have a real impact on the pastor. CE should be designed to achieve certain goals (which should be stated in the learning covenant). Those goals should include some combination of improvement in the pastor's knowledge of the church's heritage and beliefs, awareness of the context of ministry, personal and spiritual formation, and development of skills for effective ministerial leadership (see section VII, B and Addendum 1).

B. *What kinds of CE are recommended?*

Types of CE for pastors should address major areas that contribute to flourishing in ministry. In many cases, those areas are described as including character,

knowledge, and skill (as reflected in the supplement to Church Order Article 23). As a committee, we discussed two potential frameworks for organizing CE opportunities to ensure they cover a wide range of learning and growth: the standards from the Association of Theological Schools and the Five Streams, or “callings,” of the church as adopted by the CRC at Synod 2013.

The accrediting standards of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS, which accredits theological schools in the United States and Canada) identify four areas that M.Div. programs should address. These four areas are reflected in the educational goals for the M.Div. program at Calvin Theological Seminary:

- a. The religious heritage of the CRC (e.g., Scripture, hermeneutics, confessions, theology, history, polity). This area, sometimes called “knowledge” or “message,” would be especially important for a new pastor who has limited familiarity with the history, theology, and polity of the CRC.
- b. The personal and spiritual formation of the minister (e.g., pastoral identity, spiritual practices). This area, sometimes called “character” or “person,” is essential for effective ministry in any context and at any level of ministry experience.
- c. The cultural context of ministry (e.g., history of the congregation and its locale, history of the CRC, cultural context of the region or of North America). This area, which might be ignored if only three areas are identified, is crucially important for effective ministry in a given locale, in a culturally “thick” denomination such as the CRC, and in the contemporary world.
- d. Capacity for ministerial leadership (e.g., evangelism, pastoral care, preaching). This area, sometimes called “skills” or “goals,” is key for developing the skills needed to cultivate vibrant communities of disciples of Jesus Christ.

In 2013, the CRC adopted the Five Streams as a model for organizing ministry direction, now referred to as “callings” (see *Agenda for Synod 2013*, p. 381). These five “callings” of ministry are

1. Faith formation: CRC churches and leadership working together to equip believers to grow in faith and be faithful disciples in God’s kingdom.
2. Servant leadership: identifying, training, and recruiting leaders in the kingdom. Inspiring leadership is essential.
3. Global missions: we are witnesses of Christ, to the end of the earth. The denomination strengthens and encourages local congregations to be part of God’s mission.
4. Loving mercy and doing justice: we care about the oppressed, the broken-hearted, and the disadvantaged. Therefore we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with God.
5. Gospel proclamation and worship: we proclaim the saving message of Jesus and worship him in all that we do. Faith is strengthened by hearing the Word.

When we compare the four ATS standards to the CRC’s five callings of ministry, we see significant congruence. While the ATS is concerned mostly with growth and learning, the five callings have been developed mainly to address engagement in ministry as a church. We believe that both offer a useful tool in describing areas of potential CE for pastors. Thus both are mentioned in the learning covenant document shown in Addendum 1. The five callings are used as an organizing tool in Addendum 2, where we offer suggestions for potential CE opportunities. Our desire is to keep the CE discussion as closely linked as possible to the actual ministry of the local church.

C. *How should the quality of CE be assessed?*

The committee judges that the quality of the CE should be assessed by means of the pastor reporting to council, and by any other means approved by the council. For example, if a pastor takes a course for credit, the pastor's work in the course will be graded and evaluated by the teacher. For any form of CE, including courses taken for credit, appropriate ways of reporting on and assessing the learning that was done could include a report to the council, mentor, and/or regional pastor summarizing what was learned and how it will strengthen the pastor's ministry; an adult education class on the topic; a sermon series that grows out of the CE work; or an article in the congregation's newsletter. In each case, a valid question to ask is whether the CE did in fact achieve the learning or formational goals for which it was undertaken. In the end, the purpose of the assessment is not only to provide accountability but also to provide a means of solidifying and sharing the learning and formation provided by the CE activities. When assessing a pastor's CE, it helps to see any given CE activity as part of a broader plan over three or more years.

Partly to help clarify the various CE options, we think it is helpful to distinguish three different types of CE:

1. *Formal CE that leads to a degree* includes any kind of ministry-related degree program designed to enhance a pastor's effectiveness in ministry. Typically, such programs for ministers include Th.M. and D.Min. programs, but they could include other programs.
2. *Formal CE that does not lead to a degree* includes courses taken for credit, whether as part of a certificate program or not. Many seminaries will allow local pastors to take courses for credit even if they are not part of a degree program at that or any other seminary. In addition to taking courses for academic credit, many pastors have found that taking one or more units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) has been enormously helpful and rejuvenating for their ministry.
3. *Informal CE* includes any kind of CE that does not have the regular forms of registration, accountability, and credit that are part of degree programs and courses for credit. These include retreats, seminars, weekend conferences, learning events at classis meetings, peer learning groups, private programs of study (e.g., a regular program of reading books and online resources), and purposeful strategies for renewal (e.g., a regular program of spiritual care and formation, and times of retreat and reflection). All of these activities can be designed to enhance ministerial effectiveness.

Each of these types of CE can be very beneficial to a pastor and a blessing to the ministry of the church. It also seems that even those who engage in some kind of formal CE should also be engaged in various forms of informal CE.

Some pastors use sabbaticals as opportunities to engage in intensive CE activities. The committee commends churches that offer sabbaticals to pastors and notes that sabbaticals provide the time to engage in activities that can significantly affect and strengthen the effectiveness of pastoral ministry. A sabbatical can be life-changing or ministry-sustaining for a pastor. Still, engaging in CE only during a sabbatical is not sufficient. Pastors need to engage in CE as a regular practice, with sabbaticals, if offered, serving to enable unusual or intensive opportunities for CE.

VII. Rationale for recommendations

In light of our mandate, the needs we see, previous synodical decisions, and practices in other denominations, we present the following rationale for our recommendations regarding CE for pastors. We have become convinced that growing support for the CE of pastors is needed to meet the challenges of our current age. We are convinced of the biblical mandate for pastors and all disciples to live in accountable relationships. We cherish the historical value of education within our denomination and the implied values of CE for pastors. Our proposals relate to all pastors—commissioned pastors as well as ministers of the Word. They also, in many ways, relate to elders, deacons, and congregational leaders. We recognize that applying these recommendations in a nonparish setting is a task for which creativity and special wisdom will be required.

The following proposals interact with and depend upon each other. Pastors, councils, representatives of classes, and denominational offices—all need to work together in order to provide various means of support and accountability for CE that is formative and likely to enhance and sustain effective ministry.

The following items present the committee's rationale for the recommendations stated in the final section of the report:

A. *Affirm previous synodical statements*

As described in the section reviewing the history of our discussion of CE for pastors, our report does not appear in a vacuum. It stands on the shoulders of some fine work done in the past, and it builds on momentum that has been growing in the support and practice of CE. We believe it is appropriate and important that synod reaffirm the following statements of Synod 2000 regarding CE (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 681):

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. *Covenants, pastors, and councils*

Within the Reformed understanding of church order, the council of each congregation is responsible for supervising the ministry of the pastor. However, many councils have not seen their role to include encouraging or being involved in formulating plans for their pastor's CE. There may be many reasons for this from a council perspective, including a lack of awareness of this responsibility, uncertainty, resistance, or simply insufficient communication regarding CE between the pastor and council. There may be reasons from the pastor's perspective as well, such as feeling too busy, desiring to make the decision on their own, difficulty communicating about CE with their council, or not even thinking of involving their council in the first place. As a result, the formulation of CE plans is often the responsibility of the pastor alone. Thus, while many pastors and councils have functioned well together in this regard, others have not. When this happens, there is little consultation, no public record, and no further information about the pastor's CE.

The desire of the denomination to hold pastors accountable for engaging in CE can be seen in synod's earlier decision to find a method for evaluating, approving, monitoring, and certifying the continuing education required annually of all CRC ministers and full-time ministry staff personnel. To carry out this mandate, a "Ministerial-Standards Committee" was proposed. While synod deemed that this method conflicted with the local council holding the pastor accountable, it is clear that synod did want all pastors to engage in annual CE, to participate in a quality-substantive manner, and to be held accountable. While this committee desires that the local council maintain control, it also desires greater support and accountability for CE on a denomination-wide basis. Therefore later in our report, in recommendation 9, we suggest a Continuing Education Committee and a designated staff team to assist pastors and councils and to enable the denomination to know about the efforts and compliance of its pastors.

We recommend that pastors and councils develop CE plans together, working by the principle that supervising the ministry of the pastor includes honest feedback to the pastor regarding areas of strength and areas of needed growth. There is benefit in having a voice not only into the pastor's past or present ministry but also into planning and developing the pastor's future ministry.

In Addendum 1 we present a Learning Covenant document that includes simple and useful worksheets for both the ministry staff and the church. Drawing on areas that contribute to flourishing in ministry, this document allows pastors to highlight the type of learning they wish to pursue alongside the goals of this learning; it also allows churches to have a voice into what future learning may be beneficial. While an earlier version of this document has been available for many years, we suspect that it is not very well known or used. But we believe it is an effective tool for setting the framework of a CE planning discussion.

We recommend that synod encourage all councils and pastors to engage in an annual review of their plan for the pastor's CE and that synod recommend the use of Addendum 1.

C. Covenants for new pastors

At one time in our denominational history, orientation to the CRC's ministries, confessions, and polity might have seemed unnecessary. Most pastors were trained at our denominational school, Calvin Theological Seminary, after having grown up in the Christian Reformed Church, where they had many opportunities to learn, question, and eventually embrace our confessions, denominational ministries, and rules for regulating church life. Even if this picture is too optimistic about the past, it captures the view of many that those in ministry already had all the orientation they needed.

As Synod 2014 recognized, we can no longer assume (if we ever really should have assumed) that those engaged in ministry do not need further training in the confessions, ministries, and polity of the CRC. We are in the midst of a significant change in the way pastors are trained. Nearly half of our candidates for ministry in the past few years depend mainly on the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) as their seminary-level orientation to the denomination. Those who enter ministry through the EPMC program have graduated from a variety of seminaries and have had a variety of levels of experience within the CRC. But our only denominational strategy to help them learn, ask questions about, and embrace our denominational practices and values is the equivalent of

one semester at Calvin Theological Seminary (either through a two-year online program or through one semester in residence at the seminary).

If we include the new pastors each year who come by way of Article 8 (those ordained in other denominations) and by way of Article 23 (Commissioned Pastors), we find that over 70 percent of our new pastors each year have no more than nine or ten credit hours of orientation to the confessions, ministries, and polity of the CRC. Yet our confessions, denominational ministries, and polity have been important factors for denominational unity. This committee believes that the limited exposure to these unifying elements that is currently required is not adequate to allow for effective enfolding of new pastors and to encourage long-term denominational unity and shared purpose.

One key part of the committee's mandate is to develop "a plan for continuing education of pastors that includes opportunity for growth in familiarity with our denominational ministries, our confessional commitments, and our polity" (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 544). Therefore this section of the report leads to recommendations that each classis encourage new pastors (those admitted through Church Order Articles 6, 7, 8, or 23) to create a learning plan that includes increasing awareness of the denominational covenants and practice—and that classis support them in the plan.

The committee believes it would be wise to strategically imagine, design, and implement new ways for new pastors to learn and embrace our confessions, our polity, and our denominational ministries. One such way would be for each new minister to develop a learning plan, at least part of which is designed to provide orientation to the confessions, ministries, and polity of the CRC.

We would suggest that learning plans need to be designed with great sensitivity to an individual's history, ministry context, learning style, and location. Good learning can take place through private study, through participation in a peer learning group, through an event at classis, through events at broader regional venues, and through course work. Good learning has an element of accountability, in which the participant reports to a mentor, a church council, or a classis committee. Good learning is also interactive, meaning that a plan will specify how a participant shares and reflects on what is studied with a broader audience. Good learning has goals or desired learning outcomes, with some assessment of whether the goals have been met.

The committee hopes that new pastors, their councils, regional pastors, and mentors will review Addendum 1 with an eye to imagining potential elements of a new pastor's learning plan. The committee, in the context of this entire report, asks that synod encourage each classis, through regional pastors and mentors, to help develop a Learning Covenant for new pastors (Article 8 ministers of the Word, Article 23 commissioned pastors, and Article 6 ministers of the Word) 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 this section (VII, C) and Addendum 2 of this report.

D. Covenants, pastors, and classis

Our committee believes that creating a learning plan needs to have the ownership of the individual pastor and the local council, but that it can be strengthened when coordinated and encouraged at the classical level. The classis can play an important role in encouraging discussions and planning of CE among all its

pastors (not just ones new to ministry) and the churches they serve. We envision the following examples of support that classis could offer:

- Counselors of vacant churches could encourage the councils of those churches to include provision for CE as they prepare their letters of call.
- Currently our denominational practice includes assigning a classically appointed mentor for each new pastor. We believe it is wise to build on that practice by encouraging, or even expecting, the classically appointed mentor to help facilitate the development of a Learning Covenant (Addendum 1, and section VII, B above).
- Regional pastors may be able to provide helpful direction and accountability for intentional growth and development as they walk alongside other pastors. They may also be able to help pastors hear and reflect on the thoughts expressed by councils through the Learning Covenant process. If they are able to familiarize themselves with CE opportunities, they may be able to make specific suggestions of CE opportunities for local pastors.
- Church visitors could provide direction and accountability to churches by encouraging them to support their pastor’s CE and by assisting councils in providing helpful suggestions on CE opportunities.
- Each classis could encourage the development of peer learning groups in which CE can happen collectively rather than on an individual level.
- Clerks of classis can continue to be attentive to the availability of forms, guidelines, and other resources and share these regularly with their church councils and pastors.
- As many classes now have their own website, it will be possible for a classis to devote a section of their site to local and regional continuing education opportunities, as well as to provide a link to a denominational CE site (proposed later in this report).

When the classis is infused with a culture of CE, it is able to be a powerful resource to churches and pastors. It is therefore our recommendation that synod encourage each classis, through mechanisms such as mentors, regional pastors, peer groups, and church visitors, to help churches and pastors engage in the formation and annual review of the learning plan for the pastor’s CE.

E. Classis engagement with a broadening CE initiative

In our work as a committee we recognized that a number of classes have taken significant steps in engaging CE as a priority. A number of classes meet for an additional day or evening coordinated with each classis meeting for the purpose of a training, education, or fellowship event. Some classes routinely devote an hour or two in each classis meeting to a presentation by a speaker, with coordinated group discussion and reflection. In some regions, groups of classes or groups of congregations plan a specific event outside of the work of classis, expressing the value that none of our congregations live or function on their own.

Such practices enhance not only the lives and ministries of pastors but also the lives and ministries of elders and deacons who are present. They also help to create a new, more productive, and congenial atmosphere in which the rest of the tasks of classis can be addressed.

Our committee wishes to affirm these practices, and we call synod to recognize and celebrate the many learning opportunities for pastors, elders, deacons,

and key congregational leaders that are becoming part of classis life in various regions of the Christian Reformed Church.

F. Celebrating the development of sabbatical policies for pastors

In the years since 2001 when synod last did a major review of continuing education policy and practice, there has been perceived growth in the practice of sabbaticals, as granted by local churches for their pastors. As noted earlier in our report, sabbaticals represent a significant opportunity for continuing education and renewal of spirit. The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence office of the Christian Reformed Church has been tracking the development of sabbatical policies and practices and has devoted a section of their web page to this topic (see “resources – sabbaticals” on the SPE ministry page of www.crcna.org).

Our committee wants to affirm the development of sabbatical policies, and we ask synod to note with joy the growth of the practice and policies pertaining to sabbaticals among pastors and churches in the CRC.

G. Recognize and celebrate current resources

In our research we have come to realize the abundance of CE opportunities available both within and outside the CRC. We celebrate the variety of ways in which pastors can learn and grow in today’s ever-changing ministry landscape, and we celebrate the diversity of ministry opportunities within our denomination. We are also thankful for the many CE opportunities provided by Calvin Theological Seminary. Their commitment to CE helps CRC pastors to be better equipped in the local congregation. To that end, Addendum 2 lists some of the major offerings from Calvin Seminary, other seminaries, and many other sources. That list is far from exhaustive, however. More can likely be added via the “Continuing Education for Pastors” website proposed in the next section (VII, H) of this report. We therefore recommend that synod recognize and celebrate the vast variety of CE resources both within the CRC and beyond as identified in Addendum 2 of this report.

H. Create a website for CE

This committee sees great value in creating and maintaining a website that will house CE opportunities and tools for ministers of the Word, commissioned pastors, local church leaders, and classis leaders. This site could, for example, be linked within the CRC Network website under the “Leadership” heading and called “Continuing Education for Pastors.”

This site could offer several different types of information:

1. Listing CE courses/resources such as those in Addendum 2—and more as they are discovered.
2. Listing CE events that occur less frequently.
3. Rating various CE courses/events by previous participants.
4. Interfacing with the RCA on any CE opportunities that may be mutually edifying.
5. Offering the various forms and tools needed for effective recording of CE activity in the life of a pastor, as referred to in this report and its addenda (e.g., Ministry Staff Worksheet, CE Learning Covenant).

6. Offering specific CE suggestions on courses to be taken by new pastors (see Addendum 2 for some ideas offered by Calvin Theological Seminary and beyond).
7. Highlighting and providing opportunities for “vocational assessment” of pastors and other tools currently offered through the office of Pastor-Church Relations.
8. Providing a section where lists are posted:
 - Churches that have submitted a CE policy along with designated budget and time allowances.
 - Pastors who have submitted current CE covenants.
 - Examples of church CE policies and pastors’ CE covenants.

The committee therefore proposes that synod commission the creation of a “CE for Pastors Website” in cooperation with the CRC Network in order to facilitate access to resources and information pertaining to CE for pastors, as described in this section (VII, H) of this report.

I. Appoint a committee and staff

In order to successfully accomplish and coordinate these various recommendations, we believe it will be wise for synod to establish a Continuing Education Committee made up of persons from Calvin Theological Seminary, Pastor-Church Relations, and the Candidacy Committee. The tasks of the committee would include the following:

1. Establish and maintain the CRC CE website as described in section VII, H of this report so that pastors and councils can learn about CE.
2. Provide information for every pastor and council about the Learning Covenant (Addendum 1) and other available forms for the pastor-council process of formulating a learning covenant.
3. When requested by a pastor or council, facilitate the process of formulating the Learning Covenant.
4. Seek a copy of the Learning Covenant from every council, so that the denomination can know whether its goal of having every church adopt a CE policy for their pastor is being met.
5. Track on the website the pastors’ CE so that the denomination can know whether its goal of having every pastor engaged in CE is being met.
6. Supervise the distribution of denominational CE funds and consult with agency personnel who supervise their agency’s CE.
7. Gather and maintain options for CE so that pastors and councils have abundant options for learning and growth.
8. Provide resources on CE opportunities to regional pastors, clerks of classis, mentors, and others in each classis.
9. Post some pastors’ reports of the effectiveness of their CE activities so that others might benefit from their experience.
10. Be in contact with the RCA regarding potential collaboration.

Assess the effectiveness of the denominational CE strategy and report to synod via Pastor-Church Relations every three years.

In order for the Continuing Education Committee to accomplish its mandate, it will need resources and staff support. Such support would include the following tasks:

1. Provide support to the Continuing Education Committee.
2. Enable the committee to carry out all its tasks.
3. Contact pastors, churches, and classis leaders to encourage the development of CE learning covenants.
4. Do other tasks as necessary to facilitate CE for pastors and congregations.

Such work as described in this section will not be accomplished without dedicated persons responsible for the initiatives. Our committee believes such responsibility would best be served by a combination of dedicated denominational staff and enthusiastic volunteers. We have used the title “Appoint a Committee and Staff” for this section. In doing so, we recognize the budgetary limits of our denominational ministry, and we do not intend at this time to suggest an increased ministry share to support this work. Instead, the “staff” could be composed of an administrative team of current employees, potentially from a variety of agencies, with a designated person as the team leader. Since the responsibilities of Pastor-Church Relations, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Candidacy Committee tie in naturally with continuing education for pastors, these ministries could each provide a representative on this administrative team. This “staff” team could address the recommendations in this report and work with the help of a volunteer group of persons invested in these initiatives.

There is currently an entity composed of Pastor-Church Relations staff and three volunteers called the “Continuing Education Committee.” This group helps to administer grant funds for pastors and staff. In our thinking, the task of this group is important but needs to be broader, addressing the full scope of recommendations included in this report. This group supports the direction our recommendations are taking, and it could well represent some of the membership of a new, broader group that works with the administrative team of our proposed Continuing Education Committee.

Thus we recommend that synod instruct the executive director to appoint an administrative team from such ministries as Pastor-Church Relations, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Candidacy Committee to coordinate these initiatives and to seek volunteer help for what would become the proposed Continuing Education Committee, which would be commissioned to attend to nurturing the practice and culture of continuing education for pastors and ministry staff within the CRC, as described in this section (VII, I) of this report.

J. Provide funding

Funding is a major concern for most continuing education pursuits. Currently a variety of funding options exist. There have traditionally been funds available through Pastor-Church Relations for CE for pastors. Classes have also funded learning opportunities as part of classis life—either as a part of their regular meetings, or as special events. Councils have funded council or congregational learning activities that might also be relevant for pastoral CE.

One strategy for maximizing funding is to create collaborative learning activities with other organizations. For instance, our denomination could be intentional about collaboration with the Reformed Church in America in the area of

pastoral continuing education. Other opportunities for collaboration could be explored and nurtured.

Seeking out grants as a source of funding is another potentially fruitful strategy. The research conducted as part of our committee work revealed that there are few existing models of denominationally structured CE plans for pastors.

Our committee, therefore, proposes that synod encourage the newly proposed Continuing Education Committee to make use of, as much as is possible, current funds allotted through the Pastor-Church Relations current "Continuing Education Committee" and to work collaboratively and creatively with the denomination's funding source for new projects (the CRC Foundation), the RCA, and other potential donor sources to facilitate and enable a robust practice of CE for pastors.

K. CE for pastors in diverse communities

The committee is very much aware that the growing ethnic diversity of our denomination will heighten the need for flexibility in our strategy for pastoral CE. Our plans and practices will have to account for varying contexts, learning styles, languages, and resources. We believe it will be essential for the new committee that is formed (see section VII, I), regional classes, and local councils to recognize these factors in designing CE activities and learning plans. It will be helpful to consult with leaders of the various involved ethnic groups to discover strategies and resources that will best serve each distinct community.

It may be possible to create a list of available resources for learning and training events, conferences, and other contextually appropriate CE opportunities that will meet the needs of ethnic pastors and pastors of ethnically diverse congregations. These resources can be made available on the "CE for Pastors Website" (see section VII, H).

We recommend, then, that synod instruct the proposed Continuing Education Committee to work with the diverse communities in the CRC in order to enable them to attend to pastoral CE needs in ways that fit with their various cultures.

L. Nurturing a culture of continuing education

As our study committee pursued its mandate, we became convinced that the CRC needs to nurture a culture of CE for pastors. Previous synods have resisted mandating CE for pastors but have strongly encouraged pastors to engage in CE and councils to promote it for their pastors. Previous synods have also made financial resources for CE available and have encouraged councils to provide time and financial resources for pastors to engage in CE. Much has already been done, and many pastors and congregations have benefited from the CE that has been occurring.

Still, we as a committee hope that more can be done to develop within the CRC a strong culture of continuous learning and personal and professional development among pastors. To that end, we believe that the proposed Continuing Education Committee can help to provide appropriate encouragements and incentives for ongoing CE. Thus that committee's mandate should include a statement that it seek ways to encourage CE for pastors and, if necessary, make recommendations along these lines to future synods. Given this mandate, the committee could, for example, do the following:

1. Provide and continually revise guidelines for CE covenants and the means of evaluating them.
2. Include on its website a list of pastors who have developed CE Learning Covenants, perhaps with copies of what was included in those covenants.
3. Include on its website a list of churches that have provided time and financial support to the CE of their pastors.
4. Work with the Pastor-Church Relations office to include a section in the guidelines for the ministerial calling process that asks about what CE the pastor has done and offers guidance for how to provide appropriate CE to a pastor who is being called.
5. Encourage ministers to include in their profile a summary of CE that they have done and what they have learned from it.
6. Find ways to provide incentives for pastors and churches to engage in CE.

Another method for encouraging a culture of continuing education within our denomination is to incorporate a list of excellent practices into our church life. We note the following variety of practices that could be instituted in our church behaviors:

- Include a resume of a pastor’s CE with the ministerial profile.
- Include in the Letter of Call a listing of time and funds allotted for CE.
- Establish a Learning Covenant within the first year of a pastorate.
- Send a pastor’s CE plan to the denominational CE committee/coordinator.
- Include a quarterly 30-minute CE session at council meetings.
- Within three months of their joining the CRC denomination, have new pastors indicate how they will use CE to acclimate to the CRC.
- Mentors incorporate CE covenants into conversations with their mentees.
- Regional pastors discuss CE covenants and plans with each pastor of classis.
- Form peer learning groups for CE purposes.
- For mutual enrichment, form small groups in various classes in which pastors from multiple ethnic and traditional congregations share their CE learnings.
- Pastors annually engage in approximately 80 hours of CE.
- Classes engage in CE at their meetings.
- Church visitors discuss CE with councils.
- The denomination establishes a website that thoroughly covers CE for the CRC.
- CE committee/coordinator contacts all councils/pastors to obtain copies of all CE covenants.
- CE committee/coordinator records and posts online options for CE, covenants, reports, etc.
- CE committee/coordinator submits regular reports to synod on CE practices and results.
- CE committee/coordinator evaluates progress every three years and suggests ways to improve CE denominationally.

When these and other practices become part of the denominational DNA, lifelong learning will enter into the bloodstream of the CRC. Then, when all pastors are lifelong learners as seen through their CE performance, the CRC will become known for its outstanding pastoral CE even as it is known for its outstanding education in church schools, day schools, colleges, and seminary. As

pastors become active as lifelong learners, we anticipate growth also within our congregations.

We therefore recommend that synod note the various ideas for nurturing a culture of CE as presented in this section of this report and recommend them to the churches.

M. Partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary

One of the joys of the committee has been to participate in positive interaction with the leadership of Calvin Theological Seminary on issues of CE for pastors. As evidenced in numerous other aspects of denominational life, our seminary is a valuable tool for our churches. We rejoice in what Calvin Seminary currently offers for pastors and church leaders, and we seek to maximize the resources currently available. We also have a sense that if the desire were expressed, Calvin Seminary may be able to offer even more CE support for pastors and other church leaders.

Calvin Seminary offers both informal and formal types of CE for pastors. Informal types of CE are offered by the Center for Excellence in Preaching, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal, the Church Renewal Lab, lectures on campus, and presentations offered by faculty members at classis meetings, conferences, and adult education settings. Many of these presentations address the need for a growing and deepening understanding of our Reformed perspective, broadly and robustly understood. In an effort to extend the reach of these resources, we hope that the seminary will make as many resources as possible available online (for example, in a video library) for use in churches, council meetings, pastor peer groups, and other potential settings.

Further, although we recognize that not all pastors want to pursue a further degree as part of their CE strategy, we know that many pastors do seek a further degree. They may want the accountability, the organized pursuit of a topic, the focused learning and guidance, or some other aspect of an advanced degree. Some appreciate the sense of achievement gained through completing a degree program. Some pastors have pursued such a degree through the Th.M. program at Calvin Theological Seminary or some other seminary. Others have pursued the D.Min. degree at another seminary. Although Calvin Seminary has not offered the D.Min. degree, our committee believes that Calvin Seminary would provide an important and valued service to the CRC by offering a high-quality D.Min. program. Of course, even if Calvin did offer a D.Min. program, we would not expect all CRC pastors desiring a D.Min. to pursue it there. But especially given our growing diversity as a denomination, and recognizing that a growing number of our pastors have had little or no opportunity to study there, we believe there may be merit to a D.Min. degree program being offered at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Therefore, with gratitude for the responsive posture demonstrated by Calvin Theological Seminary, we recommend that synod ask the seminary to investigate and pursue means of providing additional resources for CE for pastors and church leaders, including online resources, noncredit seminars and conferences, presentations at classes, courses for credit, and possibly a D.Min. program—all for the purpose of serving the church by providing effective CE for pastors and church leaders.

N. Celebrating the development of a grant for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services' Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program has a long and valued history in the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. It serves as an excellent forum for CRC and

RCA seminary students and pastors to learn together, work together, and support each other as they develop their roles and ministries. Pine Rest has developed a grant proposal with a distance learning element for expanding its CPE program to build collaborative partnerships between the RCA and CRC denominations and to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improve the lives of parishioners of CRC/RCA churches through improved pastoral leadership and pastoral care skills in the clergy who serve them.
- Develop close bonds of friendship and collegiality among 120 RCA/CRC clergy over five years that can lead to improved denominational collaboration.
- Reduce clergy turnover through improved self-care and self-awareness.
- Increase access to CPE for RCA/CRC pastors through distance learning.

The central component of Pine Rest’s proposal involves reaching out to various communities by developing a distance learning CPE program for pastors from both CRC and RCA congregations in communities throughout the United States and Canada. Two communities each year will be identified, and a group of six pastors in each community will learn and work together in a congregational CPE program. By meeting together regularly, consulting with each other, supporting and working together on joint learning and projects, these pastors will develop closer church and ministry relationships. Pine Rest will provide CPE lectures, group sharing, and personal supervision through distance learning technology. On-site supervision will occur during three weekend retreats.

Our committee is thrilled with this development and believes it will serve our churches and pastors well. CPE is a well-regarded program for pastoral CE, and the grant proposal has great potential. Thus, we propose that synod celebrate the development of a congregation-based Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program, with a distance learning element, as a project of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in partnership with the CRC and the RCA.

O. Report to Synod 2018

As a committee we recognize that our report is quite extensive and that a lot of actions and initiatives are envisioned. Because of the complexity of the project and the strategic importance of CE for pastors, we have thought there would be significant value in having a specific denominational staff person devoted to championing these initiatives. We at first wanted to propose that a new position be created and called Director of Pastoral Continuing Education. Yet, with the present realities of denominational budgets and adjusting structures and staff assignments, we have decided to formulate our staffing recommendation in the way it is stated in section VII, I—suggesting that a team of existing staff combined with volunteers could together compose a Continuing Education Committee.

We believe it will be helpful for synod and the church if that proposed committee is asked to report to Synod 2018, and with regularity after that. By 2018 there will hopefully be much progress to report regarding the various initiatives described in this document. Also, by 2018 the proposed Continuing Education Committee will have informed thoughts as to the suitability of the staff arrangement and level of support. We are hopeful that the initiatives do not get buried under a variety of other priorities as the proposed staff team members will also have other responsibilities to attend to.

Thus we recommend that synod instruct the proposed Continuing Education Committee (see section VII, I) to report to Synod 2018, indicating progress made in the initiatives described in this report, and speaking specifically to the adequacy of the staff arrangement for these initiatives.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors, as identified below, when the report on continuing education for pastors is discussed.

B. That synod reaffirm the following statements of Synod 2000 (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 681), as noted in section VII, A of this 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.

C. 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 this report, and that synod recommend the use of Addendum 2.

D. That synod encourage each classis, through regional pastors and mentors, to help develop a Learning Covenant for new pastors (Article 8 ministers of the Word, Article 23 commissioned pastors, and Article 6 ministers of the Word) 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 of this report.

E. That synod encourage each classis, through mechanisms such as mentors, regional pastors, peer groups, and church visitors, to help churches and pastors engage in the formation and annual review of the learning covenant for the pastor's CE.

F. That synod recognize and celebrate the many learning opportunities for pastors, elders, deacons, and key congregational leaders that are becoming part of classis life in various regions of the Christian Reformed Church.

G. That synod note with joy the growth of the practice and policies pertaining to sabbaticals among pastors and churches in the CRC.

H. That synod recognize and celebrate the vast variety of CE resources both within the CRC and beyond as identified in Addendum 2 of this report.

I. That synod commission the creation of a "CE for Pastors Website" in cooperation with the CRC Network in order to facilitate access to resources and information pertaining to CE for Pastors, as described in section VII, H of this report.

J. That synod instruct the executive director to appoint an administrative team from such ministries as Pastor-Church Relations, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Candidacy Committee to coordinate initiatives and to seek volunteer

help for what would become the proposed Continuing Education Committee, which would be commissioned to attend to nurturing the practice and culture of continuing education for pastors and ministry staff within the CRC, as described in section VII, I of this report.

K. That synod encourage the newly proposed Continuing Education Committee to make use of, as much as is possible, the current funds allotted through the Pastor-Church Relations current “Continuing Education Committee” and to work collaboratively and creatively with the denomination’s funding source for new projects (the CRC Foundation), the RCA, and other potential donor sources to facilitate and enable a robust practice of CE for our pastors.

L. That synod instruct the proposed Continuing Education Committee to work with the diverse communities in the CRC in order to enable them to attend to pastoral CE needs in ways that fit with their various cultures.

M. That synod note the various ideas in section VII, L of this report for nurturing a culture of CE and recommend them to the churches.

N. That synod ask Calvin Theological Seminary to investigate and pursue means of providing additional resources for CE for pastors and church leaders, including online resources, noncredit seminars and conferences, presentations at classes, courses for credit, and possibly a D.Min. program—all for the purpose of serving the church by providing effective CE for pastors and church leaders.

O. That synod celebrate the development of a congregation-based Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program, with a distance learning element, as a project of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in partnership with the CRC and the RCA, as presented in section VII, N of this report.

P. That synod instruct the proposed Continuing Education Committee (see section VII, I) to report to Synod 2018, indicating progress made in the initiatives described in this report, and speaking specifically to the adequacy of the staff arrangement for these initiatives.

Q. That synod receive this report of the Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors and dismiss the committee with thanks.

Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors
Ronald Feenstra
Ron Hosmar
LaVerne Jordan
David Koll, chair
Russ Palsrok
Denise Posie
Al Postma
Gary Vander Ark
Mark Wallace

Addendum 1

Continuing Education Learning Covenant

Introductory Information

The Need

"In the world in which we live, there is scarcely a vocation that is not requiring continuing education in some form to meet the demands of changing technology and the complexity of the current workplace. In industry, offices, farming, schools, and other settings, staff are expected and encouraged to stay current by means of continuing opportunities for training. Ministry is no exception. The 1998 Synod of the CRC supported this concept in mandating study of continuing professional education for ministry staff" (*Agenda for Synod 2000*, p. 418).

What Is Continuing Education?

Continuing Education is an ongoing opportunity for spiritual growth and professional training. This education can be accomplished through workshops, classes, spiritual retreats, guided groups, online programs, or supervised individual study. It may include highly structured educational programs, but it also may have little formal structure.

Council Policy

Synod 2000 of the CRCNA approved a proposal urging 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 (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 681). When a call is extended to ministry staff, the call letter should address this matter and offer encouragement and expectation to continue to learn and grow through intentional participation in continuing education.

Council Resources

Synod recommended that each council set aside adequate funds for continuing education of ministry staff. Synod quantified the recommendation by stating that approximately ten days (not vacation time) and \$1,200.00 be set aside each year for this purpose for each ministry staff person. As this option may not be reasonable for some congregations, it may be necessary for classis and the denomination to provide assistance in financing programs of continued learning (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 681).

Denominational and Classical Continuing Education Funds

A denominational fund has been established and has offered modest grants for a number of years to encourage and enable ministry staff to engage in continuing education. Not all congregations have equal resources. Small and less financially established congregations and their pastors are as much in need of continuing education as larger, more financially stable congregations. Ministry shares support these grants. Each classis also has the option of establishing a fund for this purpose.

A Balanced and Broad Spectrum Approach to Continuing Education

We encourage councils and ministry leaders to make a plan for continuing education (CE) that is balanced and broad. One organizational tool for CE planning comes from the standards as set by the Association of Theological Schools. These four standards are the core expectations of a degree program meant to equip people to lead in a church context. A balanced continuing education plan will incorporate learning opportunities across the spectrum of these areas of growth.

1. **The religious heritage of the denomination** (e.g., Scripture, hermeneutics, confessions, theology, history, polity). This area, sometimes called “knowledge” or “message,” would be especially important for a new pastor who has limited familiarity with the history, theology, and polity of the CRC.
2. **The personal and spiritual formation of the minister** (e.g., pastoral identity, spiritual practices). This area, sometimes called “character” or “person,” is essential for effective ministry in any context and at any level of ministry experience.
3. **The cultural context of ministry** (e.g., history of the congregation and its locale, history of the denomination, cultural context of the region or of North America). This area, which might be ignored if only three areas are identified, is crucially important for effective ministry in a given locale, in a culturally “thick” denomination such as the CRC, and in the contemporary world.
4. **The capacity for ministerial leadership** (e.g., evangelism, pastoral care, preaching). This area, sometimes called “skills” or “goals,” is key for developing the skills needed to cultivate vibrant communities of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Another organizing tool for planning CE for pastors comes by looking through the lens of the five callings of ministry in the CRC, identified in a strategic report to Synod 2013. These five callings are listed below and include a short description of how they fit in with the larger ministry of the CRC. For a more detailed explanation and for suggested continuing education opportunities, see Addendum 2 (which is intended as a draft document leading to a robust resource website):

1. **Faith Formation:** *“As a community of believers the CRC seeks to introduce and nurture faith in Jesus Christ. We believe the church must work together to challenge and equip each believer to grow in their faith as they seek to be faithful disciples in the kingdom of God.”*
2. **Servant Leadership:** *“The CRC seeks to identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God. We believe the lifelong equipping of all leaders is essential for the flourishing of churches and ministries.”*
3. **Global Missions:** *“The CRC is a missional community with a kingdom vision. Therefore we seek to be witnesses and agents of the kingdom ‘to the ends of the earth.’ Our primary objective is to start and strengthen local churches, both in North America and around the world.”*
4. **Loving Mercy and Doing Justice:** *“The CRC hears the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged. Our hearts are broken by the things that break the heart of God. Therefore we seek ‘to act justly and love mercy’ as we walk humbly with our God.”*

5. **Gospel Proclamation and Worship:** *“Faith comes through the hearing of God’s Word. The CRC seeks to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and worship him in all that we do.”*

Formats for Pursuing Continuing Education

Various formats for Continuing Education are possible, including the following:

1. *Formal CE that leads to a degree* includes any kind of ministry-related degree program that is designed to enhance a pastor’s effectiveness in ministry. Typically, such programs for ministers include Th.M. and D.Min. programs, but they could include other programs.
2. *Formal CE that does not lead to a degree* includes courses taken for credit, whether as part of a certificate program or not. Many seminaries will allow local pastors to take courses for credit even if they are not part of a degree program at that or any other seminary. In addition to taking courses for academic credit, many pastors have found that taking one or more units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) has been enormously helpful and rejuvenating for their ministry.
3. *Informal CE* includes any kind of CE that does not have the regular forms of registration, accountability, and credit that are part of degree programs and courses for credit. These include retreats, seminars, weekend conferences, learning events at classis meetings, peer learning groups, and private programs of study.

Ministry Assessment

It may also be helpful to do some assessment of a pastor’s skills and background in order to make an appropriate learning plan for CE. A growing body of assessment tools is available, such as those that are offered through the Pastor-Church Relations office of the CRC. Assessment opportunities can be a helpful third-party voice into the continuing education planning process, and could be completed as a form of continuing education at multiple points in a pastor’s life.

Participants and Process in Formulating a Continuing Education Plan

Pastor / Ministry Staff

1. Takes part in Performance Review. This is an opportunity for the staff and the council to review ministry expectations and performance. As a result of these evaluations, the staff and council can determine areas of needed growth and focus the annual goals for continuing education programs.
2. Fills out the Continuing Education Agreement with Continuing Education Committee for approval by council.
3. Participates in Continuing Education.
4. Writes a report for the council.
5. Repeats the above procedure annually.
6. Asks council to appoint a Continuing Education Committee. (This is advised for larger churches with multiple staff members, and may not be necessary for smaller churches.)

Council/Continuing Education Committee

1. Assists staff in assessment of educational needs, learning goals, continued educational options, and presentation of the annual continuing education proposal to the council. Uses Church Advice Worksheet.
2. Meets with Ministry Staff Person(s) to
 - A. Review Ministry Staff and Church Advice Worksheets.
 - B. Complete Continuing Education Agreement as a collaborative effort with pastor.
3. Meets with council for presentation of Covenant.
4. Monitors completion of the agreement.
5. Encourages further learning experiences.

Council/Congregation

1. Council expects continuing education. This expectation may be shown by making a mutual continuing education agreement with current ministry staff or expectations and support (time and funds). These can be included in the Letter of Call for new staff.
2. Establishes a Continuing Education Committee in consultation with the ministry staff person(s).
3. Completes Performance Review of ministry staff.
4. Completes a Continuing Education Agreement with the ministry staff person(s).
5. Provides for appropriate funding and time needed for continuing education programs.

Developing the Learning Covenant

A. Worksheet for Continuing Education Committee

The following worksheet is for use by the local church Continuing Education Committee (or council) in preparation for meeting with the ministry staff person(s). Ministry staff person(s) likely have areas of interest for growth and continuing education. This worksheet is for preparation in engaging in a conversation relative to the needs of the church and pastor, and to areas the church would see as beneficial for the ministry staff person(s) and the needs of the congregation.

If a Performance Review of the ministry staff person(s) has been done, summarize the areas that could provide some guidance for continuing education.

If a Performance Review has not been done, informally provide the following information relating to the ministry staff person(s). What does the council/congregation see as

Strengths:

Areas for growth:

Suggested areas for continuing education:

Particular classes/conferences that could be helpful for the ministry staff person and the needs of the congregation:

Date _____ for meeting with ministry staff person(s) for completing the Continuing Education Agreement.

B. Ministry Staff Worksheet (to be completed by ministry staff person)

Determining Direction

1. Previous continuing education
2. Present goals for ministry
3. Needs of local congregation
4. Personal growth/interest areas
5. Possible components
 - a. Faith Formation (including growth in the religious heritage of the CRC, personal and spiritual formation, and theological knowledge)
 - b. Servant Leadership (including development and assessment of ministry)
 - c. Global Missions (including the cultural context of ministry)
 - d. Loving Mercy and Doing Justice
 - e. Gospel Proclamation and Worship

General Three-Year Plan

Area for Study

Options

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Current Year Recommendations to Advice Committee

Course(s) of study (conferences, classes, etc.) Dates

1.

2.

3.

C. Continuing Education Request

- A. Subject (area of ministry addressed)
- B. Instructor (avenue of education)
- C. Date (length of time requested)
- D. Purpose of Continuing Education

This request will enrich my ministry by

This request will benefit the congregation by

Expenses of Continuing Education

Registration fee: _____

Travel: _____

Lodging/meals: _____

Additional: _____

Pulpit supply: _____

Additional: _____

Total expense: \$ _____

Income for Continuing Education

Church funds: _____

Personal out-of-pocket funds: _____

Addendum 2

Continuing Education Learning Opportunities

I. Introduction

This document aims to give an idea of what a “learning opportunity” section of a CRCNA Continuing Education for Pastors web page could include. The website is briefly described in section VII, H of the report in Appendix B (see also recommendation I).

The CE for Pastors committee recognizes that it will require an expertise beyond that of the committee to set up a website, including all the possible links, documents, and sections that will be desired. This document is intended to give an idea of just some of the content of the site, specifically the parts of the site where learning opportunities are offered.

At the time of submission, this document is still being broadened in order to include recommendations that reflect and honor the cultural diversity of those toward whom this continuing education is directed.

In every category and in every subcategory our intent at this point is not to be exhaustive. Rather, our intent is to begin creative thought toward options available to pastors for their learning. We believe it to be wise to somehow put a spotlight on learning opportunities that come from our denominational institutions and leaders, so we have done this in the lists below. However, we also recognize and would expect that the developed website would include a much broader range of options from across the continent and the world. As such, please consider this to be a **living document** to which frequent changes are to be expected.

II. Organization

As discussed in the report document (see section VI, B of the report in Appendix B) there are various categories of learning relative to the work and life of pastors. We have found that the “five callings of ministry” provide a helpful framework. This is particularly true when we think of pastoral Continuing Education (CE) as beneficial not only for pastors but also for the sake of the church they serve. Grounding pastoral CE in the callings of ministry can help pastors and congregations connect these dots more clearly. Many CE opportunities could fall into more than one category. Perhaps on a website they could simply be tagged in more than one category.

One feature of our committee mandate was to look for ways to deepen the experience of learning about the core material a CRC pastor is expected to know (see section VII, C of the report in Appendix B). Currently our suggestion is to pay particular attention to two areas: first, the “Reading List” under Faith Formation, where we’ve put together resources that will be helpful for what one could call “basic CRC orientation material.” Second, each category has a list of resources, institutions, and agencies, and we have tried to include many of those from within the CRC that fit each particular calling. Becoming introduced to what is available within the CRC by these means, we think, will be helpful. (*Note:* As an alternative, in a web format the items that would be particularly helpful for pastors new to the CRC could be tagged as such and easily grouped together dynamically).

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN GENERAL

Continuing Education across the Callings

Healthy Practices

- Regular reading
- Taking advantage of the webinars produced by the CRC (www.crcna.org/webinars)
- Participation in a Peer Learning Group, and to ensure that the group goes beyond socializing into sharing life and learning together
- Taking mentorship seriously
- Travel to a different setting. Simply experiencing another culture can be a tremendous growth opportunity
- Seeking out annual retreats (such as for chaplains, etc.)

Continuing Education Opportunities

- Day of Encouragement
- January Series hosted by Calvin College
- Under the Fig Tree Ministries: trips to Egypt, Jordan, and Israel
- Annual retreats

Centers of Learning

- Calvin Theological Seminary (regular CE events, plus the ability to participate in one- to two-week courses)
- A vast variety of other seminaries and institutions of learning, both formal and informal, accredited and nonaccredited, have opportunities for continuing education. These opportunities can be found by looking on the websites of each institution and by asking colleagues for suggestions. (*Note:* It is possible for the CE website that will be built to list such opportunities, and to offer links to them, or even to list those that are recommended as high value.)

FAITH FORMATION

“As a community of believers the CRC seeks to introduce and nurture faith in Jesus Christ. We believe the church must work together to challenge and equip each believer to grow in their faith as they seek to be faithful disciples in the kingdom of God.”

Healthy Practices

- Designate a Faith Formation elder/champion, coached by FFM
- Intentionally cultivate a grace-shaped congregational culture
- Spiritual Director: provide a referral network of spiritual directors
- Coaching of pastors: 1-1 coaching of pastors that focuses on coaching the person and their personal growth and leading a change/transformation process in their setting.

Short-Term Organized Growth Opportunities

- CRC Prayer Summit
- Children’s Spirituality Conference (<http://childrensspirit.com/>)
- Roberto’s annual colloquium (<http://www.apcnet.org/#!/blank/codi>)
- Association for Presbyterian Church Educators Annual Event
- Storyline Conference (Donald Miller, et al.)

Longer-Term Programs or Academic Courses

- Clinical Pastoral Education
- Vibrant Faith University (<http://vibrantfaith.org/vfu/>)

Further Resources, Agencies, Institutions, Grants

- CRC Faith Formation office
- A Peer Learning Grant could be applied for with learning in this area. (<https://www.crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants>)
- Fuller Youth Institute (Sticky Faith)
The FYI E-Journal (<http://www.fulleryouthinstitute.org/ejournal>)
- Practical Resources for Churches
(<http://www.prcli.org/on-demand-webinars/> - site with wide variety of free recorded webinars on FF)
- Vibrant Faith (<http://vibrantfaith.org/>)

Reading List

- Lifelong Faith Journal (<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>)
- *Shaped by God*. edited by Robert J. Keeley
(<http://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/151126/shaped-by-god.aspx>)
- *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* by Robert J. Keeley
(http://www.amazon.com/Helping-Our-Children-Grow-Faith-ebook/dp/B0054Z7LEY/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1449849626&sr=1-1&keywords=helping+our+children+grow+in+faith)
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* by Ross and Allen
(<http://www.amazon.ca/Intergenerational-Christian-Formation-Togetherin-Community/dp/083083981X>)

- *Emerging Adulthood and Faith* by Jonathan Hill (2015)
(http://www.amazon.com/Emerging-Adulthood-Faith-Jonathan-Hill/dp/1937555119/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1449849518&sr=8-1&keywords=Emerging+adulthood+and+Faith)
- *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Peter Scazzero
- *Know Your Story and Lead with It* by Richard Hester & Kelli Walker-Jones
- **For Pastors New to the CRC**
 - Bible and Theology
 - Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics* (abridged in one volume)
 - DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk. *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies; Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice*
 - Hoekema, Anthony. *The Bible and the Future*
 - Hoezee, Scott. *Grace Through Every Generation*
 - Mouw, Richard. *He Shines in All That's Fair; Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport; When the Kings Come Marching In; Uncommon Decency*
 - Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom, and Evil; Knowledge and Christian Belief*
 - Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr. *A Place to Stand; Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*
 - Wolters, Albert. *Creation Regained*
 - Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament for a Son; The God We Worship*
 - Church Polity
 - DeMoor, Henry. *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*
 - Church Life
 - Synod reports
 - Synod report on Neo-Pentecostalism (1973)
 - Synod report on Committee to Study Homosexuality (1973)
 - Synod report on Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority (1972)
 - Synod report on Infallibility and Inspiration (1961)

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

“The CRC seeks to identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God. We believe the lifelong equipping of all leaders is essential for the flourishing of churches and ministries.”

Healthy Practices

- A regular evaluation process that involves all other ministry leaders one works alongside
- Involvement in a peer group
- Rest

Short-term Organized Growth Opportunities

- Dunamis Conferences (through Diaconal Ministries)
- Conference sponsored by the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministries
- Ministry Assessment programs

Longer-Term Programs or Academic Courses

- Ridder Church Renewal—The Ridder Church Renewal process helps leaders develop the tools to confront unhealthy models that have hindered personal and congregational growth (multiyear). Website: <http://westernsem.edu/journey/ridder>
- Deeper Journey Retreat—a two-year commitment to attend eight “three-day” retreats; to actively participate in a large community, in a small group community, and in communal worship; and to practice the disciplines and the rhythms between retreats. Website: http://www2.crcna.org/pages/deeper_journey.cfm
- Coaching: Offered through CRHM to pastors and congregations
- Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (ccef.org, in Philadelphia) has a certificate program that is both rigorous and spiritually encouraging

Further Resources, Agencies, Institutions, Grants

- Pastor-Church Relations office of the CRC
- A Peer Learning Grant could be applied for with learning in this area (<https://www.crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants>)

Reading List

- *Leadership Journal* magazine
- Robert Clinton. *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*
- Henry Wildeboer. *When God Shows Up: A Pastor's Journey*

GLOBAL MISSION

"The CRC is a missional community with a kingdom vision. Therefore we seek to be witnesses and agents of the kingdom 'to the ends of the earth.' Our primary objective is to start and strengthen local churches, both in North America and around the world."

Short-Term Organized Growth Opportunities

- Inhabit Conference—A two-day conference intentionally designed to engage, encourage, and empower innovative, missional practitioners as they go about practicing the way of Jesus in their place. The Inhabit environments provide diverse contexts for robust engagement and meaningful dialogue.
- Salaam 2.0—A CRC project to help Christians in Canada understand Muslim neighbors
- CRC Office of Race Relations workshops
- 3D Movements (<http://3dmovements.com/>)—Their vision is to CHANGE the world by putting DISCIPLESHIP and MISSION back into the hands of ordinary people.
- Exponential Church Planting Conference (<http://www.exponential.org/>)
- Missional Café

Longer-Term Programs or Academic Courses

- CTS: Course on Christian Engagement with World Religions
- CTS: Course on Intersections of Theology and Science
- The Renewal Lab (<http://www.calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab/>)—part of Calvin Theological Seminary's Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal (<http://calvinseminary.edu/resources/centers-and-institutes/igcpr/>), exists to help pastors and church leaders grow church communities that are epicenters of God's redemptive love so that more may come to know Christ. (multiyear)
- Courses at a local college or university on world affairs, politics, psychology, sociology, social justice, race relations, or other topics.

Further Resources, Agencies, Institutions, Grants

- Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal
- Newbegin House
- <http://ministrytheorem.calvinseminary.edu>
- A Peer Learning Grant could be applied for with learning in this area. (<https://www.crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants>)

Reading List

- Goheen, Michael. *Introduction to Christian Mission Today*

MERCY AND JUSTICE

“The CRC hears the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged. Our hearts are broken by the things that break the heart of God. Therefore we seek ‘to act justly and love mercy’ as we walk humbly with our God.”

Healthy Practices

- Restorative Practices Training available from OSJ, ORR, and Safe Church.

Short-Term Organized Growth Opportunities

- Blanket Exercise (<https://www.crcna.org/BlanketExercise>)—A tool that literally walks participants through the history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in North America. It helps participants understand why reconciliation is needed and how to take steps toward reconciliation and new relationships. Available through CPD, CAMC, OSJ, ORR.
- Living the 8th Fire (<https://aboriginalministry.wordpress.com/workshops-landing/workshops/>)—a small group series for Canadians meant to help congregations go deeper into relationship with Indigenous neighbors. Available through CPD, CAMC.
- Church Between Borders—group activity to discern roots of brokenness in the U.S. immigration system. Available through OSJ, ORR.
- *Climate Conversation: Kenya*—a four-part video series featuring on-the-ground footage and interviews from Kenya highlighting issues of climate change and environmental stewardship. Available through OSJ, World Renew.
- Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) from ORR

Longer-Term Programs or Academic Courses

- Communities First Association has a tools archive (<http://www.cfa-partners.org/tools-archive/>) and longer term coaching opportunities.

Further Resources, Agencies, Institutions, Grants

- Communities First Association
- Diaconal Ministries Canada
- Citizens for Public Justice
- CRC Office of Social Justice
- CRC Office of Race Relations
- A Peer Learning Grant could be applied for with learning in this area. (<https://www.crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants>)
- Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue
- Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee
- World Renew
- Micah Challenge U.S.
- Canadian Foodgrains Bank
- Bread for the World
- Food Resource Bank
- The Henry Institute
- Center for Public Justice

Reading List

- *God's Diverse and Unified Family*—a 1996 synodical report on diversity
- Doctrine of Discovery report (https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/doctrine_of_discovery.pdf)—a Synod 2016 report that examines the CRC's relationship to the Doctrine of Discovery, a Catholic doctrine about the superiority of Europeans over Indigenous peoples which has been integrated into North American legal and theological systems
- Do Justice blog (<http://dojustice.crcna.org/>)—a conversation space for justice in the CRC, run by the Office of Social Justice and Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue
- *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, Bryan Stevenson
- *Live Justly*—Micah Challenge and World Renew
- *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller
- *Welcoming Justice*, Charles Marsh and John Perkins
- *Red, Brown, Yellow, Black and White: A Call for Diversity in Missions and Ministry*, Leroy Barber
- 2010 Report to Synod on the Migration of Peoples; 2012 Report to Synod on Global Climate Change
- *Social Justice Handbook*, Mae Elise Cannon
- *Earthwise*, Calvin B. DeWitt
- *Welcoming the Stranger*, Matthew Soerens, Jenny Yang

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION AND WORSHIP

"Faith comes through the hearing of God's Word. The CRC seeks to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and worship him in all that we do."

Healthy Practices

- The Network (<http://network.crcna.org/worship>)
- Sermon Starters (<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/>)

Short-Term Organized Opportunities

- Calvin Symposium on Worship
- "Reading for Preaching" seminar through Center for Excellence in Preaching
- Calvin Festival of Faith & Writing
- A variety of regular Fall & Spring preaching conferences hosted at Calvin Seminary (<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/events>)
- Center for Excellence in Preaching hosts two-day regional seminars on occasion, and can be arranged through the CEP office at Calvin Seminary.
- The Gospel Coalition conferences

Longer-Term Programs or Academic Courses

- Center for Excellence in Preaching organizes and hosts a variety of one- to two-week preaching seminars (<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/events>)

Further Resources, Agencies, Institutions, Grants

- Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
- Center for Excellence in Preaching
- CRC Worship Ministries Website: (www.crcna.org/worship)
- Vital Worship Grants Program (<http://worship.calvin.edu/grants/>)
- Grants for Small Churches (under 150 active adult members) through the Sustaining Congregational Excellence Program (<https://www.crcna.org/SCE>)
- A Peer Learning Grant could be applied for with learning in this area. (<https://www.crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants>)

Reading List

- Preaching
 - Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Reading for Preaching*
 - Scott Hoezee, *Actuality: Real Life Stories for Sermons that Matter*
 - Peter Jonker, *Preaching in Pictures*
 - David Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads*
 - Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*
 - Mike Graves, *The Fully Alive Preacher*
 - Michael Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*
 - Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*
 - Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*
 - Tom Long, *The Witness of Preaching*
 - Tom Long, *Testimony*
 - Tom Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*

- Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*
- Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*
- Richard Lischer, *The End of Words*
- Richard Lischer, *Open Secrets*
- Worship
 - *Reformed Worship* magazine (www.reformedworship.org)
 - 1968 Synodical Report (https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/1968_acts_of_synod_supplement_3.pdf)
 - 1997 Synodical Report: (https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/1997_acts_of_synod_authentic_worship.pdf)
 - Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture—a study version of the 1997 synodical report available through Faith Alive (<http://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/420100/authentic-worship-in-a-changing-culture.aspx>)

I. Introduction

The Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church provides the foundational statement guiding the work of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC). The charter states: “When the CRC believes that a particular denomination is part of the universal church of Christ, then the CRC can be in an ecumenical relationship with that church and consider such a church an ecumenical partner, especially in areas where we share values and a common mission.” Noting that “the CRC does not need to endorse every position taken by an ecumenical partner,” it goes on to explain that ecumenical relationships provide important opportunities for churches to learn from each other and to discuss differing perspectives. The charter concludes that “ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which that gospel calls the whole church.”

Four categories of relationship provide ways to express our ecumenical partnership with others, as explained in the Ecumenical Charter. First, there are churches with which the CRC has a particular affinity, which are called *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. Second, there are churches with which the CRC is in a stage of exploration for a closer relationship, or with which there is a memorandum of understanding, which are called *churches in dialogue*. (In the EIRC’s February meeting, the group explored when and how movement from the second category to the first should be addressed, and we will continue to focus on this question.) Third, some relationships are more distant and episodic and, therefore, are important to the extent that the CRC considers such churches to be part of the global Christian family. This third classification is called *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. These first three classifications are at times referred to as *bilateral ecclesiastical relationships*. And, fourth, there is a classification for participation in *ecumenical organizations*. This classification is at times referred to as *multilateral relationships*.

Finally, the two-part name of the committee (ecumenical and interfaith) demonstrates two distinct and important foci to our work. The former relates to relationships between the CRC and those of other Christian traditions. The latter refers to the exchange between the CRC and those of non-Christian faith traditions. This distinction is important for the committee as well as for individuals and congregations.

II. Membership and meetings

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2016, are Rev. Andrew Beunk (2017/1); Rev. Anthony Elenbaas (2016/1); Rev. Emmett Harrison (2016/1); Ms. Sharon Jim (2017/1); Rev. Karen Norris (2018/2); Ms. Debra Ortiz-Vásquez (2016/2); Dr. Jim Payton (2018/2), chair; Dr. Jay Shim (2017/2); Rev. Kathy Smith (2018/1); and Rev. John Tenyenhuis (2018/1). Dr. Steven Timmermans and Dr. Darren Roorda serve as ex officio members of the EIRC. Dr. Darren Roorda serves as the ecumenical representative in Canada in his capacity as the Canadian ministries director; Dr. Timmermans and Mr. Colin Watson, Sr., share additional ecumenical duties.

The EIRC met in October 2015 and February 2016. A conference call meeting is scheduled to be held in April 2016.

III. Nominations for membership

Ms. Debra Ortiz-Vásquez is completing her term of service on the committee. Because of her faithful work, the EIRC recommends that synod express its gratitude for her service.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination, the EIRC presents the following slate of nominees for the position held by Ms. Ortiz-Vásquez:

Ms. Lenore Maine is a special education teacher with a B.S. in business/marketing and a master's degree in education. She is a member of Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, New Jersey, where she currently serves as an elder and as council clerk (second term). In the past she has been the chairperson of the deacons board and has served as a liaison between committees and the council. Ms. Maine has led a children's drama troupe and also serves in the church's Alpha Program as a small group leader. Ms. Maine served as an elder delegate to Synod 2015. She has worked with ministries in Mexico and East Africa and has traveled as a youth leader to the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Ms. Amy Vander Vliet is a senior web editor and database manager for the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Her B.A. is in political studies and history; her M.A. is in security studies. She is a member of the Washington, D.C., CRC, where she is currently beginning her second term as a deacon. She previously served on the church's hospitality team, transition committee, and search committee. In 2009 and 2010 she served as a young adult representative to synod, which led to her extensive involvement in the Young Adult Leadership Taskforce (YALT). In addition, from 2010 to 2011 she served as a member of and as secretary for the synodically appointed Creation Stewardship Task Force, which reported to Synod 2012. Ms. Vander Vliet continually engages with people of diverse faiths and nationalities as part of the Berkley Center's work to promote dialogue and interreligious understanding.

IV. Information regarding ecumenical relations

A. Fraternal delegates

The EIRC appointed the following fraternal delegates to the assemblies of churches with whom the CRC has a relationship or has membership:

1. To the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) General Assembly, Rev. Lawrence Spalink.
2. To the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Dr. Shirley Roels.
3. To the General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa), Rev. Michael Ribbens.

B. Representatives and observers to ecumenical organizations

In accordance with the provisions of the Ecumenical Charter of the CRCNA, the EIRC appointed representatives and observers to various ecumenical organizations. These gatherings often provide occasions to connect with representatives of churches with which the CRC is in ecclesiastical fellowship or dialogue, and members of the EIRC take every opportunity to make those connections.

1. Mr. Colin Watson, Sr., serves as the CRC's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Dr. Steven Timmermans participates in the NAE's Heads of Communion meetings.
2. Rev. Shannon Jammal-Holleman attended the biregional meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches' Caribbean and North American Area Council.
3. Dr. Darren Roorda and Rev. Anthony Elenbaas serve as the representatives of the CRC to the Canadian Council of Churches.
4. Dr. Steven Timmermans and Mr. Colin Watson, Sr., serve as the CRC's representatives to Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA).
5. Dr. Darren Roorda represents the CRC to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).
6. Dr. Steven Timmermans serves as the CRC's representative to the Global Christian Forum (GCF).
7. Mr. Colin Watson, Sr., serves as a member of the board of Sojourners.
8. Dr. Jim Payton serves as the ecumenical representative on the RCA's Commission for Christian Unity.
9. Rev. Tim Wood serves on the board of KAIROS.
10. Dr. Matthew Lundberg serves as the representative on a commission of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.
11. Dr. Peter Choi, Dr. Ronald Feenstra, and Dr. Sue Rozeboom serve as representatives of the CRC in its participation in the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue.

In addition to these appointments, CRC executive director emeritus Dr. Peter Borgdorff and Dr. William Koopmans serve on the executive committees of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and Sojourners.

V. Multilateral relationships – ecumenical organizations

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The WCRC as a global ecumenical organization is composed of 230 denominations, all of which have roots in the Reformed tradition and subscribe to the historic Reformed confessions. Together these denominations have a membership of more than 80 million people. With offices in Hanover, Germany, the WCRC is dedicated to building "communion" and relationships among its member churches and to bearing witness to and for those in the world who suffer from all forms of oppression. Rev. Chris Ferguson is the general secretary of the WCRC.

B. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

The CRC in Canada is a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). The EFC is a national association of evangelical Christians in Canada and offers a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society. The EFC focuses on bringing evangelical Christians together for greater impact in mission, ministry, and witness. It does so by working closely together for ministry

empowerment and by working cooperatively to address the government and the courts on current issues of interest and concern.

C. *Canadian Council of Churches*

The CRC in Canada is also a member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), the largest ecumenical organization in Canada. The CCC works primarily through its Commissions on Faith and Witness and on Justice and Peace. The CRC has representation on both commissions, and the CRC representatives make the CRC's voice heard in matters relating to ecumenical relations and to broad concerns within our culture and world. The EIRC has appointed a number of CRC members to be our denomination's representatives on a variety of commissions and committees of the CCC.

D. *KAIROS – Canadian ecumenical justice initiatives*

While this is not officially classified as an "ecumenical" organization, it functions as one. KAIROS is dedicated to promoting human rights, justice and peace, viable human development, and solidarity. The CRC's participation is currently funded through the Canadian Ministries Office. Together the members of KAIROS focus on the continuation of Christ's ministry and mission in the world.

E. *National Association of Evangelicals (USA)*

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) meets twice each year to discuss matters of common interest and concern among representatives of evangelical denominations, ministries, and organizations. In addition to these membership meetings, the CRC participates in NAE meetings and gatherings focused on current concerns and topics.

F. *Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. and the Global Christian Forum*

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA) brings together five families of churches: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Historic Protestant, Evangelicals/Pentecostals, and Historic Ethnic. The global expression of this same ecumenical configuration, with even more diverse participation, is the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The CRC participates with both groups.

G. *World Reformed Fellowship*

World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) is a gathering of denominations (71), organizations, congregations, and individuals from seventy-nine countries around the globe. World Reformed Fellowship seeks to provide understanding, cooperation, and sharing of resources among these many evangelical and Reformed Christian members in order to advance the gospel. The CRC joined WRF during the past year after Synod 2015 approved membership.

Invitations for two or three of these groups to send representatives to our synod are extended each year, and we look forward this year to the possible participation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the World Reformed Fellowship—a group with whom synod authorized affiliation last year.

VI. Bilateral relationships

The CRC maintains a relationship of *ecclesiastical fellowship* with twenty-four denominations and partners with ten *churches in dialogue*. The complete list is provided in the Appendix to this report.

A. *Recommendations and notifications*

Synod 2015 added two denominations to the category of *churches in dialogue*—the United Reformed Church in the Congo and the Sudanese Reformed Churches. The EIRC recommends that Synod 2016 designate the Presbyterian Church in Ethiopia (PCE) as a church in dialogue with the CRC.

The PCE was originally planted by missionaries but disappeared during the years of Ethiopia's socialism in the 1980s. However, it experienced a rebirth in recent years, and now the PCE has 160 churches and five schools. The PCE's former general secretary is studying at Calvin Theological Seminary and, on behalf of the denomination, has sought this affiliation with the CRC. The CRC executive director, Dr. Steven Timmermans, has visited the church's headquarters and reports that through the Bible League Ethiopia, the PCE is beginning to benefit from the Timothy Leadership Training Institute. In making this recommendation, the EIRC cites this feature of the *churches in dialogue* category: "The EIRC shall continue to explore specific ways in which we may be of service to these churches through our denominational agencies; for example, through opportunities for higher education of pastors and teachers in our educational institutions. . . . Such services will require the cooperation of these agencies with the EIRC."

In addition, the EIRC has invited a denomination into relationship by means of the category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. The Ecumenical Charter requires that the EIRC notify synod of such actions, and the charter provides these descriptions: "this category of relationship . . . while less formal than [the others], is to maintain contact, correspondence as circumstances may dictate, and conversation," and "the CRC will be responsive to churches from differing historical and confessional backgrounds that are willing to address matters of common interest or issues that require clarification."

Already included in this category are the Mennonite Church Canada, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (Uganda), and the Presbyterian Church of India—Mizoram Synod.

A relationship with the Kale Hiwot Church (alternate spelling: Kale Heywet) of Ethiopia—a denomination that has developed out of the Sudan Interior Mission—also fits the intent of this category. Given the common interest that has developed between the Kale Hiwot Church, the Timothy Leadership Training Institute, and our broader Christian Reformed World Missions East Africa efforts, formalizing this relationship serves to further collaborative ministry and mission.

B. *Reports*

Activities of three bilateral partners in ecclesiastical fellowship deserve extended mention.

1. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika (Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: DRC)*. Rev. Michael Ribbens, a CRWM missionary in the Johannesburg area, was the CRC delegate to the DRC's 16th General Synod. Beyond introductory information, two significant outcomes are provided.

- a. The DRC has nearly 1.1 million members and 1,602 ordained ministers.

Their General Synod meets every two years, has shifted to more consensus focused procedures, and was composed of 192 minister, elder, and deacon delegates (with the number of elders being approximately the same as that of deacons). They received a report stating that 523 of their congregations had not contributed financially to the denomination.

- b. The General Synod did not accept the Belhar Confession as a confessional standard for the DRC; the action of a General Synod relative to confessional matters involves prior voting by congregations and regional synods with specific percentage criteria that must be met, and not all of those criteria were met.
- c. The General Synod approved a multipart resolution concerning same-sex relationships; some of the components are provided here (noting the difference between South Africa and North America in the definitions of civil unions and marriage):
 - 1) The General Synod reconfirms the equality of all people irrespective of their sexual orientation and commits herself to maintain the human dignity of all people.
 - 2) The General Synod declares that hetero- and homosexual persons who live in a personal faith-obedient relationship with the Lord can fully participate in all the privileges of the church as a covenant community.
 - 3) The General Synod reconfirms the decisions of 2004, 2007, and 2013 concerning marriage, namely that only the union of one man and one woman is considered as a marriage.
 - 4) The General Synod decides, in the light of point 1 above, to give recognition to the status of civil unions between persons of the same sex that are characterized by love and fidelity. The General Synod makes provision for pastors who see their way open to solemnize such unions.
 - 5) The same Christian ethical standards (doctrine and life) apply to all persons with regard to licensing and ordination.
 - 6) The General Synod acknowledges the diversity of opinions within the DRC concerning same-sex unions and confirms the right of church councils to formulate and exercise their own viewpoints and practices.
 - 7) The General Synod confirms the discretion of church councils to deal with different opinions concerning same-sex relationships in a congregation and requests them to do it in a spirit of Christian love.
 - 8) The General Synod offers these decisions concerning same-sex relations with humility after searching earnestly, and as the best application of the biblical message as we understand it at this stage. The General Synod requests members, congregations, and church councils to again engage in their own independent process of searching for the application of the biblical message in this regard. In this search the study material of the General Synod done in 2007, 2011, 2013, and 2015 should be read earnestly. In conjunction with the Belgic Confession Article 2, the specific and general revelation should be used, which means use of the best findings of recent human sciences research.
- 2. *Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ)*. Rev. Larry Spalink, the CRC delegate to the RCJ's 70th General Assembly, reported that plans are under way for their 70th anniversary celebration; initial plans to unite various RCJ media ministries were introduced (developed with the assistance of Back to God Ministries International); discussion occurred and communications were drafted to

address troubling efforts of the government (e.g., re-nationalizing Shintoism); and the change in church order to drop the word *male* from the qualifications for teaching and ruling offices took effect at the conclusion of the assembly.

3. *Reformed Church in America (RCA)*. The synod of the CRC and the General Synod of the RCA met simultaneously in 2014 at Central College in Pella, Iowa, and adopted a resolution that commits the two denominations to further shared ventures and mandated cooperation in every way possible unless some essential principle prevents either denomination from doing so in a particular case. Many refer to this resolution in short-hand as the “Pella Accord.”

The number of cooperative ventures is too lengthy for inclusion in this report, but three deserve special mention. A new initiative of Calvin Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary to enhance clinical pastoral education has begun, focused both for seminarians and pastors serving churches. Second, a joint effort has begun to identify leadership development best practices for the pew and pulpit in six areas of the United States and Canada. Finally, talks have begun to determine how the major assemblies of the two denominations could once again meet simultaneously.

The EIRC believes that this important ecumenical relationship, strengthened by the Pella Accord, requires interpersonal engagement. In addition to regular meetings of the CRC’s executive director and RCA general secretary Rev. Dr. Tom DeVries, EIRC chair Jim Payton serves on the RCA’s Commission for Christian Unity and has been invited to assist the RCA in their ongoing three-year process of developing their interfaith purposes.

One further note: Same-sex relationships are a contentious issue in the RCA. By the time the CRC’s synod gathers in 2016, the RCA will have held a modern-day Jerusalem Council. In April 2016, a specially selected group of seventy-four RCA members will gather in Chicago with a mandate to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern “a constitutional pathway forward for the Reformed Church in America to address the questions of human sexuality as it relates to ordination and marriage.”

VII. Dialogues

A. *The United States Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue*

The Christian Reformed Church is a participant in the United States Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue. Dr. Susan Rozeboom, Dr. Ronald Feenstra, and Dr. Peter Choi are the appointed representatives. The Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism (approved by Synod 2011) has been followed by a round of dialogue on issues that are ecclesiological in scope. The most recent focus has been on ordination ministry. No approvals, however, are sought at this year’s synod.

B. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*

The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, after many years of dialogue, agreed in 1999 to adopt the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). From 2011 to 2015 the World Communion of Reformed Churches has been in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and hopes to present an analysis of and response to the JDDJ in the near future. The EIRC’s role will soon be to contribute to the WCRC analysis.

VIII. Interfaith activities

The EIRC informed Synod 2015 that, in order to pursue the four interfaith responsibilities provided by Synod 2010, it would establish a subcommittee to focus on the tasks, in light of the guidance included in the 2010 action: “While the Christian church should never lose its confession that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and should joyfully proclaim that there is no other name given under heaven by which people may be saved, interfaith dialogue must not be a pretext for evangelism. . . . However, it is hoped that when people of other faiths have an accurate understanding of Christian teachings and values and get to know Christian people, they will be intrigued by the Christian worldview and testimony and begin a journey that leads to true reconciliation with God” (*Agenda for Synod 2010*, p. 449).

Membership in this subcommittee includes Rev. Bernard Ayoola, Ms. Priscilla Brink, Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemaans, Dr. Jim Payton, Rev. Greg Sinclair, Dr. Steven Timmermans, Mrs. Femke Visser-Elenbaas, and Mr. Cory Willson. Each member brings extensive interfaith experiences related to their country of birth and/or their professional and personal experiences. Two examples of engagement in interfaith groups by members of this subcommittee and the EIRC are these:

Dr. Jim Payton serves as the CRCNA representative on the National Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee affiliated with the Canadian Council of Churches.

Rev. John Tenyenhuis serves as the CRCNA representative on the Christian Interfaith Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches.

The four responsibilities follow:

- Compile resources for the Christian Reformed Church that will guide interfaith encounters.
- Monitor and facilitate the interfaith encounters that come through ecumenical activities and within the context of the ministries of the CRC.
- Provide advice and perspectives for the CRC as requested.
- When appropriate and opportune, represent the CRC in interfaith dialogues.

As the subcommittee began its work in the fall of 2015, it focused on understanding the range and role of interfaith engagement on the part of CRC members and congregations. It has begun to reach out to Reformed institutions of higher learning to understand the degrees to which young people are prepared for participation in an interfaith world via the college curriculum and student development efforts. Appreciative of the theological grounding provided in the 2010 report, the committee seeks to develop further missiological dimensions foundational to interfaith activities.

IX. Ecumenical Faith Declaration: The Belhar Confession

Synod 2012 adopted the Belhar Confession as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration (EFD) without providing definition to this new category. As reported to Synod 2014, the category of Ecumenical Faith Declaration did not find favor with the attendees at a conference gathered to focus on the possible value of such a category (see the EIRC report to Synod 2015, *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 291-92), nor with our ecumenical partners. Some of our ecumenical partners are confused by the category; still others remain discouraged that the CRC did not adopt it as a confession.

Important to note, however, denominational staff have taken to adding, with appropriate descriptors, *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* and the Belhar Confession, an Ecumenical Faith Declaration, when listings of the creeds and confessions are provided in a range of print and web publications.

Synod 2015 instructed the Board of Trustees to ensure that denominational Ministry Support Services, Faith Formation Ministries, and Worship Ministries provide consultative Belhar Confession assistance to congregations and make related materials available through their service, marketing efforts, and web-based access. The EIRC is grateful for the work of staff in response to this instruction. An article was included in an August 2015 CRC News story; World Renew is including the Belhar Confession in their resources for World Renew Sunday (April 2016); Faith Formation Ministries will soon begin work on an Intergenerational Toolkit that will include a resource for fostering dialogue via the Belhar Confession; groups from congregations studied the book *Live Justly* and the Belhar Confession together in the past year; the 2016 Ascension/Pentecost issue of *Reformed Worship* includes an article on including the Belhar Confession in worship; and the Belhar Confession page on the CRCNA website has been updated with worship resources.

X. Closing comments

The preceding paragraphs document the work of the committee to whom synod has assigned responsibilities for ecumenical relations. However, it would be unfortunate if the impression left was that ecumenical responsibilities were not the concern of agencies, local congregations, and their members.

In the Ecumenical Charter (section III, B, 2, a), the section regarding *churches in dialogue* indicates that our relations with others occur through the denominational agencies, and lists a number of opportunities for teaching, resources, and services—activities the agencies could and should realize through the involvement of individuals and congregations. Further, a report of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC; former name of the EIRC) provides this focus (using then-current terminology) on such contact: “Both the CRC and the churches in corresponding fellowship are to be alert to persons who may be available to represent their churches through personal contact. This has already been happening with many of these churches and has proved helpful to the IRC. The IRC will monitor our denominational agencies, such as CRWM, CRWRC, Back to God Hour, military chaplains, and educational institutions, to be alert to personnel that may be traveling in the areas where such churches are located and may be able to further the relationships through personal visits on behalf of the CRC” (*Agenda for Synod 1993*, p. 409).

The committee also recognizes the Ecumenical Charter’s (section I, C, 3) direct focus on congregations: “The ecumenical task is the responsibility of the church at all its organizational levels. This task is especially important at the level of the local congregation, for it is there that the witnessing power of visible unity—and the counter-witness of division—is most vivid. Local congregations should seek to worship, witness, and work with neighboring churches that are part of the Christian community and unequivocally witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).” The EIRC recognizes that many individual congregations and their members are engaged directly in ecumenical activities and in the future wishes to further encourage and support such efforts.

XI. Recommendations

A. That Dr. Jim Payton (chair) and Dr. Steven R. Timmermans be given the privilege of the floor when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are being discussed.

B. That synod express its gratitude to Ms. Debra Ortiz-Vásquez for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect a member from the slate of nominees provided to serve on the EIRC for a term of three years, effective July 1, 2016.

D. That synod approve the reappointment of Rev. Anthony Elenbaas and Rev. Emmett Harrison to second three-year terms.

E. That synod designate the Presbyterian Church in Ethiopia as a church in dialogue with the CRC.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
Jim Payton, chair
Steven R. Timmermans, executive director

Appendix

Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Formal Dialogue, and Other Ecumenical Relationships

I. Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

A. Africa

1. Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) (1974)
2. Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) (1983)
(Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika)
3. Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) (2001)
(Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika)
4. Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile) (2014)
5. Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) (1982)
6. Reformed Churches in South Africa (1974)
(Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika)
7. Reformed Churches in South Africa (Synod Soutpansberg) (1989)
8. Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (2003)
9. Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) (1982)
(Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider Afrika)
10. Universal Reformed Christian Church (URCC) (1974)
(formerly Church of Christ in the Sudan Among the Tiv)

B. Asia, Australia, and Indonesia

1. Christian Church of Sumba (Indonesia) (1974)
(Gereja Kristen Sumba)
2. Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar (2011)
3. Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines (1997)
4. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) (1974)

5. Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka (1974)
6. Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) (1974)

C. Europe

1. Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC) (1982)
(Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken)
2. Protestant Church in the Netherlands (via Memorandum of Understanding) (2014)

D. North America

1. Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) (2014)
2. Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) (1986)
3. Reformed Church in America (RCA) (1976)

E. Latin America

Christian Reformed Church in Cuba (2001)
(La Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en Cuba)

F. South America

1. Evangelical Reformed Church in Brazil (1974)
(Ireja Evangelica Reformada no Brasil)
2. Reformed Churches in Argentina (1974)
(Iglesias Reformadas en le Argentina)

II. Churches in Dialogue

- A. Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa (Uganda)
- B. Christian Reformed Church of Haiti
- C. Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Nkhoma Synod) - Malawi
- D. Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar
- E. Evangelical Reformed Church of Burundi
- F. Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC)
- G. Reformed Church in Zambia
- H. Reformed Church of East Africa (Kenya)
- I. Sudanese Reformed Churches
- J. United Reformed Church in the Congo

III. Churches in other ecumenical relationship

- A. Kale Heywet Church (Ethiopia)
- B. Mennonite Church Canada
- C. Pentecostal Assemblies of God (Uganda)
- D. Presbyterian Church of India – Mizoram Synod

I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is a standing committee of the Christian Reformed Church established by Synod 1934 to oversee the work of the denominational archives and promote publication of denominationally related historical studies. The committee's members are Dr. Lyle Bierma, chair (2017, second term); Dr. Paul Bremer (2016, first term); Dr. Kristin Kobes DuMez (2016, first term); Dr. Robert Schoone-Jongen (2018, second term); Dr. Richard Harms (ex officio), secretary.

II. Archives staff

Dr. Richard Harms is the curator of the archives, housed in Heritage Hall on the campus of Calvin College; he also serves as archivist for the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College. Other staff members are Ms. Hendrina Van Spronsen, office manager; Ms. Laurie Haan, department assistant; Ms. Holly Waldenmeyer, department assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt, field agent and assistant archivist; and Ms. Chloe Selles, student assistant. They are assisted by volunteers Mr. Phil Erffmeyer, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Ralph Haan, Ms. Helen Meulink, Ms. Clarice Newhof, Rev. Gerrit Sheeres, Ms. Janet Sheeres, and Ms. Jeannette Smith.

III. Archival work during 2015

A. *Christian Reformed Church Archives*

- Christian Reformed Home Missions files (12.5 cubic feet) dealing with their outreach work to various church plants, 1962-1980
- Records (3 cubic feet) of the Kalamazoo Diaconal Conference, 1985-1989
- Records (2 cubic feet) of the Christian Reformed Church's Interchurch Relations Committee, 1988-1989
- Financial records (3 cubic feet) from Classis Rocky Mountain, 2001-2007
- Minutes, reports, and correspondence (3 cubic feet) of Classis Toronto, 1956-1971
- Minutes, supporting documents, and correspondence (3 cubic feet) of Classis California South, 1924-1966, 1989-1997
- Records (5 cubic feet) of Montello Park Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, 1940-2014; a discontinued denominational ministry
- Records (1 cubic foot) of Cedar Hill (Texas) Christian Reformed Church, 1993-2002; a discontinued denominational ministry
- Membership records (1 cubic foot) of Crossroads Community Church, Flanders Valley, New Jersey, 1964-1979; a discontinued denominational ministry
- The pictorial collections of Eunice Post from her nearly twenty years (1956-1976) of teaching in Zuni, New Mexico, with images of individuals, school activities, picnics, and various locales in the American Southwest
- Rev. William Buursma's papers, including his nonsermonic writing and articles on theological topics, a number of which led to articles in *The Banner*, and family history

B. *Calvin College Archives*

From the president's office eight cubic feet of administrative and academic governance files, 2008-2013, and from the provost's office ten cubic feet of records

(having to do with curriculum development and faculty professional development), 2005-2012, were processed and opened for research. The appointment of a new vice president for student life resulted in a large transfer of files, of which 28 cubic feet, 1994-2012, were processed; the remainder duplicated existing material and was discarded. The archives also organized two cubic feet of brochures, journals, photographs, CDs, and DVDs from the admissions office, 1999-2014. The 48 cubic feet of college files processed this year were reduced from 127 cubic feet by the removal of duplicate and some extraneous items.

C. *Calvin Theological Seminary Archives*

We added all of the 2015 committee records to the collection.

D. *Dutch in North America Collections*

The following materials were added to the Dutch in North America Collections:

The World War II letters collected by the Steenwyk families, donated by Myrtle Steenwyk, detail the service of four young men from the extended Steenwyk families who lost their lives during the war—Ben Kerkstra, from Byron Center, and Andrew Smit and the brothers Bernard and Hank Steenwyk from the Beavertown, Michigan, area. The papers of Diet Eman's World War II experiences. Eman, with her fiancé Hein Sietsma, agreed to assist in hiding Jews from German arrest during the war. Sietsma was arrested and died while in custody, but Eman, also arrested for a time, continued working as part of the Dutch underground during the rest of the war, finding shelter and food for Jews in hiding. For her work the State of Israel awarded her the honorific "Righteous Among the Nations." We received the journals of Dr. Glenn W. Geelhoed, surgeon and educator who led more than two hundred health care missions to the developing world, including Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, and South America, 2005-2010. The family of the late Dr. Hessel Bouma III, a biologist and Christian ethicist who specialized in beginning-of-life and end-of-life issues and taught at Calvin College, donated his research files, speeches, lectures, and publications. The family of the late Dr. Charles Miller, the first Calvin College tenured faculty member (1954-1984) who was not a member of the CRCNA, also donated his files.

Another large addition came from former congressional representative Vern Ehlers, who served as a Calvin College professor of physics and as an elected member of the Kent County Board of Supervisors, the Michigan State Legislature, and the United States Congress. The new material focuses on the Kent County Services and work on behalf of environmental issues in the U.S. Congress. Dr. William Romanowski, author and member of the Calvin College Communication Arts and Sciences Department, donated seven cubic feet of additional research and publication files (1979-2000) on Christian music and the intersection of American Christianity, popular art, and culture. Dr. Quentin Schultze, author and recently emeritated colleague of Romanowski at Calvin College, added to his papers detailing his writing, speaking, mentoring, and consulting work and the organization of the Center for Servant Leadership Communication, which helps individuals "become more virtuous, trusted, and skilled communicators."

In addition, we received a copy of the 1776 reprint of the 1716 Pieter Keur Staten Bible with clasps, catches, and corners (missing one map). It is a fine example of late eighteenth-century Dutch Bible binding with hardware.

IV. Publications by *Origins*

We continue publishing the semiannual paper copies of *Origins*, which is self-funding. *Origins* funds were also contributed to the publication of a tour of Dutch sites produced by the Dutch Heritage Coordinating Council, and to the forthcoming commentary on the Classis of Holland (RCA) by William Kennedy, to be copublished by the RCA Historical Series, Van Raalte Institute Press, and the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. We have electronically published another year of *Origins* (2015) via our webpage (www.calvin.edu/hh/origins/Origins_Main_Page.htm).

V. Recognition

A. The committee recognizes the following individuals who will celebrate significant anniversaries during 2017. These 132 ministers will have served a combined 7,776 years in the ordained ministry:

76 years, 1941-2017	Gysbert J. Rozenboom
72 years, 1945-2017	James W. Van Weelden
70 years, 1947-2017	Clarence Van Ens
69 years, 1948-2017	Carl G. Kromminga, Sr. Howard B. Spaan
68 years, 1949-2017	Albert J. Vanden Pol
67 years, 1950-2017	Lugene A. Bazuin Martin D. Geleyne Dick C. Los Lammert Slofstra
66 years, 1951-2017	Gerard Bouma Leonard J. Hofman Jacob Kuntz MyungJae Lee John T. Malestein Leonard Sweetman Clarence J. Vos Wilmer R. Witte
65 years, 1952-2017	Ralph D. Baker Herman Leestma Chester M. Schemper Richard D. Sytsma Rits Tadema Samuel Vander Jagt Benjamin Ypma
64 years, 1953-2017	Harry G. Arnold William A. Huyser Bassam M. Madany Bernard J. Niemeyer Kenneth R. Slager John W. Van Stempvoort Theodore Verseput

63 years, 1954-2017 Alan A. Arkema
Paul E. Bakker
Louis F. Baker
Marvin Beelen
Ralph W. Bronkema
Floyd R. De Boer
Earl D. Dykema
Neal Punt
Sidney H. Rooy
Martin Stegink
Anthonie Vanden Ende

62 years, 1955-2017 Andrew J. Bandstra
Winston C. Boelkins
Rodger J. Buining
John Bylsma
Ike Chang
Michiel M. De Berdt
Bert Den Herder
John Hofman
Earl C. Marlink
Jack J. Matheis
Carl J. Reitsma
John C. Rickers
Gerard Ringnalda
William Kenneth Stob
Jacob W. Uitvlugt
Wilbert M. Van Dyk

61 years, 1956-2017 Harold Bode
Theodore L. Brouwer
James A. Bultman
John Cooper
Sidney Cooper
Henry M. De Rooy
Milton R. Doornbos
Norman E. Jones
James R. Kok
Edson T. Lewis, Jr.
Calvin W. Niewenhuis
Jacob A. Quartel
Clarence Van Essen
John G. Van Ryn

60 years, 1957-2017 Wilbur L. De Jong
Earl S. Holkeboer
Louis E. Kok
Pieter Kranenburg
Eugene W. Los
Harvey A. Ouwinga
Eugene F. Rubingh

Arnold (Arend) Rumph
Gordon T. Stuit
Jack (Jacob) Stulp
Paul C.H. Szto
Louis M. Tamminga
Hans Uittenbosch
Roger E. Van Harn
James E. Versluys
Donald P. Wisse
Lloyd J. Wolters

55 years, 1962-2017

William A. Bierling
Gerrit A. Bieze
John Boonstra
Henry R. De Bolster
Michael De Vries
Hendrik Eshuis
Jan Friend
Gary G. Hofland
Louis Kerkstra
Gerald M. Nyenhuis
Peter Sluys
Arthur J. Stienstra
Berton Van Antwerpen
Henry B. Vanden Heuvel
Duane E. VanderBrug
Howard D. Vanderwell
Jacob (Jack) B. Vos
Cornelius Vriend
Jochem Vugteveen

50 years, 1967-2017

Edward J. Blankespoor
Pieter Brouwer
Ecko De Vries
Gerald E. De Vries
Aalt D. Evans
Richard O. Grevengoed
Ralph Koops
Henry Lunshof
Peter J. Mans
James S. Mantel
Henry Numan
Melle Pool
Jay R. Pruijm
Fred D. Rietema
Ronald R. Sprik
Duane E. Tinklenberg
Charles D. Uken
William Van Tol
Louis W. Wagenveld
Douglas A. Warners

Jack Westerhof
John L. Witvliet
Norberto E. Wolf

B. We report the following anniversaries of ministries that will occur during 2017:

25 years, 1992-2017	Anacortes, WA – Anacortes Fontana, CA – Friendship Community Gaylord, MI – Friendship Grand Rapids, MI – Westend Miami, FL – Iglesia Buenas Nuevas Northridge, CA – Dong San of Love Red Valley, AZ – Red Valley West Valley, UT – The Community CRC
50 years, 1967-2017	Akron, OH – Akron Bellevue, WA – Bellevue Fountain Valley, CA – Fountain of Life Fellowship Woodbridge, ON – Maranatha
75 years, 1942-2017	Grand Rapids, MI – Boston Square Mount Vernon, WA – First Ridgewood, NJ – Ridgewood
100 years, 1917-2017	Austinville, IA – Austinville Hawarden, IA – Hawarden
150 years, 1867- 2017	Berwyn, IL – Ebenezer Wellsburg, IA – First

VI. Reminders

We again ask congregations that have observed anniversaries during 2015 or will observe anniversaries during 2016 to send copies of commemorative materials (booklets, historical sketches, video recordings, photos, etc.) to the archives.

During 2015, official minutes of 79 Christian Reformed congregations and two Christian school organizations were received, microfilmed, copied, and stored in our vault. As always, once filmed, originals were returned to the respective churches. Of the 849 active congregations, 654 have participated in the records microfilming efforts. Once a congregation is ten years old, we begin contacting them about duplicating their minutes. There are 776 congregations that meet this ten-year threshold, which means that 84 percent of these have had minutes duplicated.

Official minutes were received from all forty-eight classes (minutes from meetings late in the year had not yet been received when this report was being prepared). Anniversary materials were received from fourteen Christian Reformed churches. The following classes are to be commended for having had minutes duplicated from all of their churches that are at least ten years old: Arizona, Eastern Canada, Grand Rapids East, Hamilton, Niagara, Thornapple Valley, and Zeeland. These seven classes are noteworthy for continuing to achieve this distinction year after year.

VII. Regional representatives

The Historical Committee has a representative in each classis who acts as a liaison between the committee and the churches within that classis. During this past year communications have been sent to each of our representatives thanking them for their services throughout 2015 and requesting that they continue to serve next year. In a number of classes the stated clerk has taken on this additional role, for which the committee is particularly thankful.

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant Dr. Richard H. Harms the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to its mandate come before synod.

B. That synod appoint Dr. Paul Bremer and Dr. Kristin Kobes DuMez to second three-year terms.

C. 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.

D. That synod encourage classes Alberta North, Alberta South/Saskatchewan, Atlantic Northeast, B.C. North-West, B.C. South-West, 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, North-central 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 contact the archives to have this done.

Historical Committee

Lyle Bierma, chair

Paul Bremer

Kristin Kobes Du Mez

Richard Harms (ex officio), secretary

Robert Schoone-Jongen

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED AGENCIES

Dordt College

Greetings from the Dordt College community. As we celebrate sixty years of offering biblically based Christian higher education, we're thankful for the partnership we've had over the decades with congregations of the Christian Reformed Church. Thank you for allowing us to share some of the ways our students are growing to live as Christians in their vocations and daily lives in today's world.

In a time of struggling enrollments, Dordt College celebrated another good year, falling one student short of our record high enrollment last year. More than half of our students come from more than 500 miles away, and our students represent more than 20 countries.

Again this year, we've been privileged to see examples of students and faculty putting their insight to work.

Over semester break, a group of engineering students, with the aid of Harbel, Liberia, residents and several Sioux County businesses, completed work on a 53-foot-long bridge across a creek in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. Designed by engineering majors for their senior design project, this bridge will ease the transport of supplies and produce from an 18-acre farm to local churches and the market.

Another group of engineers won first place in the annual John Brown University Shelter Contest held last spring at John Brown University. The shelter easily survived a timed assembly, an earthquake shake test, an overnight liveability stay by students, a heat retention test, and a wind/water test.

Many more examples in other disciplines could be cited. Each year we try to find new ways to help students see that their faith and worldview has legs—in film, in classrooms, on the farm, in research—in every part of life.

In preparation for this election year, Dordt hosted the inaugural Iowa Conference on Presidential Politics (ICPP). The national, cross-disciplinary academic meeting of scholars and activists focused on the theoretical and practical aspects of presidential elections and presidential power. Iowa's first in the nation role in the American political process gives us firsthand access to presidential candidates. We encourage our students to be politically active with wise minds and compassionate hearts.

In March, Dordt College and Partners Worldwide, along with the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service and World Renew, explored the question, *How do we come together to "feed the world" and end poverty?* The Global Agriculture Summit brought together international leaders from the fields of agriculture, business, community development, and academia for an intensive two-day conference on how Christians, farmers, and nongovernmental organizations can work together to restore our world.

Dordt's youth ministry program teamed up with Friendship Community Church in Sergeant Bluff, Iowa, and with Youth Unlimited to provide a summer service opportunity called "Prairie Serve" for high school students from the United States and Canada. The goal was to help young people experience God's presence in and through individuals and churches already at work in the community and to encounter different cultures in their own backyards so that their own worldview could be enriched by meeting people from different cultures.

Based on the report of a recent task force, Dordt College is seriously exploring offering two-year degrees in professional/technical programs. For generations, youth who pursue baccalaureate degrees have had access to post-secondary Christian education, but those interested in pursuing alternative occupations have not. As a college with its programs rooted in a Reformed worldview, Dordt believes that technical work is an important calling. The initial programs will be in manufacturing/engineering technology and agribusiness/farm management, two areas in which Dordt is well positioned to provide a good education because of its proximity to partnership opportunities, local resources, and already existing complementary majors.

Dordt's Center for the Advancement of Christian Education is working closely with six schools across the country to help them be distinctive. The center and these efforts are based on the conviction that Christian schools can flourish if they provide unique instructional approaches, significant student/faculty relationships, and a breadth of curricular and co-curricular choices—if they offer experiences that will shape a child for a joyous and purpose-filled life.

The Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship's online magazine, *inallthings.org*, has enjoyed hundreds of thousands of visits from readers all over the world and continues to reach more each month.

Our Career Development Center also reports that in a survey of 2015 graduates, 87 percent of students responded, and a record 99.6 percent of alumni from that class are either employed or in graduate school.

Please pray with us that these and many more efforts like them will make an impact on our world, testifying to God's greatness and love.

Dordt College
Erik Hoekstra, president

Institute for Christian Studies

As the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) looks forward in hopeful anticipation to its fiftieth year, we reflect with deep gratitude on the evidence of God's sustaining grace among us. We are encouraged by the renewed energy and growing initiatives making our teaching and research more accessible. We are grateful indeed for the role Christian Reformed churches play through your prayers, encouragement, and financial support. Thank you for standing with us faithfully in this mission.

As a graduate school, we want our teaching and learning to undergird our service to the community as a whole. Our doctor of philosophy, master of arts, and master of worldview studies degrees are vital to our generations-long commitment to Christian scholarship. Currently forty-three students are enrolled in degree programs: five in the M.W.S. program, fourteen in the M.A. program, and seven in the Ph.D. program (plus seventeen in the post-coursework phase). We welcomed seven new students in September, and we accepted two of our M.A. graduates into the Ph.D. program. In May 2015 we celebrated the graduation of six accomplished Junior Members: four in the M.A. and two in the Ph.D. programs. They came to ICS from Iowa, Alberta, New York, Ontario, and New Mexico. Across our total offering of twenty-one courses (nine in distance mode), we have 103 course registrations—a figure that includes students enrolling in single courses through the Toronto School of Theology or via distance education.

ICS's Institutional Repository, our online archival and research resource of faculty, student, and staff publications, continues to expand its reach into the global academic community and is fully accessible on mobile devices. We are using social media such as Twitter to draw attention to individual items of note (and to our courses also). The repository is harvested by many search engines, from popular tools such as Google to more academically focused ones, including Theses Portal Canada and Google Scholar. The repository will also serve the Faith and Learning Network (8,000 volumes) and the Dooyeweerd (5,000) and M.C. Smit (9,500) Collections.

Teaching excellence goes hand in hand with disciplined research. Our Senior Members make a significant contribution through their books and articles. Most recent is Lambert Zuidervaart's *Religion, Truth, and Social Transformation: Essays in Reformational Philosophy* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2015), bringing together papers written over a span of more than forty years and representing a sterling contribution to Christian scholarship. I wish to make special note of Dr. Zuidervaart's retirement on June 30, after dedicated service at The King's University College and Calvin College before his appointment at ICS in 2002; he is an ICS graduate, and he has served on our senate for many years. On February 26, we hosted a celebration to mark Shannon Hoff's major publication, *The Laws of the Spirit: A Hegelian Theory of Justice* (SUNY Press, 2014). We regretfully farewelled Dr. Hoff in July, also joyfully congratulating her on taking up an appointment at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where her gifts are sure to be greatly appreciated.

ICS's Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics (CPRSE) continues its innovative approaches to cooperative research, further extending our mission into the broader community. We received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the production of a professional video (*Just Faith?*), just one result of our two-year research partnership with the CRCNA in Canada. This forms part of a toolkit churches can use to create community

dialogue on justice and faith issues. Encouraged by the success of this project, CPRSE submitted a grant proposal for a research partnership on religious contributions to best practices in mental health care; the outcome of this application is not known at this time of writing, and we are praying for a positive judgment.

One of our major priorities has been to expand our scholarly service to the community through programs, courses, and other avenues—off-site and on campus. In the fall, we launched Nik Ansell’s *Continuing Ed/ge*, a “walk through the Bible” from *Genesis* to *Revelation* for those wishing to read Scripture with fresh eyes but without time to commit to an extended program. Also new was a summer semester on *Art, Religion, and Theology* in Orvieto, Italy, developed by Rebekah Smick to serve Christian writers and artists in pursuing their vocational and personal interests.

The *Wayfinding: Identity, Belonging and Vocation* stream in our master of world-view studies will launch in fall 2016. Conceived by recently appointed faculty member Gideon Strauss (known to many for his roles in *Cardus* and the Center for Public Justice), this exciting opportunity is designed to help women and men in varied vocations navigate the intersections of faith and work. We continue to explore ways of expanding our course offerings, recruiting adjunct faculty and sessional lecturers to design courses addressing the “hinge issues” of society and culture, a focus integral to our mission. To further broaden our scope, we are forging active partnerships with Christian undergraduate institutions and community service organizations.

We were very thankful to appoint Patricia Webb as director of advancement in 2015, this position having been vacant for quite some time. The work of advancement focuses on inviting students and donors to join us in furthering our vision of faithful Christian witness in the academy and beyond. Together, they sustain our educational mission. We are also developing new revenue streams through increased enrollment and slightly higher fees. Promotion of our courses is thus a much higher priority than we have been able to make it in recent years.

We look forward in hope to our Lord’s provision to undergird our initiatives. And we thank you for the steadfast and generous support we receive from you, the Christian Reformed Church, and the many individual supporters who derive predominantly from this community. Your commitment to our students and to Christian higher education encourages and strengthens us as we strive to fulfill Jesus’ calling to take his teachings into all the world. As disciples in the Reformed tradition, we well know we must not ignore the academy in this Great Commission.

We give thanks to God for you, and we pray for wisdom and discernment on your work during Synod 2016.

Institute for Christian Studies
Doug Blomberg, president

The King's University

Greetings from The King's University! We're pleased to have this opportunity to share the blessings we've enjoyed since our last report, and to look ahead to the exciting opportunities facing us over the next few years. We are also grateful for the ongoing support of Christian Reformed congregations and individuals throughout western Canada and beyond. Our university exists and thrives today because of the visionaries who believed that "*every square inch*" is God's, and through the ongoing faithful support of his people.

We have been greatly blessed by God over this past year:

- We've had another year of *record enrollment*, now topping 785 students (up 7% over last year).
- Our name change is complete, thanks to an Act of the Alberta Legislature removing the word *college* from our name.
- Last fall we dedicated a commemorative bench and garden on campus, honoring our institutional commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and to our First Nations people.
- We celebrated the twenty-year anniversary of participating in the Honduras Water Project.
- The new Leder School of Business at King's has expanded its team, increased its enrollment, and connected with industry.
- We signed agreements with universities in Holland, Hungary, Thailand, and Lithuania, offering students the opportunity to spend a semester studying around the world.
- Our education program celebrated more than twenty years of training and inspiring great teachers—highly sought after—to work in communities and schools around the world.
- We celebrated the 35th anniversary of The King's University Foundation.
- Our Interdisciplinary Studies Conference this fall featured keynote speaker Andy Crouch and his recent book *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*. Our recent January conference was on climate change, featuring keynote speakers Katharine Hayhoe and Michael S. Northcott.
- Our faculty and senate have approved a four-year B.A. sociology degree program.
- Our men's soccer team went to nationals for the first time, while our women's volleyball team is at the top of their conference and currently ranking fourth in nationals.

The King's *Shared Vision 2020* strategic plan lays out a new blueprint for the future of the university. As a result, we are in the process of updating our Campus Master Plan, defining the program requirements and new or renovated spaces. Major elements of the new Campus Master Plan include a *Centre for Excellence in Science* that builds on King's strength in sciences, adds a kinesiology/health science degree, and upgrades lab space and athletic space; a *Student Success Centre* that gathers and enhances all noncurricular programming for students; and a *Centre for Christian Thought and Action* (working title), which unites and enhances King's theology and philosophy programs with the Micah Centre. The goal is to present a new Campus Master Plan to the King's Board of Governors at its meeting in June 2016.

The King's University aspires to flourish and grow as a university community faithful to the biblical vision of the restoration of all things in Jesus Christ. Our partnership with the CRC community has played a significant role in the life of King's. We have been blessed by these relationships, and we trust that your communities have also been blessed by the work that God is doing through King's. We thank God for your ongoing support of Christian higher education at King's. May God bless your work on behalf of his church and during Synod 2016.

The King's University
Melanie Humphreys, president

Kuyper College

Academic year 2015-2016 was a stable year for Kuyper College, with enrollment and budget figures coming in slightly more positive than projected. We were encouraged to see the growing linkage of professionalism with a personal sense of call demonstrated in the lives of our students as they increased engagement in research and public forums. When the college talks about “extraordinary results” in its promotional materials, it is affirming the tangible and measurable outcomes demonstrated in our students’ lives out in the community. When we think about the changes and challenges in our society that are affecting the free expression and practice of Christian faith, we all can be encouraged that highly dedicated and capable students such as these are coming through (all of) our Christian institutions of higher learning!

Our focus at Kuyper in this era has grown stronger recently in emphasizing the Bible and theology component of the double major we require (the other major being the professional area of a student’s choosing). This double major is a requirement for most of our programs and an easily reached elective for the remaining programs that require a Bible and theology minor. Increasingly, students who come to Kuyper cite this emphasis as “highly important” in their choice to attend Kuyper. This is another note of encouragement we extend as people wonder about the future of the church and the younger generation.

Our desire to make our course content available to communities that cannot take advantage of on-campus courses has led to the beginnings of Kuyper’s online learning endeavor. Friends of the college contributed special funding to move this program forward, and we are working to have an online presence next year.

The Kuyper College Board of Trustees appointed two task forces last year—one to clarify the stand of the college with regard to human sexuality, and the other to clarify and affirm the Reformed worldview statement-of-allegiance required of trustees and employees. Both recommendations were received by the board this year, and final approval is expected soon. We are glad to see the trustees helping us secure the college even more in our biblical, Reformed worldview as we respond to challenges and opportunities coming to all Christ-centered institutions.

The board has also established a transition team that is preparing for the president’s coming retirement (after 22 years as president) and the selection of the new president. That transition is anticipated to take place in 2017 at the time when, it is hoped, a new president will be available. I encourage you to be part of the search effort by providing names of people who could serve this institution well.

All of us at Kuyper College continue to be grateful for the long history of encouragement and support we have had from the Christian Reformed Church. Thank you for embracing us in fellowship and prayer as we continue to strive to serve Christ and his church well.

Kuyper College
Nicholas V. Kroeze, president

Redeemer University College

Greetings from Redeemer University College to the delegates to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. May God bless and guide you in your deliberations as you seek to faithfully lead the CRCNA in important decisions.

Redeemer, like the CRCNA, continues to encounter—and meet—the significant challenges of our times while staying true to our Reformed vision and mission for university learning. Most notably, we are in “year three” of what is forecast to be a seven-year demographic decline that negatively affects university enrollment and budgets. This demographic trend is compounded by a very competitive post-secondary market and economic concerns that incline prospective students to low-cost, career-focused, post-secondary training.

As a result of these trends, our enrollment for 2015-16 is 691, down from 763 in the previous year. Thankfully our incoming first-year class of 201 students is similar to the previous year’s number of 203. Nevertheless, as we graduate larger third and fourth-year classes over the next two years, we expect our enrollment to decline to 668 in 2016-17 and again to 641 in 2017-18 before it is expected to level and begin rising again.

Redeemer is responding aggressively to these challenges. We have made significant budget reductions that will see us through our forecast low enrollment period without increasing debt. Coinciding with these reductions, we have launched our “Redeemer 2020” strategic plan with the goals of enhancing academic programs and the student experience, raising Redeemer’s profile and strategic connections, and strengthening Redeemer’s financial position, especially through balanced budgets and substantial debt reduction. Some of the strategic initiatives launched in 2015-16 include

- a revised and integrated Core Program.
- a new Centre for Christian Scholarship, which held its inaugural conference on “Purpose, Power, Potential” in October 2015.
- a new Centre for Experiential Learning and Careers to facilitate co-ops, internships, service-learning, and career planning.
- a new B.A. degree in media and communications.
- an expanded B.A. degree in ministry.
- a reorganized marketing and communications division and marketing plan.
- reconstruction of our IT network, website, portal, online applications, and e-commerce.
- reduction of our debt by several million dollars.

These initiatives reflect the intent of our “Redeemer 2020” plan not only to manage financially during our enrollment downturn but also to prepare Redeemer to sustain its mission and provide Christ-centered university learning that responds to the needs of our students and our culture for the next generation.

In addition to these initiatives, Redeemer has again been blessed with faculty committed to excellent university teaching and scholarship from a biblical, Reformed perspective. This year we welcomed Dr. Joanne Nazir (teacher education), Dr. Deanne van Tol (history), Dr. Naaman Wood (media and communication studies), Dr. Ken Herfst (religion and theology), and Prof. Michelle Shockness (social work, July 1, 2016) to our faculty. Ms. Marlene Power is our

new library director, and Ms. Patricia Kok is our new assistant librarian. We are reviewing applications for a tenure-track position in business, to begin July 1, 2016. With the resignation of our provost, effective December 31, 2015, we also will be launching a search for a new provost and VP, Academic.

Like many other institutions, Redeemer has also experienced and is responding to the significant pressures of our social and cultural context. Two such pressures stand out: First, we continue to see growing demand for mental health services, and to meet this demand we have contracted with the Shalem Mental Health Network to provide counseling services to our students. We also have partnered with McMaster University and Mohawk College in using a Mobile Mental Health Unit to provide first response service when appropriate. Second, we continue to encounter public and regulatory pressure regarding issues of sexual identity and the status of LGBTQ students, and we have appointed a committee to consider how Redeemer should respond to these issues. We look to our supporting churches, including the CRCNA, for wisdom in these sensitive matters.

In the midst of the challenges that we face, we praise God for his provision and sustaining grace. Our calling to Christian university learning remains as strong and urgent as ever, as our youth seek meaning and purpose in a confusing and broken world. We are confident that with God's help the strategic efforts we are making will strengthen Redeemer's impact. We also are very grateful for the prayers and financial support we receive from the Christian Reformed community, including the ministry shares we receive from area Christian Reformed churches. We believe that a strong partnership between church and university is vital for helping our young adults develop in faithful and effective service to Christ's kingdom.

May God bless the meeting of synod and the CRCNA's efforts to make disciples of all nations for God's glory and the coming of his kingdom.

Redeemer University College
Hubert R. Krygsman, president

Trinity Christian College

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on behalf of Trinity Christian College. Throughout our history we have valued and appreciated our relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. We are grateful for the support we receive from CRC congregations that direct a portion of their ministry shares for Christian higher education to be directed to their area college. We cherish the students from CRC families who select Trinity as their college. We relish the opportunities to be in partnership with the CRC in a variety of ways—from hosting classis meetings, to serving as a resource for local congregations, to preparing students to be leaders in our local congregations. Our partnership with the CRC is a valuable and mutually beneficial one!

On July 1, 2015, I had the privilege of beginning my time of service as Trinity's eighth president. Special thanks are due to longtime provost, Ms. Liz Rudenga, who served splendidly as interim president for a year during the search process and who will return to our education faculty. Our family (Leah and I as well as our two daughters, Juliana and Emma-Elisabeth) have already experienced the sincere hospitality that the Trinity community and the local constituency are known to offer. Indeed, Juliana's experience with the Trinity community has been so deep and impressive that it led her to enroll at Trinity, where she will begin studies as a freshman in the fall of 2016. (Her parents, as you might imagine, are delighted!)

The arrival of a new president also brings with it new energy and a fresh look at the college and its programs. In this season of significant change and challenge to higher education—and Christian higher education in particular—we remain absolutely committed to the work that has animated our efforts from our earliest days: to provide an excellent, biblically informed liberal arts education that prepares our students to faithfully lead in a multiethnic and dynamic world. We do so by educating students in our traditional undergraduate program, our adult studies program, our graduate program, and our online environment (new in 2015).

Our overall enrollment in the fall of 2015 was where we anticipated it to be, with nearly 1,400 students. That number was buoyed by a strong enrollment in our adult education program. An early focus of the new administration is to revamp and enhance our recruiting efforts and, as of this writing, those efforts are already having a positive effect. Overall, the incoming class of new traditional undergraduate students has been the most academically talented group in Trinity's history—and the most ethnically diverse, with just under 30 percent of new students being persons of color. Part of our calling, especially given our unique location in the global metropolis of Chicago, is to better reflect the broad ethnic diversity of our world, doing so as a consequence of our Christian commitment.

Our faculty, staff, and students continue to faithfully live out their callings and are increasingly doing so in collaboration. For example, our students are finding new ways to collaborate on original research with members of our faculty; our choral honors ensemble will be touring in California in May; and our faculty are showcasing their talents to a broader audience. For example, Dr. David Brodnax, professor of history, was recently interviewed by National Public Radio concerning his research into the first African-American presidential candidate (in 1904). Similarly, Ryan Thompson, chair of Trinity's Department of Art and Design, is exhibiting his work, "Echo of Untouched Matter," at Lothringer13 Halle in Munich,

Germany. Finally, a collaborative effort of our business department, Entrepreneurial Club, the Trinity community, and two area high schools, raised nearly \$25,000 to purchase a standing wheelchair for Trinity nursing student, Katie Vree, to permit her to pursue her passion for helping other people. All of these stories are available on our website (www.trnty.edu) and in our publications; I invite to you learn more about the things that are happening at Trinity Christian College!

Thank you again for your partnership with and support of Trinity Christian College. We are a better and more faithful place because of our cherished relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and we look forward to many future years of deep and rich partnership with the CRC.

Trinity Christian College
Kurt D. Dykstra, J.D., president

Communities First Association

Communities First Association (CFA) is a national, faith-based organization of highly relational, expert practitioners committed to community transformation through the multiplication of skillful leaders in asset-based community development (ABCD). A diverse group of professional community developers, the community advancement coaches and affiliates of CFA are leaders in their cities, churches, school districts, and local civic and nonprofit organizations. They are committed to a coach-trainer model that infuses high standards of coaching, training, and facilitation of relevant, rigorous, and diverse curricular experiences that will equip the next generation of leaders to help transform communities in the spirit of *shalom* in God's kingdom.

We have worked very hard this past year in the creation of professional learning tools, resources, and experiences that support CFA coaches and CFA affiliates in their growth in key core competency areas: race equity, gender equity, conflict resolution, polarity management, prayer, ABCD direct training, coaching and consulting, cultural competency, restorative justice, soul care, strategic planning, and systems thinking.

Additionally this past year we constructed the Professional Development Initiative (PDI), which allows participants to craft their own unique journey through the core competencies over time, highlighting and focusing on ones they self-select as they go. For more information on this process, please visit www.cfaolc.ning.com.

CFA also participated in the Assembly of Global Partners this past year, as both teachers and learners. Leading workshops in systems thinking, community transformation narrative, and collective impact, as well as experiencing many of the workshops that were offered, CFA learned about the ways in which World Renew and the CRC are expressing the kingdom throughout the world and North America.

In support of the coaches participating in PDI as well as the continued learning of all CFA affiliates, we have now constructed an entire menu of learning opportunities that CFA will offer in the coming year. From our small book group webinar series that spans the topics outlined by our core competencies, to our online workshops in Direct ABCD training, our goal is to make CFA accessible as a faith-based professional learning organization for all who are interested in multiplying ABCD in their neighborhoods, communities, organizations, and/or churches. For more information on our 2016 calendar of learning opportunities, please visit us at www.cfaolc.ning.com.

As a more relational approach to what we have to offer, CFA has designed a cohort model that will run in spring, summer, and fall each year. Intended for individuals who work/lead in Christian community development with a focus on one area/community, this Sojourners Cohort allows those who apply and are accepted to journey together for one year with colleagues who do similar work through a series of CFA facilitated coursework related to their context and our core competencies—all while receiving monthly one-on-one coaching from a seasoned CFA coach along the way. We are launching our first such cohort in January 2016.

Another CFA innovation has been the development of a Fast Track Vetting Process. This model was designed last year with the understanding that there are

many ABCD practitioners skilled at the art of ABCD. We designed an experience that allows those invited to participate to illustrate their knowledge/experience through portfolio submission and presentation for determination of proficiency in each CFA core competency. Our fall intake experience produced four incredible individuals who are now either coaches or sojourners of CFA! We will have our next intake process in spring 2016.

This past year we hosted our two customary semiannual gatherings. Focusing on PDI in Virginia last April, we helped our coaches grow accustomed to this new process, received some dynamic training from our CFA board member, John McKnight, and visited the community in which our coach Wendy McCaig serves and leads in ABCD. The fall gathering held in Chicago focused on the core competencies of systems thinking and race equity; we were all stretched and challenged in each of the categories through conversations, teachings, small group sharing, and poetry/spoken word performances. In spring 2016 we will gather in Houston, where we will host ABCD training for organizations and churches located in Houston and the surrounding area, and will learn from the Christian community development work currently unfolding in the third ward, where our coach John Eigege is involved in the community.

As CFA reflects on the significance of ABCD influences in education, as indicated by the work we continue to forge with North Park University and Calvin Theological Seminary, we are also exploring how the work we do in ABCD might be supportive in urban transformation and economic development. As such, CFA also participated in the "Synergia 2015" conference hosted in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and convened by Leadership Foundations, Street Psalms, and both Christian Reformed Home Missions, and Christian Reformed World Missions. We continue to engage in teaching and learning opportunities with each of these entities, taking opportunities to share our learning, even as Home Missions and World Missions become one agency.

CFA remains committed to the spirit of *shalom* and the process of discerning what God is already up to across the country; we desire to be a vessel for God to pour into, that we might simply come alongside his great and remarkable work in the world. We believe, after much prayer and discernment, that our efforts must concentrate on being present to the traditionally marginalized as we listen and learn how better to lead them from behind, creating leadership opportunities and sustainability in all of our communities.

Communities First Association
Reesheda Washington, executive director

Diaconal Ministries Canada

The mission of Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) is to *inspire, equip, and encourage deacons, churches, and their partners as they join in God's transforming work in communities*. It is a privilege for DMC to see the Spirit at work, enabling churches to live out their diaconal calling. We are partners in this work, serving the churches in three primary areas: engaging community, equipping deacons, and doing justice.

1. Engaging community

DMC's goal is to encourage each deacon and each church to join in God's transforming work in each community. For churches seeking to do this, DMC has developed the Community Opportunity Scan and will walk alongside churches as they use this assessment tool to get to know their neighbors. DMC also offers the Operation Manna Program, which provides coaching and grants for churches to establish and grow their ministries in the local community. Last year, members of 183 Canadian CRCs gave close to \$200,000 so that CRCs and ministries might access this program.

2. Equipping deacons

For each Canadian CRC, DMC offers Diaconal Ministry Developers (DMDs). DMDs are classis-based and are equipped to help deacons, through workshops and conversations, to understand their role, discover their gifts, and develop their leadership skills. DMC is also committed to providing resources that will equip and enable deacons to live out their calling. Whether through work plans, guidelines for preparing an offering schedule, or devotions, deacons will be blessed by the many resources available online at www.diaconalministries.com.

3. Doing justice

DMC equips and encourages deacons and mobilizes churches to act on justice issues affecting vulnerable people in their communities. Partnerships with other ministries, such as the Office of Social Justice and the Office of Disability Concerns, increase DMC's capacity to serve the churches in their calling to do justice. DMC has also developed online resources that will help churches walk alongside marginalized people in their communities.

DMC is actively engaging with churches and classes as a result of the report to Synod 2015 by the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon. Through equipping deacons, encouraging churches to engage their community, and doing justice, DMC continues to serve the CRC in Canada. This blessing is made possible by our diaconates and churches that support DMC through diaconal ministry shares (separate from CRC ministry shares) that are based on the number of active, professing members in the Christian Reformed Church within Canada (see www.diaconalministries.com).

Diaconal Ministries Canada
Hans Kater, executive director

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps

I. New director

At Synod 2014 it was reported that Mr. Dick Broene was retiring from the role of executive director of the Calvinist Cadet Corps. In November 2014 the executive committee selected Mr. Steve Bootsma, a Cadet counselor from Waterloo (Ont.) CRC, to be the next executive director. Almost fifteen months later the immigration paperwork was finally completed and approved. Steve started in the role as of February 15, 2016. We are thankful to God for his answers to prayer in finding a replacement and for guidance during the transition. We are grateful to Mr. Broene for the amount of time he volunteered to ensure that the necessary aspects of the job were met while we waited for Mr. Bootsma to be able to move to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and begin working in the United States.

II. Program opportunities

The Cadet program continues to develop new materials. This year at the annual meetings we approved new badges about creation, snowshoeing, and mushrooms and fungi. While we are not planning an International Counselor Convention this summer due to lack of interest in hosting one, we have seen an increase in attendance at our regional training days. Between Michigan and Ontario nearly 250 men attended a one-day event in November, participating in training sessions, networking with others, and being refreshed both spiritually and emotionally in their work with boys. Other smaller-scale training days occur out west, both in Canada and the United States. Our 2016-2017 theme will be “Get in the Game,” based on Hebrews 12:1-2.

III. International development

This past January, Mr. Daniel Nandwa, our Kenyan club coordinator, was able to spend three weeks in Ontario and Michigan visiting various Cadet clubs and councils that help support the clubs in Kenya. He was able to speak at several churches and to experience winter activities such as attending a college basketball game and an outdoor snow derby. His message was well received, and a number of clubs/councils committed to help sponsor new clubs in Africa. This help is greatly appreciated as the number of clubs in Kenya has more than doubled over the past couple of years, now totaling 82 clubs at last count. A team of four men from Michigan will be heading to Africa this summer to continue training the new counselors and making connections with the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA)—the denomination that Daniel works with and that hosts many of the clubs.

Calvinist Cadet Corps
Steve Bootsma, executive director

I. Introduction

For almost sixty years, GEMS Girls' Clubs have offered girls a place to learn and grow as they discover who God created them to be. Our mission is to bring girls everywhere into a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. To do that, we inspire and train teams of women to mentor the next generation.

Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior (GEMS) is founded on the principles of Titus 2, and we want to grow women closer to God and closer to each other as we equip them to show girls how to live God-honoring lives. GEMS is an exciting, safe environment for girls to learn about God, his Word, and his world!

II. Highlights from 2015

- GEMS is experiencing growth across North America and the world with 24,000 girls and 5,300 women participating in GEMS clubs.
- Approximately 1,600 counselors in North America and 120 in Africa participated in training events this year.
- GEMS' award-winning magazines (*SHINE brightly* and *Sparkle*) for girls continue to reach both believers and nonbelievers for Christ in North America. *Sparkle* magazine reaches over 7,000 girls, and 13,000 girls receive *SHINE brightly*.
- Over 11 countries outside of North America are asking for GEMS training and curriculum.
- A new website was launched in May 2015. In recent surveys we found that almost 40 percent of girls in GEMS clubs do not come from a believing family or have a home church. Since 2008, we have averaged 40 new clubs each year.
- The Esther School in Chongwe, Zambia, is an outreach ministry of GEMS and currently has 121 children receiving an outstanding Christian education at the school. A new administrator, grade 2 teacher, and two Zambian teachers began serving in August 2015.

III. Goals and new initiatives for 2016

- Continue to invest in training and equipping more women in their mentoring roles as counselors, and to inspire more women to be passionate in their calling to mentor girls, building servant leaders for the kingdom of God.
- Explore and pursue new avenues for outreach and partnerships to reach more girls for Jesus through the GEMS ministry.
- Inspire women and girls to greater acts of service demonstrating their love for Christ.
- Start more GEMS Girls' Clubs to serve even more girls in North America and around the world. Plans have been made to begin GEMS Girls' Clubs in Kenya through our sisters in Africa who want to reach girls for Jesus and help them overcome the injustices they face.
- Add curriculum to meet the needs of girls in our world today and to better help girls who are without a faith-based foundation or biblical knowledge to learn about God and who he created them to be.
- Continue building and operating The Esther School, a Christian day school in Chongwe, Zambia, built by GEMS Girls' Clubs; this year's plans include

completing a classroom for grade 4 students, building a staff housing dorm unit, and finishing the guesthouse.

At GEMS Girls' Clubs we give thanks to our great God for all of his blessings! We want to continue to obey all that God is calling us to do in helping to build his kingdom. We also give thanks to the Christian Reformed Church for supporting our ministry.

GEMS Girls' Clubs

Kristine Palosaari, executive director

Youth Unlimited

48,594—this number has a story to tell—actually many stories, but they are only the introduction to a much larger story. The stories include themes of sacrifice, selflessness, inspiration, life change, pain, understanding, discipleship, faith, friends, fun, brokenness, challenge, and more. These stories will give some persons hope, others joy, and others peace!

So what does this number represent? It represents stories from Christian Reformed youth leading the church, bringing redemption, restoration, and the love of Jesus to people across Canada and the United States. 48,594 is the number of hours students gave in serving others in the name of Jesus through the Youth Unlimited *Live It* convention and *Serve* mission experiences in 2015. And this is a small sampling because it represents only 1,900 students from about 20 percent of Christian Reformed churches during one week of the summer.

Youth Unlimited is grateful this year to be working even more closely with Christian Reformed churches because of influential movements such as Faith Formation Ministries and the Youth Ministry Canadian Pilot Project. We are excited to see how these will enhance our opportunity to best serve Christian Reformed congregations.

Youth Unlimited's prayer is that the Christian Reformed Church be a community of congregations with great hope and trust in our Lord, a community that fans into flames the faith and work of his people, our youth. Let's be quick to listen, offer an encouraging word, provide heartfelt appreciation, and allow our youth some freedom to speak into the future of the church.

The theme of Youth Unlimited's 28 *Serve* experiences in 2016 will be "Make Change. Be Changed" (based on the gospel of Mark). We are praying that God uses this Scripture and theme to help students encounter the person of Jesus Christ in very real ways during their time at *Serve*. Held in tandem with their ministry of service, relationships with peers, and mentoring from small group leaders, this program experience will allow students in their walk of faith to meet more fully the Savior who humbly came to serve so that this love would be poured out for us.

Youth Unlimited is honored to be making an impact for the kingdom of Christ with the Christian Reformed Church.

Youth Unlimited

Jeff Kruithof, executive director

Friendship Ministries

Friendship Ministries is an international/interdenominational ministry that empowers the church to share God's love with people who have intellectual disability and enable them to become active members of God's family.

Friendship Ministries provides opportunities for people with intellectual disability to be baptized and make profession of faith using our resource *Expressing Faith in Jesus*. We also provide resources to help our friends grow in faith, including our core Bible study curriculum and studies on the Ten Commandments and Psalms. Many Friendship members have found ways to serve and share with their congregations by ushering, helping to lead worship, and participating in service projects.

We are currently in the process of developing an exciting new line of curriculum. In addition to providing existing Friendship groups with the quality Bible studies they are accustomed to, the new material will include a track of studies that will be appropriate for any traditional adult small group interested in including one or more persons with intellectual disability.

There are more than 300 Friendship programs in Christian Reformed churches in Canada and the United States, and many of these involve multiple CRC congregations. Some programs also collaborate with churches of other denominations, extending their outreach into the wider community.

We are a worldwide organization:

- There are more than 1,200 Friendship programs in 28 countries.
- Friendship groups are in more than 75 denominations.
- Friendship serves approximately 18,000 people who have an intellectual disability.
- Through *Ministerio Amistad*, the Spanish arm of Friendship Ministries, there are four programs in the Cuba CRC. There are almost 300 programs in Latin America.
- This past year 32 new programs were started. Our goal is to start 40-50 new groups in the next year.

We collaborate with the CRC in the following ways:

- We are working closely with CRC Ministry Support Services to develop our new materials.
- Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) students in the pastoral care class are required to attend a Friendship group and write a one-page reflection paper.
- CTS students may participate in Friendship groups as a service-learning option.

Friendship Ministries provides the following additional services:

- A website that contains clear and easy-to-use resources for starting a group.
- A newsletter and regular blog that provide inspiration and practical tips for new and existing Friendship groups.

Friendship Ministries

Tom VanWingerden, executive director

Partners Worldwide

Partners Worldwide is pursuing the vision of a world without poverty, and we are doing this in a unique way. We mobilize long-term, hands-on global relationships to form a powerful Christian network that uses business as the way to create flourishing economic environments in all parts of the world. To build this network, we create partnerships with local community institutions and business affiliate volunteers to provide mentoring, training, access to capital, and advocacy. These four program components are designed to catalyze entrepreneurs and job creators to create permanent change in their communities and to celebrate business as a calling to do God's work. Christian businesspeople around the world are being affirmed and encouraged to join in and share this God-given mission with their networks.

With a strong Christian network and a partnership model that is working, we are witnessing exponential impact around the world. We reached a milestone this past year with over 103,000 jobs created and sustained! This is more than just a number—hundreds of thousands of people and their families and communities have been positively affected by Partners Worldwide this year, in 27 countries throughout five regions. These brothers and sisters in Christ are no longer dependent on aid because they now have a sustainable income to help them grow out of poverty and provide food, shelter, education, and so much more for their families. Each person in the Partners Worldwide network is doing all of this through their business as they live out their calling from God to serve in business.

The entrepreneurial and resourceful nature of the businesspeople in our network is amazing. Often under very difficult business climates, they use their business as a ministry for Christ's transformation of lives and his restoration of all things: mentoring at-risk youth, starting schools and medical clinics, providing more nutritious and affordable food for their communities, encouraging earth-friendly alternatives to land use, starting community or economic development organizations, and employing people who otherwise could not find a job.

We are deeply grateful for our founding and long-term partnership with World Renew that now spans over twenty years, and we are thankful to be planning Sea to Sea 2017 with them to raise awareness and funds to fight poverty around the world. We are also thankful for our expanded strategic partnership with the CRCNA, created in 2008 and approved by Synod 2009. It truly is a blessing to have the CRCNA promoting Partners Worldwide as a business ministry partner for the CRC, and we look forward to expanding our work together to discover and implement opportunities for this shared vision and mission.

Please pray for wisdom for us to be effective and humble servant leaders in the calling we have before us. The demand for the work of Partners Worldwide in North America and around the world continues to exceed our ability to respond.

Hence, we feel a sense of urgency to partner with more CRC churches and engage their businesspeople in partnerships that help grow businesses, create jobs, transform lives, and build healthy communities around the globe to end poverty so that all may have life and have it abundantly.

Partners Worldwide
Douglas Seebeck, president

Timothy Leadership Training Institute

I. Organization and vision

The mission of Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI) is to equip ministry partners to train pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders worldwide to make a global difference in their congregations and communities. In doing so, we follow the guidance of 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

TLTI’s vision is to make its core training programs accessible to all areas of the Christian world by 2020. Today we are active in eight of nine global regions with continued opportunities to serve new areas.

While expanding our reach, TLTI also wants to provide training programs of excellent quality and with effective assessments so that we can monitor and validate the improvements in a trainee’s skills. New software under development will provide us with unprecedented insight into our training activities.

II. Training programs

TLTI’s core Leadership Training Program consists of seven training manuals that cover the basic areas of ministry. The curriculum includes Caring for God’s People; Christian Stewardship; From Harm to Harmony: Overcoming Violence in the Family; Biblical Preaching; Teaching the Christian Faith; Praising God in Work and Worship; and God’s Plan for Sustainable Development. Each manual takes about sixteen hours of training time to complete. The training manuals incorporate the inductive-style of teaching, which focuses on reading Scripture, asking questions, and discussing topics with peers. Action plans are created to put the learning into practice and to monitor the progress of the trainees. Since flexibility is often needed to accommodate the participants’ availability, training can take place in weeklong event-based sessions, weekend or weekday sessions, or church-based weekly sessions. The participants are granted status as a basic trainer or master trainer to certify their completion of various training levels.

This year we revised our Leadership Training Program and released the 2016 edition. Several manuals underwent revision, and no further revisions are planned until at least 2020. A major translation project is under way to translate the new edition into over twenty-four languages, allowing us to reach pastors and lay leaders throughout the world with materials in their own language.

III. Organization and structure

Last year, TLTI implemented a training hub model for our operations worldwide. Today TLTI has identified 70 potential training hubs with actual ministry taking place in 45 of these hubs.

Typically an area training hub is aligned with an established ministry partner who sponsors and supports the training efforts. A ministry partner may be a congregation, denomination, academic institution, mission-sending agency, or other organization interested in promoting the trainings. With this structure, area training hubs and our ministry partners become training multipliers. Often most of the costs are paid by the participants themselves. The leverage of local resources provides more training at a lower cost and in the long term creates self-sustaining replication.

IV. Partnerships

TLTI's training programs are used extensively in the field by Christian Reformed World Missions, Verre Naasten (the mission-sending agency of the Dutch Reformed Church - Liberated) and other agencies or denominations. Our training programs are also used by World Renew and Back to God Ministries International. TLTI's trainees come from several hundred distinct church organizations—both large and small—around the world.

This past year TLTI signed Affiliation Agreements with Christian Reformed World Missions and Back to God Ministries International to formalize and strengthen our working relationships and mutual commitments. TLTI signed new agreements for Area Training Centers with IDEA Ministries, a nonprofit based in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Ministry for Christian Development in Haiti; the Vine Institute, a leadership development program in Salt Lake City, Utah; and the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic.

TLTI also has an Articulation Agreement with Miami International Seminary (MINTS), which provides a path for TLTI Master Trainers to receive a certificate from MINTS for their work with TLTI's core Leadership Training Program (plus an additional assignment) and grants credit equivalent to the first year of the MINTS Bachelor of Arts in theological studies.

V. Training outcomes

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015, TLTI certified 656 basic trainers and 391 master trainers worldwide. TLTI received reports of 173 training sessions in 30 separate countries attended by 2,623 participants. As more basic and master trainers are graduated, they in turn conduct additional trainings, which multiply the effect of TLTI's work substantially.

VI. Summary

TLTI's global training network and programs are effective tools to use for pastoral and lay leader training around the world, and the demand for our program is growing. We look forward to continued partnerships with CRC agencies and congregations as we seek to train leaders worldwide.

Timothy Leadership Training Institute
Stephen M. Tuuk, president and
chief executive officer

STUDY COMMITTEES

Outline of the report

I. Introduction

- A. *The committee's mandate*
- B. *Committee process and production of reports*
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II. The cultural and legal context of civil same-sex marriage

- A. *Canada*
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- A. *Religious and civil marriage*
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V. Principles for pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage

- A. *Religious marriage, as understood by the Christian Reformed Church, is a covenantal union between a man and a woman*
- B. *Civil marriage is properly within the domain of the state and differs in significant ways from religious marriage*
- C. *Marriage—whether civil or religious—involves social and personal values and has social effects that the church holds in high regard*
- D. *Intimate sexual relations belong within the bonds of religious marriage*
- E. *While both religious marriage and civil marriage involve an expectation or presumption of intimate sexual relations, the church's welcome, belonging, and discipling should not be based solely on presumptions*
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VI. Pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage

- A. *Same-sex weddings and other occasions*
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VII. Recommendations

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Survey Findings

Appendix B: Resources

Appendix C: Two Views of Church and State

Appendix D: Encouraging Dialogue on Same-sex Marriage

I. Introduction

For the first 150 years of its existence, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) ministered within a social context and a legal environment that agreed with the church's theological understanding of marriage as a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman. That situation is no longer the case. Civil governments, via legislative action in Canada and constitutional interpretation by the Supreme Court in the United States, have altered the legal definition of marriage so as to allow marriage between two persons irrespective of gender. From a *civil* standpoint, marriage may now involve partners of the same sex.

This change raises challenges for the CRC—challenges that invite us to ask questions and examine our thinking about marriage as we minister in today's cultural context. In many instances, the realities of same-sex marriage are intensely personal: A beloved grandchild is to be married in a same-sex ceremony and requests his grandparents' presence. Among the neighborhood children are two whose parents are a same-sex couple. A boss or coworker is in a same-sex relationship, and a wedding shower is planned. A close friend has experienced (or we personally have) a lifelong same-sex orientation, and we find ourselves sorting through our thoughts, emotions, and responses in light of this new legal possibility within society.

Beyond such personal realities, the legality of same-sex marriage raises questions about the relationship between marriage as a civil institution and marriage as an ecclesiastically blessed covenantal relationship. The legal situation today presents churches, church members, pastors, and church leaders with practical and pastoral challenges not contemplated by most of us more than a decade ago. This committee has therefore been mandated to provide pastoral guidance to churches, leaders, and members regarding same-sex marriage.

A. *The committee's mandate*

Synod 2013, in response to overtures from two U.S. classes, appointed a study committee to

give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.

(Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 617, 640-41)

The committee was asked to explore issues and provide advice for pastoral ministry as well as to identify resources and recommend best practices for use by the churches.

Further insight into synod's intent was evident in the stated grounds for the mandate. Synod observed that the synodical reports of 1973 (on homosexuality) and 2002 (on pastoral care to homosexual members) had served the denomination well by establishing biblical principles and foundations. The current committee was to focus its work on the implications of those teachings in light of recent political, legal, and social developments. These developments include the potential impact of same-sex marriage on church life as well as the significant shifting of public opinion, which also makes an impact on the membership of the denomination, especially among younger generations.

With regard to process, synod directed the committee to follow the shepherding model pioneered by the Faith Formation Committee. Further, a motion from the floor of synod, and subsequently adopted, instructed the committee

to consult extensively with pastors in Canada and the United States, members of different ethnic minorities, and others who have a broad range of experience and expertise (i.e., biblical, pastoral, ethnic) to both inform and provide feedback regarding the work of the committee.

(*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 643-44)

The first task facing the committee when it convened in November 2013 was to clarify its mandate and outline a process to meet the expectations of the shepherding model. Concerning its mandate, the committee has interpreted its task as being to focus on issues relating to civil same-sex marriage and the church's ministry. Some have suggested that the committee cannot fulfill its mandate without opening up larger issues, including the denomination's biblical and theological position on homosexuality. In this regard the committee was urged by some to ask synod for an expansion of its mandate.

After significant deliberation, the committee concluded the following regarding its mandate:

1. The social, cultural, and legal dimensions of same-sex marriage pose sufficient challenges for the church and its ministry—sufficient on their own merits to warrant the attention of this committee.
2. Synod 2013 was clear in establishing the 1973 and 2002 reports as the biblical and theological baseline for the work of the committee and indicated that it did not want the biblical grounds reopened at this time. In fact, after extended discussion, Synod 2013 defeated a motion that would have allowed consideration of an amended mandate that would include reevaluation of biblical teachings relevant to homosexuality, human sexuality, and marriage.¹
3. Broader questions about homosexuality and the church's ministry warrant further study and discussion. Such questions, however, have proven to be divisive in many Christian denominations, and members and CRC leaders are not of one mind about them. Addressing ancillary matters (such as civil same-sex marriage) well has the potential to move the church away from divisiveness and into fruitful areas of ministry. Civil discourse on civil same-sex marriage would be an encouraging step for the church.
4. Civil same-sex marriage raises ministry questions, challenges, and in some cases conundrums that force the church, through its leaders and members, to consider how Christ and the gospel can best be manifest in this world.

The committee has therefore focused its attention on civil same-sex marriage and ministry to persons affected (in various ways) by it. We believe this to be the most productive and appropriate understanding of our mandate.

¹ This motion and its vote were not recorded in the *Acts of Synod 2013* because it was a motion to *allow consideration* of an amendment, not a motion to include such an amendment.

B. Committee process and production of reports

The committee's work has been varied and extensive. The shepherding model, while offering opportunities for discussion and input unavailable through traditional committee work, requires a significantly greater investment of time and activity than does the traditional model. It should be noted that the success of the shepherding model for the Faith Formation Committee was related, at least in part, to the length of time that committee functioned—nearly twice as long as the typical denominational committee. Our committee has been stretched in its resources to follow the shepherding model and complete its work in the expected three-year period.

The committee's process included the following:

- Meetings—The committee gathered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for two-day sessions on seven occasions, with meetings spaced approximately every 3-4 months. These meetings gave the committee opportunity to remain current on legal and social developments as well as to consult with a variety of persons, including ethnic and minority community leaders. These meetings also allowed us to revisit particularly vexing questions and provided the advantage of active engagement followed by periods of reflection.
- Survey—The committee commissioned a denominational survey through the Calvin College Center for Social Research. Over 4,000 people responded to the survey, including feedback from 700 pastors and 226 respondents who identified themselves as same-sex oriented (gay, lesbian, bisexual, or same-sex attracted). The survey provided background information on experiences and attitudes among CRC members regarding same-sex marriage and ministry with same-sex oriented persons.
- Consultations—The committee consulted with persons knowledgeable and experienced in areas germane to the committee's work. These persons included leaders in ethnic communities within the CRC, representatives of denominational agencies, persons with legal expertise, same-sex oriented persons who are or were members of the CRC, and others.
- Listening sessions—Committee representatives conducted listening sessions at a dozen classis meetings across Canada and the United States. Similar sessions were held with campus ministry leaders and CRC chaplains, as well as with representatives of the denominational Board of Trustees. Committee members also hosted a listening session with delegates and advisers to Synod 2015. These listening sessions provided valuable input to the committee's work. These sessions also began the conversation within the wider church on appropriate ministry in the context of same-sex marriage.
- Committee coordination—We noted the potential overlap between the work of our committee and the Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty (RPL), whose report will also be considered by Synod 2016. Since religious liberty questions arise in the context of same-sex marriage, we have met with RPL representatives for consultation. Our committee also followed closely the work of the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Team in its recommendations for cultural and structural change in the CRC.

C. *Same-sex marriage in relationship to homosexuality*

A recurring challenge for the committee has been the perception that the committee's mandate is to address the issue of homosexuality. Reasons for this perception vary. For some, there is an assumption that the two—homosexuality and same-sex marriage—are one and the same thing. For others, civil recognition of same-sex marriage is a secondary matter—of less importance than reaffirming one's position on homosexuality. Others believe that general agreement among Christians on the biblical teaching and theology regarding same-sex attraction and behavior would settle all important questions surrounding same-sex marriage.

The committee consistently encountered in its listening sessions and in communications from individuals and churches an insistence on making statements regarding homosexuality more generally. This insistence contributed significantly to polarization within discussions. This polarization is, in the committee's estimation, unhelpful and not necessary in addressing the committee's mandate regarding same-sex marriage. We ask, as we have asked before in listening sessions and elsewhere, that this report be read and responded to as it addresses *civil same-sex marriage*; otherwise, whatever benefit the church might derive from this discussion regarding same-sex marriage and the pastoral guidance offered will be lost amid the voices clamoring that the conversation should really be about homosexuality.

D. *The status of the 1973 and 2002 reports*

Our mandate from synod (see section I, A above) directed us to take the 1973 and 2002 reports as givens, applying their biblical and theological teachings to the changed cultural landscape of a society that supports same-sex marriage. The 1973 baseline from which the committee provides its pastoral guidance can be stated concisely: same-sex oriented believers are brothers and sisters in Christ who should be fully embraced in the life of the church. Same-sex orientation, a disordering of sexual attraction, is not chosen and not in and of itself sinful; same-sex sexual behavior (what the 1973 report termed "homosexuality") is sinful.

The 1973 and 2002 reports constitute pastoral advice to the church on an ethical matter. As Synod 1975 noted in its categorization of types of synodical decisions, pastoral advice on an ethical matter is to be taken seriously—i.e., considered settled and binding—so far as the life of the church and the lives of its members are concerned. Synod 1975 clarified that synodical reports which function as pastoral advice on ethical matters remain open to discussion and even disagreement because they are not confessional matters. These reports, however, do bind the behavior of the church's members. (See *Acts of Synod 1975*, pp. 44, 597-602.)

Consistent with our mandate and synod's understanding of pastoral advice, we are asking that this discussion of same-sex marriage be separated as much as possible from church conversations about the broader question of homosexuality. We understand the difficulty of separating these two matters. Not all committee members are in complete agreement with the 1973 and 2002 reports on every point. We were not asked to be in complete agreement. We were mandated to work within the teachings given in those reports.

Later in this report, we refer to "the logic" of the 1973 report and the Church Order. This logic (and indeed our mandate itself) inevitably pushes the discussion in a direction that focuses almost exclusively on same-sex

sexual behavior. Same-sex oriented believers in our churches have long felt the reduction of their personhood to proscribed sexual behavior, even when they commit to celibacy in keeping with the church's teaching. It cannot be stated strongly enough that same-sex oriented persons are whole and complex human beings loved by God, and that their desires for love, companionship, and intimacy should be respected, even as the denomination continues to follow its teaching on marriage and sexual relations.

E. *Comments and cautions*

Before turning to the body of the report, the committee makes the following observations and issues the accompanying cautions about its report:

1. Marriage—Until recently the term *marriage* could be used without qualifying adjectives to describe at one and the same time a legal status recognized by the state and an ecclesiastically approved covenantal relationship. The two concepts were conflated—not surprisingly, since a single ceremony, often presided over by a minister, initiated and solemnized both relationships.

Our report will distinguish between *civil* marriage and *religious* marriage because there is increasing awareness of the distinction between these concepts. Some may question whether it is proper to use the term *marriage* in the context of monogamous, covenanted same-sex relationships. This report will follow Synod 2013's use of the term *same-sex marriage* in its mandate to the committee as well as legal usage in Canada and the United States.

2. Language—As happens continually with language, the meanings and uses of terms remain in flux and carry varying and variable connotations—both positive and negative. After much discussion, the committee agreed that using the language of “same-sex oriented” was the most neutral respectful option available at this time that would be acceptable to the majority of readers. The phrase “same-sex oriented” is intended as a descriptive umbrella term that encompasses persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or same-sex attracted, as well as those who experience romantic and sexual attraction to persons of the same sex but choose not to label (or perhaps even acknowledge) those feelings. The word *homosexuality* is still in wide use as a general term to describe same-sex sexuality; however, the word *homosexual* as a noun applied to persons is no longer considered respectful by the majority of those it once aimed to describe. For that reason we do not use *homosexual* as a noun in this report. It may also be the case that “same-sex oriented” may not be a self-chosen descriptor for those who identify as bisexual; our usage attempts to include rather than ignore those who experience sexual attraction to both genders. We ask those who do not find their preferred language reflected in this report to be gracious as the church undertakes this challenging discussion.
3. Matters not addressed—Questions relating to same-sex marriage are inevitably connected to other questions, including those about the nature of biological sex and gender identity. Respondents to the survey, for example, raised important questions relating to transgender persons, gender identity, and sex assignment. The committee as constituted and

mandated was not able to address these topics, important as they are to members and leaders in the church. The committee hopes that the denomination will address these questions in the near future and will ensure that its ministry encompasses persons affected by these realities.

II. The cultural and legal context of civil same-sex marriage

The past fifty years have witnessed dramatic changes in Western society, a fact particularly evident in the growing social acceptance of same-sex oriented persons and relationships. It is not that the percentage of same-sex oriented persons within society has increased during that time span, but the willingness to identify publicly as same-sex oriented has certainly increased as stigmas and discriminations have declined. The undeniable visibility of same-sex oriented individuals and couples today increases their profile in the fabric of social and cultural life. The visibility and profile of same-sex orientation varies, however, from community to community and region to region.

Prominent in this social change has been a shifting assessment of same-sex relationships and whether these relationships should be accorded legal status. Whereas opinion polls in the late 1990s showed support for same-sex marriages or civil unions as a decidedly minority position, polls today show well over half of the North American population supporting same-sex marriage, with civil unions no longer even considered as a possibility.² Since the committee's mandate included assessment of recent legal changes, a brief review of the Canadian and U.S. legal situations follows.

A. Canada

In Canada, same-sex marriage moved swiftly from provincial enactment to federal (i.e., nationwide) adoption in a period of just two years. The province of Ontario first formally legalized same-sex marriage in 2003, but in so doing it recognized retroactively the legality of same-sex marriages performed already in 2001. By the time the Canadian Parliament adopted the Civil Marriage Act in July 2005, eight of ten provinces and one of three territories had legalized same-sex marriage either by court decision or by legislative action.

Civil marriage in Canada is defined at the federal level, although procedural rules for solemnizing marriage fall within provincial jurisdiction. The Civil Marriage Act of 2005³ altered the definition of civil marriage to encompass "the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others." Section 4 of the Civil Marriage Act of 2005 states that a marriage in Canada can be between two persons of the same sex, explicitly noting that "a marriage is not void or voidable by reason only that the spouses are of the same sex."

The preamble to the Civil Marriage Act of 2005 assembles the considerations that led Parliament to alter existing law regarding marriage and to allow same-sex marriage. Equal protection arguments (i.e., ensuring similar rights were available to all citizens, not just to some) were relied on to

² As recently as 2010, a vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Rev. Richard Cizik, resigned from his position in response to criticism from evangelicals following a radio broadcast in which he had expressed support for civil unions. Now civil unions are no longer even a part of the political discussion.

³ Civil Marriage Act (S.C. 2005, c.33), published by the Minister of Justice at <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca>.

require recognition of same-sex marriage alongside traditional marriage. Addressing the argument that alternatives to same-sex marriage might accomplish the same thing, the preamble explicitly rejects civil unions and notes that Canadian courts have ruled previously that civil unions are unacceptable as an equivalent to marriage.

In adopting the 2005 act, the Canadian Parliament recognized that establishing same-sex marriage as a right could place people and organizations—most obviously pastors and churches—in the position of being asked to act against conscience to solemnize same-sex marriages. Freedom of conscience and religious expression is a freedom explicitly recognized under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The right of clergy to refuse to perform weddings that are not in line with their religious beliefs is established in section 3 of the Act: “It is recognized that officials of religious groups are free to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.” In the decade since the adoption of the Civil Marriage Act, no legal consequences have resulted from pastors declining to perform same-sex ceremonies.⁴

B. *The United States*

The legal situation in the United States is more complex and has taken longer to develop than in Canada. Prior to 2003, the majority of U.S. states had taken steps to define marriage along traditional lines (i.e., between one man and one woman). Initially this was accomplished through legislative statute, but concern that statutes might be ruled unconstitutional led traditional marriage groups to pursue voter referenda or constitutional amendments, thereby enshrining traditional definitions of marriage within state constitutions. At the federal level, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was signed into law in 1996, defining marriage as “a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife.”⁵

A legal shift began in 2003 when the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled that same-sex couples had the right to marry and that designations such as “civil union” were discriminatory. Thus began a slow procession of states (New Jersey in 2006; California in 2008; Iowa in 2009) allowing same-sex marriage either by court decision or, less often, by legislative action.

In June 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Windsor* ruled a portion of DOMA affecting federal benefits to partners in same-sex marriages unconstitutional. This successful challenge to DOMA led to a cascade of federal court cases challenging state bans on same-sex marriage. The *Windsor* decision, however, left unclear whether its decision to strike down a portion of DOMA was based on constitutional arguments (i.e., violation of equal protection or due process guarantees) or on the grounds that regulation of marriage is a matter best left to the states (a federalism argument). A constitutional basis for the court’s decision would effectively authorize same-sex marriage nationwide. A federalism argument would leave it to each state’s legislature and court to decide the civil definition of marriage for that state.

⁴ We note, with the Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Religious Liberty, that discrimination issues have been raised in Canada in different contexts (Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., on accreditation; and First CRC, Hamilton, Ont., on staff hiring).

⁵ Defense of Marriage Act (“DOMA”), 1 U.S.C. § 7.

Following the *Windsor* decision, most state and federal courts relied on the constitutional equal protection argument to strike down bans on same-sex marriage. When this synodical committee was formed in 2013, fewer than 20 states recognized same-sex marriages. By January 2015, same-sex marriage was legal in 36 states and in the District of Columbia. Only the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals (covering Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee) and a Louisiana federal district court had ruled to sustain state bans on same-sex marriage. This decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the equal protection and due process clauses of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibited states from limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples. By a narrow margin, the court struck down state bans on same-sex marriage.⁶

The decided trend in Western society and in North America in particular is now toward cultural and legal acceptance of same-sex marriage. The Christian Reformed Church should anticipate that within both the United States and Canada civil same-sex marriage will remain a legal reality into the future, and that overall public opinion will be supportive of this reality, especially among younger age groups.

III. Marriage: Civil and religious in a pluralistic society

A. *Religious and civil marriage*

Marriage is an ancient institution, and if one is speaking biblically, the adjective might be *primordial*. As the early CRC Form for the Solemnization of Marriage (1912) stated, “The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very dawn of history.” While the Christian Reformed Church does not—as the Roman Catholic Church does—deem marriage a sacrament, it considers it a sacred bond. Marriage gives substance to God’s intents for human society in this world. As the 1912 marriage form explains, “Marriage was established to extend the human race, to advance the kingdom of God, and to enrich the lives of those entering this state.”⁷

The CRC’s most recent and extensive study of marriage in 1980 affirmed the basic character of marriage as the union of husband and wife.

Man and woman, created in the image of God, were made for each other to become one flesh in marriage. Thus marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will.⁸

The backdrop for the 1980 CRC statement on marriage was the increasing divorce rate within society and the church, combined with a rise in the number of couples cohabiting without pursuing marriage. The CRC’s 1980 statement affirmed a biblical and theological understanding of marriage as the covenantal relationship between a man and a woman.

This is not all, however, that needs to be noted. Especially in this era of hypercharged rhetoric surrounding marriage, it is good to be reminded that, revered as marriage is from a Christian standpoint, it is not the be-all and end-all of human relations or society. Jesus certainly “honored marriage

⁶ *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ___ (2015).

⁷ *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1988), p. 1007.

⁸ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 469.

by his blessed presence at the wedding in Cana,⁹ but Jesus also noted that “those who are considered worthy of a place in that age [to come] and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.”¹⁰ Similarly, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 contextualizes marriage as a penultimate good—that is, good as it meets the needs of those being married, but a good which may detract from single-minded devotion to “the affairs of the Lord.”¹¹ Marriage, from a Reformed perspective, is creational; it is not eschatological.

What we do not find expressly stated in Scripture is an indication of the state’s role in the institution of marriage. Within Western culture, marriage has become a social institution in which civil government, the state, has an interest and plays a role. This has not always been the case. In its origins marriage was religious, and only in the past few centuries—as modern nation-states have developed—has the state become involved in issuing marriage licenses and recording marriages for the good ordering of society. John Calvin, in fact, was one of the first to require the recording of marriages by the civil magistrate in Geneva.

As the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* notes,

Reformed churches have insisted on the state playing its legitimate role. After modern states finally began to do so in the latter part of the eighteenth century, these churches have continued to respect the state’s interest and involvement in marriage and family. They have always acknowledged the mandate God gave to civil government (Matt. 22:15-22) to regulate, say, the legal protections afforded to those who are married “under the law.” In North America, the ordained minister of the Word who solemnizes the marriage is an agent of both church and state. It is not an either-or situation.¹²

In North American contexts, the close connection between the state and the church in regulating marriage has led, especially in religious circles, to a tendency to conflate civil and religious marriage. The confusion is understandable; the two often happen concurrently and under the auspices of a single ministerial officiant. The liturgy of another CRC marriage form (1979) indicates that the appropriate phrasing for the minister following the couple’s vows includes recognition of this dual authority: “As a minister of the church of Christ *and* by the authority which the state has vested in me, I now pronounce you, (name) and (name), husband and wife” [*emphasis added*].¹³

Over the centuries and through religious and political shifts, the roles of church and state have changed. What began as record-keeping and vow-enforcing duties by the state in support of religiously authorized marriages has become a set of social rights, privileges, and responsibilities moderated by the state and tangential to religion. The relationship of civil and religious marriage now varies throughout in the Western world. In the Netherlands, for example, there are both religious and civil ceremonies for marriage.

⁹ Marriage form (1912), *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1988), p. 1007.

¹⁰ Luke 20:35 (NRSV).

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 (NRSV).

¹² Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), p. 372.

¹³ Marriage form (1979), *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1988), p. 1011.

They are held in separate places at separate times. However, the civil ceremony is the one that is required to be valid in the eyes of the law.

Even in the North American context the two are not synonymous, as states allow civil officials such as mayors, justices of the peace, or judges to conduct civil marriage ceremonies with no religious implications or connotations. As Christian legal scholar John Inazu notes,

It has been a long time since civil marriage has primarily been about the goods of Christian marriage. That doesn't mean that Christians should give up on the importance of these goods. But it does suggest that same-sex marriage is symptomatic of, rather than the cause of, a vast gulf between Christian marriage and civil marriage in the United States.¹⁴

Inazu points out another aspect of Christian marriage in relationship to civil marriage that bears mention. Since the mid-1900s, the state has progressively distanced itself from regulating sexual relations. Laws against adultery remain in less than half the states in the United States and are rarely enforced. Laws against fornication and sodomy in the United States (traditionally enforced only in instances of same-sex encounters) have been declared unconstitutional. To quote another legal scholar,

Sex and sexual morality are central to religious marriage, but increasingly peripheral to legal provisions for civil marriage. There is very little about sex among the hundreds of things defined by law as part of civil marriage.¹⁵

What to think, then, of the legal dimensions of civil marriage? In legal terms, marriage confers a variety of rights, privileges, and obligations that are unique to the marital relationship. "In short, the marriage laws transform a private agreement into a source of significant public benefits and protections."¹⁶ In 2004 the Government Accounting Office examined the United States Code to determine the federal rights, responsibilities, and privileges that were provided to married couples. The study identified a minimum of 1,138 statutes in which marital status was a factor. At the state and federal levels, these rights, privileges, and obligations affect areas including family law, taxation, health care law, probate, torts, government benefits and programs, private sector benefits, labor law, real estate, bankruptcy, immigration, and criminal law.¹⁷

Three things should be noted from this brief discussion of religious and civil marriage. First, religious marriage and civil marriage have come to mean significantly different things. They function differently. The church should be careful in thinking through the relationship between civil and religious marriage.

¹⁴ John Inazu, "What to Expect After the Supreme Court's Marriage Decision," *Christianity Today Online*, April 28, 2015. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/april-web-only/what-to-expect-after-supreme-courts-coming-marriage-decisio.html.

¹⁵ Brief of Douglas Laycock, Thomas C. Berg, David Blankenhorn, Marie A. Failinger, and Edward McGlynn Gaffney, as Amici Curiae in Support of Petitioners, March 5, 2015. www.supremecourt.gov/ObergefellHodges/AmicusBriefs/14-556_Douglas_Laycock.pdf.

¹⁶ Vermont Supreme Court ruling in *Baker v. State*, 744 A.2d 864, 883 (Vt. 1999).

¹⁷ The American Bar Association Section of Family Law Working Group on Same-Sex Marriages and Non-marital Unions, *A White Paper: An Analysis of the Law Regarding Same-sex Marriage, Civil Unions, and Domestic Partnerships*. www.abanet.org/family/whitepaper, 16-17 (2004).

Second, the biblical and theological understanding of marriage within the CRC is incompatible with *religious* same-sex marriage. Religious marriage, as the CRC understands it, entails the union of a man and a woman in the bonds of holy matrimony.

Third, a substantial question remains about the church's stance toward *civil* same-sex marriage. It would seem, on first consideration, that the derivation from religious practice of civil marriage laws and enforcements in the eighteenth century would establish a necessary religious foundation for civil marriage. A historical case can so be made. But, as noted above, there has emerged a level of disconnect between civil and religious marriage. They are no longer, nor have they been for some time, of one piece. The question is how significant the disconnect is, and whether the state has both the authority and the latitude to redefine civil marriage to include same-sex relationships. In order to address this latter question, we will need to consider, albeit briefly, the nature and limits of pluralism in contemporary society and the role of civil government in the ordering of society.

B. Principled pluralism

The changing legal status of same-sex marriage in the United States and the legality of same-sex marriage in Canada highlight important questions about the relationship between the church's teachings and the state's laws. On these sorts of questions, the Reformed tradition has historically occupied a middle position within the Western Christian tradition.

At one end of the spectrum, the Roman Catholic Church uses the concept of natural law—a divine rationality that pervades the created order and is discerned by the rational human mind. This concept is used to insist that the state align its structuring of society with the church's understanding of God's will for society. In this natural law argument, the conditions for human flourishing are sufficiently clear that the church should insist (even if the state ultimately does not agree) that the state order society in ways consistent with the natural law, especially with regard to marriage, family, and procreation.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Anabaptist tradition has difficulty embracing the state's coercive power. From an Anabaptist perspective, the Christian community orders its own social life as it understands Scripture to require it and does not look to the state to affirm or enforce these community rules within the society at large. What happens outside the Christian community is not within the authority of the community except insofar as the gospel invites others to join the community. The church does not presume to direct the state.

The middle ground occupied by the Reformed tradition uses the Kuyperian concept of *principled pluralism* to navigate with conviction and civility the Christian life in the public square and to moderate our interactions with those with whom we agree and disagree on important social and political matters.

Principled pluralism holds that in God's diverse and differentiated creation there are different structures that have their own particular authorities and powers. These different structures of authority operate within different spheres of social life. Each of these spheres—family, school, church, state, etc.—has its own God-given task, right, and authority. Each possesses authority within its own domain, and each possesses an appropriate authority in their interrelationships with other spheres.

The Kuyperian view upholds the legitimate authority of the state *within* a particular sphere of life. Alongside the sphere of the state, we recognize other social structures as having legitimate authority within their respective domains of social life. The state is *one* structure to which God has given this relative authority. This pluralism, a *structural* pluralism, is both pragmatic and fundamentally good—that is, both useful and the way things are supposed to be.

Structural pluralism—understanding different spheres of life to have different authorities—is one aspect of principled pluralism. A second aspect is *confessional* pluralism. Confessional pluralism refers to the right of different religious (and areligious) groups not only to exist within society but also to promote their own views and develop their own patterns of involvement in public life. Confessional pluralism reflects an outworking of the relative authority of particular spheres: it is not the function of the state to discern the *ultimate* truth for those under its rule. The end result is not relativism, but a public square in which values and principles intersect in their relevance to social structure and public life.

In addressing questions regarding marriage, the state uses its authority toward different ends than the church does. The task of the government is not to compel everything that is right or moral by Christian standards, nor to punish everything that is wrong or immoral. The state's role is to maintain civil law and uphold public justice, protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens to fulfill their responsibilities—civic, social, familial, religious—and ensuring that they are not unduly harmed or restricted by the actions of others.

The church's posture in the public square ought to recognize the pluralistic nature of our world and the confessional pluralism of this political sphere. Christians ought not shy away from voicing particularly Christian values in the public square, but Christians need not make it their goal to enshrine Christian moral teaching into law.

So what of civil same-sex marriage? The challenge with marriage is that it intersects with multiple spheres. It is fundamentally a matter of family, which is a sphere of authority in its own right. The well ordering of society as a whole may be the primary responsibility of civil government, but other spheres have a stake in the wisdom of that ordering. Both the state and the church, it would appear, have relative authority with respect to marriage.

For many years there have been Reformed Christians who support the recognition of civil same-sex interdependent relationships for reasons of public justice in a pluralist society, while still holding that within the church, religious marriage has different standards. The CRC Committee for Contact with the Government within Canada wrote in 2003:

Our understanding of justice is rooted in an assumption: *people have intrinsic dignity and related rights because they are created in the image of God, no matter what their creed, colour, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.* The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has indicated that the denial of civil and social rights for homosexual persons threatens justice.¹⁸ It follows, therefore, that church members

¹⁸ In June 2002 a study committee reported to the CRC synod on the topic of Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members. The final section of that report requests the church "to reflect on the pursuit of God's justice and peace with respect to homosexuality" (*Agenda for Synod 2002*, p. 334). Key to this reflection is an attitude of grace, resting on a belief that, despite the legal complexity and moral ambiguity surrounding these issues, CRC members should "entrust the future to the God who holds it and who calls us to 'do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God'" (*Agenda*, p. 337; Mic. 6:8).

ought to affirm the validity of legal recognition of long-term and committed same-sex interdependent relationships. Justice and grace are due to all people—even to those with whom one may have profound disagreements.¹⁹

Among North American Christians who lament the opening of civil marriage to same-sex couples there is a tendency to view the adoption of civil same-sex marriage as the work of an activist judiciary influenced by a liberal, antireligious agenda. It would be wise for the church to read carefully and consider well the arguments offered as underlying rationale for civil same-sex marriage.²⁰ They are arguments based on justice and equal protection of citizens, which is the arena of the state. While it is not incumbent upon Christians to *accept* or *agree with* these arguments, Christians are duty bound by the ninth commandment to represent them accurately as well as to acknowledge their considerable weight in the current cultural discussion.

For some, the reality is that the state has redefined civil marriage, and now the church has to come to terms with this new reality. Civil same-sex marriage is the law of the land and that is unlikely to be reversed. For others, it is important to make sense of the current cultural shift in which the state operates with a different understanding of marriage than that held by the church.

Principled pluralism does not of itself provide a definitive answer to whether Christians should oppose or be supportive of civil same-sex marriage. Rather, it provides a framework within which a society decides which policies shape its interactions. While principled pluralism does not give us definite answers as to how we ought to act, it does shape the way we think through our current situation, where the church's understanding of marriage is different from the state's. No longer must this be necessarily threatening; nor must we have a singular response in all areas of life.

In Appendix C we sketch two lines of argumentation—one that argues the church should work to reverse the state's decision to allow same-sex marriage, and one that supports the state's decision to allow same-sex marriage.

C. *Pluralism and religious liberty*

Freedoms of conscience and religious expression are protected freedoms in both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the U.S. Constitution. Recognizing the significant freedom of religious expression issues involved, legislators have implemented laws protecting the free exercise of religion. In Canada, the Civil Marriage Act itself recognizes that religious groups and their representatives may refuse to perform marriage ceremonies that conflict with the tenets of their faith. In the United States, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA) was adopted ostensibly to ensure protections for religious groups and individuals from laws that burdened a person's free exercise of religion. It didn't absolutely prohibit any law from impinging on an individual's religious expression, but it did necessitate two things: (1) any law affecting religious expression must serve a compelling government interest, and (2) the law must be designed to achieve its ends in the least restrictive manner possible. The Christian church should

¹⁹ Same-sex Unions: A Case for a Just Pluralism. A Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the Committee for Contact with the Government of the Christian Reformed Church. April 10, 2003.

²⁰ The court's decision in *Windsor v. Connecticut* is available online, as is Judge Bernard Friedman's decision in *DeBoer v. Snyder* (see Appendix B).

support the protection of religious freedoms, but it should do so wisely and appropriately. We will have more to say about this in our section on pastoral guidance.

Religious freedom does not mean that individuals, churches, and businesses are free to engage in any conduct so long as it is religiously justified. It means (1) that the state has to have a compelling interest to infringe on that freedom and (2) that any requirement infringing on that freedom has to be narrowly drawn. Preventing discrimination in the public arena constitutes a compelling interest, so public actions that discriminate against persons may well be prohibited.

For churches and denominations, there is no legal requirement to support same-sex marriage or to perform same-sex weddings. A church has the right under law to set its membership requirements and establish its policies. Similarly, individuals such as pastors who represent a religious tradition are exempt from solemnizing or participating in same-sex weddings. *Pastors need not be concerned about being forced to perform same-sex weddings so long as they do not hold themselves out as available to solemnize weddings for members of the general public.*

What encouragement and support should the church provide to members who object in their lives or livelihood to becoming entangled with same-sex marriage, its observance, or its celebration? There is a growing list of disputes that have occurred in the United States and Canada, typically involving businesses providing products or services for weddings—bakers, photographers, florists, etc. The central issue appears to be where the religious person senses that artisanal work involves one personally in a ceremony with which one disagrees. While more will be said about this later in our report, we note that most judicial cases have ruled against individuals and businesses who declined service to same-sex ceremonies.

IV. Civil same-sex marriage and the covenant community

Same-sex oriented persons have become increasingly visible and accepted within North American society. Long relegated to the fringes of society and subjected to discriminatory treatment, same-sex oriented persons have experienced a significant shift in social attitudes, especially over the past fifty years. The Christian Reformed Church has played a small role in that shift, calling for an end to belittling and marginalization of same-sex oriented persons and instead encouraging inclusion within the covenant community and the pastoral ministry of the church. That has been our intent, although we have not always lived up to our intentions.

Civil same-sex marriage continues the trend toward visibility and social acceptance. Society now includes same-sex family units—both couples and families with children—as part of community life.

Negotiating these dynamics presents challenges for Christians and the church. Life events such as weddings and childbirths, and family milestones such as anniversaries or funerals, for example, have accepted social norms for their celebration or observance. Do social norms for celebration apply to same-sex couples and families? Uncertainty leads to anxiety, to social awkwardness and potential offense. No one wants such things with family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

Compounding the challenge are the variety of experiences with same-sex families; visibility and acceptance are not evenly distributed across North American society. In some communities, perhaps even where same-sex marriage is a relatively new phenomenon, same-sex oriented persons, couples, and families are a part of everyday life. Knowing same-sex married persons can lessen the anxiety. In other regions, even where same-sex marriage has been legal for years, some communities and persons have little or no contact or experience with same-sex oriented persons or couples.

It is important for the church to say something constructive and helpful about these personal and social relationships without imposing a rigid framework for negotiating the wide variety of relationships within which these questions may arise. We should note that even personal decisions may have an impact on the life of the church community. If church members attend a same-sex wedding of a friend who is or was part of the congregation, it has the potential to become a point of contention within the community. Not attending also has the potential to become a point of contention. Should we grant each other the freedom to figure out these situations and to listen to the variety of ways available to respond to them?

Of most significant impact to the church is its communal and institutional life, where same-sex marriage leads to questions about participation in the life of the church, including church membership and the sacraments. Many of the questions raised will not be answered simply. Consider the following variations on basic questions about the sacraments and church membership:

- A young woman, a longtime member of the congregation, announces that she is marrying her same-sex partner and adopting her partner's child. She asks to have her child baptized upon completion of the adoption process.
- A same-sex couple with young children begins attending the church, in large part due to the children's participation in the church's youth programs. The couple asks about joining the church and having their children baptized.
- A member of the congregation who has lived in another state for a number of years returns to be closer to family and resumes attendance. She is now married in a same-sex marriage and wishes to have her two infant children baptized. Her parents have been lifelong members of the church and support a request for baptism.
- A member of the congregation who acknowledges her same-sex orientation is nearing completion of the adoption process. She is not in a same-sex relationship, but has not ruled it out in the future. She requests baptism for her child upon adoption placement.
- A member of the congregation who is in a same-sex marriage in another state moves back home to take care of his aged mother while his spouse remains in their out-of-state home. The member brings his mother to church, takes communion, and brings his mother to congregational meetings, where they both vote.

V. Principles for pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage

The following principles derive from the preceding discussion and inform the pastoral guidance that will follow. It bears mentioning that these

principles do not, in every case or even in most cases, limit ministry to a single appropriate response. The church in its ministry is moving in shifting cultural waters. It is as great an error to presume more certainty and knowledge than we currently possess as it is to claim too little. If there is a primary message from the committee's listening sessions and survey, it is that a wide variety of experiences and social settings exist within the CRC.

A. Religious marriage, as understood by the Christian Reformed Church, is a covenantal union between a man and a woman

The Christian Reformed Church understands marriage as the union of a woman and a man as wife and husband. Both the 1912 and 1979 marriage forms and various synodical reports, most recently in 1980, have regarded marriage in this fashion.

Neither the Civil Marriage Act in Canada nor the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* requires the church to redefine marriage. While some within the religious community have tried to marshal opposition to same-sex marriage by warning that churches will be forced to accept same-sex marriage, forced acceptance has not been the case in Canada and is not anticipated in the United States. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution respect the freedom of religion, which includes the right of churches to define marriage according to their faith traditions. Whatever equal protection or due process arguments may operate in the civil sphere where legal rights and responsibilities apply, these are not applicable or essential to religious marriage.

B. Civil marriage is properly within the domain of the state and differs in significant ways from religious marriage

Civil marriage, as noted earlier, has diverged from religious marriage in important respects. If, as stated above, the Christian church is not bound in its understanding of religious marriage by the state, the church should acknowledge that the state has freedom to define civil marriage as it deems most just. Civil marriage is a matter of public policy, which is legitimately under the authority of the state.

The following table summarizes differences between civil marriage and religious marriage.

CIVIL MARRIAGE	RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE (AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE CRC)
Establishes legal rights, privileges, and responsibilities, with over 1,000 laws in the U.S. and Canada dependent on legal marital status	Establishes a covenantal relationship between a woman, a man, and God within a covenantal community
Establishes legal status for inheritance, medical decision-making, and kinship/parental status	Demarcates appropriate and inappropriate sexual relations
No longer (trend since mid-1900s) establishes legal and illegal (criminal) sexual relationships and practices with regard to civil marriage	

Whether civil same-sex marriage is a wise public policy decision or a matter of constitutional necessity is a matter on which Christians may differ. What this principle precludes is a claim that the state has no authority to define civil marriage or that the state must adhere to a particular religious definition of marriage.

C. Marriage—whether civil or religious—involves social and personal values and has social effects that the church holds in high regard

During the cultural contentions over same-sex marriage, the focus from religious communities has been almost exclusively on objections to same-sex sexual relationships. At times, the debate has been in danger of reducing these relationships to their sexual dimension.

Marriage, whether civil or religious, requires personal traits and social commitments that are highly valued by Christians—things like commitment, patience, self-sacrifice, and loving kindness. Same-sex couples, like traditional opposite-sex couples, value and display these traits, forming relationships that can provide stability and continuity within a social framework. The Christian church must be careful, in its commitment to truth and being cognizant of how it represents the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to be guilty of reducing same-sex marriage solely to sexual expression.

D. Intimate sexual relations belong within the bonds of religious marriage

While the Christian community is often caricatured as obsessed with sexuality in a negative way, the tradition teaches quite the opposite. Sexual intimacy is a gift of great promise and power and is therefore to be enjoyed within the safeguards of a religious covenant relationship. This has been the Reformed understanding of the import of the seventh commandment as well as church teachings on marriage and sexual expression. The 1973 and 2002 synodical reports on homosexuality continued this understanding of sexual expression within the bounds of religious marriage.

E. While both religious marriage and civil marriage involve an expectation or presumption of intimate sexual relations, the church's welcome, belonging, and disciplining should not be based solely on presumptions

Civil same-sex marriage does not, in and of itself, entail improper sexual relations. Civil marriage provides a legal environment in which persons can establish stable, familial relationships, whether those relationships be opposite-sex or same-sex and whether or not those relations involve sexual expression. Sexual intimacy between married adults is, in most situations, an integral element of a stable, familial relationship. It is, however, but one element of many, and not an essential element in all cases or at all times.

The result is that a civil same-sex marriage likely, but not necessarily, involves same-sex sexual behavior. Situations have also existed, both in our denomination and in the broader Christian world, in which two celibate same-sex oriented people have lived together or have sought legal married status while refraining from sexual intimacy. These situations may arise in our churches as well, and we ought to consider them thoughtfully and on an individual basis.

The church, as an agent of God's grace in the world and a channel for Word and sacrament as means of grace, should not carry out its ministry based solely on presumptions. Its welcome to all who encounter the

community of Christ, its openness to would-be followers of Christ, and its encouragement to live in gratitude for grace must not be muted based solely on assumptions of sexual impropriety. This is true for all persons and couples, regardless of sexual orientation or marital status.

The Christian church faces a significant challenge in this regard. Pastoral ministry is relational ministry, and it is only in relationship that these questions can be explored appropriately through further conversations, taking account of every relevant consideration.

F. Solemnizing religious marriages is an ecclesiastical function governed by the church

In a religious wedding, the pastor functions as a representative of God and the church in solemnizing the wedding. The Church Order (Art. 69) limits ministers to solemnizing religious marriages that conform to the Word of God.

VI. Pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage

The committee's mandate is to provide pastoral guidance in addressing the pastoral and personal questions that arise from civil same-sex marriage in Canada and the United States. The term *pastoral guidance* is apt. As a committee, we are providing a set of principles and suggested courses of action that are consistent with the Christian Reformed Church's understanding of Christian marriage and the need for the church, its representatives, and its members to be a gracious, truthful, and contributing presence within the wider culture.

One aspect of the issue confirmed during our listening sessions and consultations is that people demonstrate a wide range of responses and attitudes toward same-sex marriage. These responses should not be oversimplified into oppositions: liberal/conservative, Bible-believers/culture-accommodators, relational/principial, or doctrinal/experiential. On the committee itself we experienced differences of opinion as to the appropriate response in different situations. Two years of listening and discussion may have nuanced those differences and brought us to better understanding, but the experience did not eliminate disagreement. Where these differences matter we have tried to indicate the options that the church possesses.

This is a time to be forthright. Any set of guidelines will leave a great number of people unsatisfied in some way or another. In some instances, we provide firm guidelines that flow out of the church's theology and ecclesiology. In other situations, however, we deemed it unwise to adopt a set of rules locking churches, pastors, and others into singular responses to what are novel and challenging situations.

A. Same-sex weddings and other occasions

1. Attending

An invitation to a same-sex commitment/marriage ceremony and its accompanying events raises a potential point of tension and uncertainty for many people. The invitation may well come from a family member, a neighbor, a coworker, or a friend.

Church members who have received such invitations have undoubtedly thought through their response, although they may have felt

ambivalence about their decision. Christians have addressed the tensions in a variety of ways—from a decision to attend in respect of friendship or family ties to a decision to decline because one is reluctant to be seen condoning a relationship with which they disagree. Some within the CRC may attend because they celebrate the relationship and do not consider same-sex committed relationships as inherently sinful. Decisions to attend or not are often shaped by conscience, and conscience deserves respect. A decision to attend a wedding means different things to different people. Given this, there is not one singular response to an invitation to a same-sex wedding that we recommend. We judge that the church is best served by allowing latitude and supporting thoughtful choices.

We note that ambiguity may accompany decisions to attend as well as not to attend. A decision to attend may be read as condoning a relationship that the Christian Reformed Church considers incompatible with the conclusions of its 1973 report. A decision not to attend runs the risk of reducing an assessment of committed relationships—relationships which possess a myriad of dimensions, many of them commendable—to sexual behavior. The latter exposes the invited friend or family member (and by extension the church) to the charge that the sexual dimension of marriage is the only thing that matters. These perils highlight that there is no perfect solution in the quest for grace and truth.

Some might question whether the same decisional freedom should apply to pastors and other church leaders. The presence of a pastor or church leader at a public event carries symbolic as well as personal meaning. Once again, the decision can be complex. A pastor might attend in order to maintain a relationship with one or both marital partners for the sake of future pastoral care or discipleship, even if the pastor does not agree with the marriage on biblical grounds. The marriage may be that of the pastor's own child, grandchild, or other relative. Family ties may be at stake. Or a pastor might attend to support a parishioner, neighbor, or friend who does not agree with the same-sex marriage but still chooses to be present as an expression of love and support for their family member.

As with any marriage celebration, attendance does not necessarily mean approval of every aspect of a relationship. It would be wise for a pastor to consult the church consistory regarding attendance at the ceremony. This encourages transparency and eliminates surprise should objections later arise, especially from within the congregation.

2. Officiating

The denominational survey and classical listening sessions conducted by the committee indicate that CRC pastors have received requests to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies and weddings. With the United States joining Canada in allowing civil same-sex marriage, requests to CRC pastors to officiate at same-sex weddings will undoubtedly become more common.

Four basic questions arise with respect to officiating at same-sex weddings:

- Might pastors be required by the state or province to officiate at same-sex marriages, especially where discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited by a city, state, or province?

- What are the marks of a religious marriage?
- Should pastors be permitted to solemnize religious same-sex marriages?
- Should pastors be permitted to officiate at civil same-sex marriages?

a. Legal aspects for pastors

Anxiety over potential legal vulnerability for refusing to officiate at a same-sex marriage is not uncommon among pastors, especially in U.S. states where same-sex marriage has only recently become legal. As one pastor asked in response to the committee’s survey: What will I do if/when a same-sex couple asks me to officiate at their wedding? What guidelines or policies should be in place in my local church to protect me if/when such a request comes?

This is an area in which Canada’s decade of experience with civil same-sex marriage is informative. Since 2005 when same-sex marriage was made legal in Canada, no Christian pastors have been forced to officiate at same-sex ceremonies against their convictions or against the position of their denomination. For all the concerns expressed, it has been a nonissue in Canada for ordained CRC pastors.

The Canadian experience, of course, does not guarantee an identical result for pastors in the United States. The Canadian situation differs in that the Civil Marriage Act specifically guarantees religious freedom for pastors and churches. In the U.S., the Supreme Court in the *Obergefell* decision mentioned religious liberty issues primarily in the dissenting opinions. Still, most legal experts do not anticipate that pastors in the U.S. would be required to officiate at same-sex marriages. The First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion is almost certain to be held to obviate any duty to officiate at same-sex weddings.

We should note, by way of warning, one situation of potential difficulty: a pastor who holds him- or herself out as available to conduct weddings regardless of whether those being married belong to the pastor’s congregation or denomination. While few, if any, pastors in the CRC advertise themselves as available to conduct weddings for all comers (and such pastors would do well to consider the implications of Church Order Art. 69 in this regard), we would be remiss not to mention the real possibility that a pastor who advertises availability to conduct weddings for the general public may be prevented from refusing to conduct same-sex weddings when requested. We address the institutional ministry contexts of chaplains in subsection C, 5 below.

Pastors would be wise to state clearly on their church’s website (on, for instance, a Wedding or Building Use page) the CRC understanding of marriage and adopt a policy statement regarding officiating at weddings. Although the likelihood of a discrimination lawsuit against a pastor for refusing to perform a same-sex wedding is small, pastors who wish to minimize their risk should restrict officiating of all weddings to those in which at least one person is a member of the congregation or denomination.

b. Marks of a religious marriage

We noted earlier in our report the increasing distinction between civil and religious marriage. It remains the case that virtually all North

American religious marriages are also civil marriages, with a single ceremony solemnizing both the civil and the religious marriage.

Typically, a religious wedding initiates a marriage between Christian believers. What makes a wedding religious? Certainly setting plays a part. A wedding in a church sanctuary surrounded by the symbols and expressions of the Christian faith suggests an intent to seek God's and the Christian community's blessing on a marriage. More specifically, three things distinguish a wedding solemnizing a religious marriage:

- a declaration of marriage (following the exchange of vows) using the formula “by the authority vested in me by the church of Jesus Christ and by the State/Province of . . .”
- liturgical elements that invoke the name of God and prayers that express God's blessing on the couple
- acknowledgment that the couple's vows are being stated and the marriage is being solemnized “before the face of God”

c. Solemnizing a religious same-sex marriage

The CRC understanding of marriage in concert with Church Order Article 69 precludes a CRC pastor from solemnizing a religious same-sex marriage. As noted earlier in this report, the CRC understands marriage as a covenant bond between a man and a woman before God. Article 69 prohibits pastors from solemnizing marriages that are contrary to the Word of God. The biblical and theological basis of the 1973 report presents a denominational understanding that same-sex sexual behavior (not orientation) is sinful. Solemnizing a religious same-sex marriage runs contrary to that understanding.

A request to solemnize a religious same-sex marriage may well present a pastoral challenge. Assuming that the request comes from a church member or from a friend or relative of a church member, some pastors will be conflicted in refusing a request that originates in a strong personal or pastoral relationship.

If a pastor were to solemnize a religious same-sex marriage, he or she would be open to church inquiry and discipline, including potential suspension or loss of ministerial credentials. Some denominations, such as the United Methodist Church, have attempted to make suspension and loss of credentials virtually automatic in such cases. Significant national publicity, not to mention institutional and personal trauma, has accompanied such instances in which a Methodist pastor has officiated at a same-sex wedding.

While some may suggest that the CRC should adopt a similar policy, the committee does not recommend such a course. CRC polity does not operate in the same fashion as does the polity in, say, the United Methodist Church. The CRC is not hierarchically structured under the authority of bishops, nor do we have a Book of Discipline. Our covenantal life is moderated through the deliberative assemblies of the church, originating in the local church council and following processes laid out in the Church Order. Singling out solemnization of a religious same-sex marriage for automatic suspension or discipline would create categories of offense and curtail the deliberative nature of the church's assemblies. When a pastor has acted in violation of the Church Order,

the pastor's consistory is the appropriate venue in which to raise the issue, and from there the matter proceeds to classis and synod if necessary, according to established church polity.

d. Officiating a civil same-sex marriage

Most requests to officiate at a wedding involve an implicit request for a religious as well as civil marriage ceremony. Where such requests involve a same-sex couple, the above pastoral guidance applies.

It is unusual, but not unheard of, for a pastor to receive a request to officiate at a civil ceremony. Most pastors receive one or more such requests during the course of their ministry. The circumstances of such requests vary widely, as do pastoral responses. Some ministers refuse all such requests. Others will officiate if they discern a significant pastoral dimension in the relationship with the couple being married. At least in practice, the Christian Reformed Church has given latitude in this regard.

May a CRC pastor officiate a civil same-sex ceremony? This is, we note, an extremely narrow question—limited to instances in which a same-sex couple is committed to living within the bounds of the 1973 CRC position and does not seek a religious marriage. They wish, however, to avail themselves of the legal structures and benefits of civil marriage.

It is generally wise for pastors to refer people in such rare situations to a civil official charged with officiating at civil marriages. However, pastoral situations may arise in which it may be appropriate for a particular minister to be the civil officiant. Consider the following examples:

- Two older men have developed a deep friendship over the years. Neither has married. They share a house, friends, and business interests. As they age, they realize the vulnerability of their legal, medical, and personal situation. Having a longstanding relationship with the CRC pastor, they approach the pastor and ask if s/he will marry them in a civil ceremony.
- Two women with gifts and interests in adopting and parenting special needs children seek the stability of a two-parent household for their children. The church recognizes their gifts and wishes to be supportive. The women ask the pastor to officiate at their civil marriage ceremony.

The committee discussed these situations, uncommon as they might be. We are not of one mind as to pastoral guidelines. Some committee members thought that pastors should not conduct any civil ceremonies, same-sex or otherwise, in the absence of a religious marriage. Other committee members thought that in unusual and very limited situations such as these, latitude should be given based on circumstances. At the very least, however, these examples demonstrate that a civil same-sex marriage is not inherently in conflict with the CRC understanding of same-sex orientation and behavior nor with the church's position on marriage.

3. Hosting

Churches frequently make their facilities—usually the sanctuary and/or fellowship hall—available for events and ceremonies, including weddings

and receptions. Some limit availability to church members, while other churches allow access for the wider community, with perhaps a difference in rental fee for church members versus nonmembers. In some churches, the reservation may be made through a church member even though the event itself may be the wedding of persons not currently members of the church.

Allowing use of facilities by nonmembers could bring into play nondiscrimination provisions of federal, state, provincial, or local law. If a church advertises on its website or in its informational materials that its facilities are available to the general public for weddings, it may be required to make them available for same-sex weddings just as it does for opposite-sex weddings. As churches in Canada have been advised for the past decade, a church that does not wish to allow same-sex weddings to be solemnized in its building is best advised to do two things: (a) have a clearly stated wedding policy that references the CRC's understanding of marriage, and (b) limit facility rental/availability to congregational members. Appendix B of this report refers to legal resources for churches with concerns in this regard.

What if a CRC church is open to allowing a same-sex wedding in its facility? Some denominations have forbidden their churches to permit same-sex celebrations in their sanctuaries, usually in denominations where local church property is deemed to be owned by the denomination and managed in trust by the local church. In the CRC, property is owned by the local congregation, and decisions regarding its use have traditionally been local decisions.

For some churches, making the facilities available to nonmembers is a way to connect the church to the wider community. Access to facilities may also be a part of ecumenical relationships with other Christian denominations, including some that allow same-sex marriage. Some CRC churches, in fact, share facilities with other congregations. It would be unwise for the CRC to establish a blanket rule in this regard; this is a matter best addressed locally and at the discretion of the local church council.

4. Playing a role in a same-sex wedding

Much media attention has focused on persons whose livelihood or position may involve them in one way or another in a same-sex wedding—the baker, the florist, the photographer, the county clerk who issues marriage licenses, and so on. This is the initial arena in the United States where religious liberty vis-à-vis same-sex marriage is playing out, both legislatively and through the courts.

Legislatively, the challenge has been to find a proper balance between nondiscrimination interests in society and a religious individual's desire not to participate in celebrating or authorizing a relationship with which he or she disagrees. The primary sticking point in the U.S. has been whether businesses should be included within state statutes protecting religious liberty.²¹

Religious liberty issues are important, and the church should support legislative efforts to protect religious expression. The issues are too

²¹ This is peculiar to the U.S. and is a result of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 573 U.S. ____ (2014), which recognized that the freedom of religion protections of the First Amendment extend to closely held businesses.

complex for detailed treatment here. It is important that the CRC has a study committee reporting on religious liberty and religious persecution.²²

Those who work in civil positions (i.e., county clerk, magistrate, territorial judge, etc.) that involve the issuing of marriage documents will not be able to claim religious freedom as grounds for refusal to carry out their civil responsibilities. Part of the oath of office is a promise to faithfully execute public duties. A person's implication in issuing required public documents is insufficient to trigger religious liberty protections.

The same is likely to be held for public officials who are required by law to solemnize civil marriages. Attempts to accord civil officials the same right of refusal to officiate as religious clergy have failed in several Canadian provinces. As of 2015, the state of North Carolina has adopted such a policy, and it is currently being considered in other U.S. states. Overall, it is unlikely that civil officials will be excused from performing their official functions.

Initial cases in the United States for persons and businesses that provide wedding-related services indicate that religious liberty claims face an uphill struggle if a person or business advertises their services to the public. Especially in communities that have enacted antidiscrimination provisions that include sexual orientation as a protected category, courts and commissions are likely to require that services be made available regardless of personal religious objections.

Providing these services to same-sex couples may violate the conscience of some individuals in our churches. Others may feel no burden of conscience to refuse services to same-sex couples. Such decisions are best made on an individual level. Just as we do not mandate that members do not provide catering for bar mitzvahs or arrange flowers for a wedding between two atheists, providing services to other people does not inherently imply an agreement with the event taking place or with every aspect of the customer's life.

On a personal level, as opposed to a professional or business level, church members may be invited to participate in a same-sex wedding celebration in a variety of ways—from standing up in the wedding to being involved in the music or liturgy. We judge any participation short of officiating to be a discretionary matter in which a person's own conscience before God should guide their decision.

Ministers of the Word, commissioned pastors, and other ordained leaders of the church will be aware that their involvement in a same-sex ceremony is likely to be scrutinized closely. "Involvement" can include any of a dozen roles, from reading Scripture to prayer to walking a daughter down the aisle to receiving a token of thanks and appreciation from a son. These potential involvements are too complex to create blanket rules of prohibition or allowance. Suffice it to say that ordained and commissioned church leaders should exercise caution and discretion in their public roles.

²² For an excellent legal argument in favor of recognizing religious liberty protection in relationship to same-sex marriage, see Douglas Laycock, "Religious Liberty and the Culture Wars," 2014 *Illinois Law Review* 839.

B. *The church community*

We now turn to same-sex marriage as it affects the Christian church community. We address this pastoral guidance through three aspects of church life: welcoming, belonging, and discipling. Welcoming is the introductory stage in which a person and a church become acquainted and establish a relationship. Belonging is the stage of enfolding a new person into membership within the community. Discipling is the process in which church members seek transformation into the likeness of Christ and the church becomes the body of Christ.

Addressing these stages sequentially runs the risk of implying that persons in same-sex marriages are most likely to encounter the church from a starting point outside the church. That would be misleading. Many same-sex oriented people already call our congregations home, and various questions will arise from our brothers and sisters who are already members. We are addressing it this way as a matter of conceptual convenience.

So we note that the church is most likely to encounter same-sex marriage when a same-sex oriented church member decides to marry. For the purposes of our discussion, we treat that situation under subheading 3, Discipling (below).

1. Welcoming

In *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, the CRC affirms that “in the new community all are welcome” (para. 34). Welcoming involves the process of invitation, introduction, and establishing a relationship. We were encouraged during our listening sessions to hear pastors, elders, and church leaders consistently affirm that all persons are to be welcomed into fellowship and invited into relationship with Jesus Christ. The good news of the gospel has no preconditions for its hearing; the faithful church has doors open to the world.

In 1973 and in 2002, synod affirmed that same-sex oriented persons were to be welcomed and included in the pastoral ministry of the church. In 2016, synod should affirm that persons in same-sex marriages are also to be welcomed and invited into a relationship with Jesus Christ. If we are to be true to our confessions and our testimonies, we must be welcoming and an embodiment of the grace that is ours through Jesus Christ.

To say that Synods 1973 and 2002 affirmed the church’s welcome and pastoral ministry with same-sex oriented persons is, of course, not to tell the whole story. The affirmation of 1973 was adopted amid significant disagreement within the church, and Synod 2002’s adoption of the report on Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members was prompted by acknowledging that the CRC had not been a supportive or welcoming place for persons, whether members or not, who were same-sex oriented.

This remains a crucial challenge for the CRC, one that we deeply lament. While 78 percent of ministers who responded to our survey reported having intentionally tried to show Christ’s love to same-sex oriented people, only 12 percent said their church is intentionally seeking to provide a hospitable place for same-sex oriented people to know and worship God. An additional 35 percent said their church is doing this in some ways, and 44 percent responded that they are not doing so.

Responses to the question “Do you ever hear comments from church members that you believe would be offensive to people in your

congregation who are attracted to the same sex?” were even more alarming: 61 percent of responding ministers said they had heard offensive comments from congregants, and 75 percent of nonheterosexual (self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer,²³ or same-sex attracted) respondents in the whole survey reported hearing offensive comments from church members. This is profoundly disturbing; repentance is needed.

Can the CRC live out its intention to be welcoming to same-sex couples and families? We pray so. The challenges are readily apparent and, in some cases, require discernment of a high degree. In our listening sessions, the willingness to welcome was often accompanied by tempering statements such as “we wouldn’t want to give the wrong impression” or “we shouldn’t hide our denominational position on homosexuality.” There was anxiety and uncertainty over the appropriate point or situation in which the CRC’s position on homosexuality and same-sex relationships should be made clear. We understand the tensions inherent in the situation.

The key, we suggest, is that in welcoming, the church and its members are willing to enter into relationship with people as Christ does—without preconditions. To welcome involves entering into honest relationship, offering the hospitality of Christ, and in the process of an unfolding relationship discerning moments for appropriate and needed conversations and genuine encounter. Welcoming involves recognizing that the life and grace we share in Christ cannot be reduced to solely a matter of sexual orientation or behavior.

This is especially true in the programs and outreach of the church. One pastor, in response to the committee’s survey, wrote that at a recent parenting series sponsored by the church and offered to the community, the first couple to sign up was a same-sex couple. What does it mean for the church to be welcoming in this situation? For a start, it means that the church is hospitable; it treats others with dignity. It respects the impulse that draws people to the church and does not stymie the desire to draw from God’s goodness. Pastors and church leaders enter into relationships with people—relationships shaped by the grace and goodness of God.

There will be appropriate opportunities for conversation and for communicating the understanding of marriage within the CRC. Certainly, should a same-sex couple inquire about the church’s position, leadership should invite the couple into a time of conversation that, while being invitational, does not conceal or obscure the denomination’s theological statements from 1973. Later in this section on pastoral guidance we address communicating the 1973 report truthfully and gracefully. What is to be avoided is the impulse to “make clear where the CRC stands” in a way that would undo or block the welcome that the church offers.

Questions of serving and leadership in various church ministries were raised in our survey and listening sessions. Most frequently, these questions surrounded day-to-day participation in the life of the church. May a spouse in a civil same-sex marriage serve as an usher? A nursery supervisor? May they volunteer in the church office? May they teach a Sunday school class or volunteer in a children’s ministry that their child attends? May they serve with their musical or creative gifts? The variety of

²³ “Queer” has been reclaimed as a positive umbrella term by many in the LGBTQ community.

potential situations is broad in scope. Also relevant are the church life context of each situation, the person's relationship with others in the church, and their discipleship journey. This committee wrestled with whether any productive advice can be given to the whole denomination on matters of service and leadership. We concluded that one size does not fit all and that it would be unwise to attempt to parse out advice for multiple potential situations in a report such as this. Decisions of this nature rightly belong to the discernment of the local church, where the persons involved are known and loved.

2. Belonging (membership)

Welcoming inevitably moves toward belonging, and the welcoming ministry of the church naturally moves toward enfolding people into the life of the church as members. It is here that the most obvious tensions arise between the CRC's 1973 report on homosexuality and the church's ministry with married same-sex couples and, if applicable, their families.

Enfolding is an interplay between two dimensions of the church's life: the organic and the formal. The organic dimension is the body life dimension—delightful, messy, full of surprises and peculiarities. It is the rich concoction of lives, relationships, and interactions that make up the body of Christ. It is people living in community, sharing life, struggling to overcome their own and the world's brokenness, offering their gifts in service to God, each other, and the world. It is the church being what it is called to be: family to one another, and salt and light for the kingdom as the body of Christ. It is the goodness and grace of God made tangible.

The formal dimension of the church touches on belonging through its rules of membership. The church creates structure and establishes order so that the organic life of the community can flourish. The church has rules of membership and establishes rights and responsibilities for people who are members. It identifies expectations for church members and follows procedures for discipline. These formal rules are a mix of biblical principles, cultural practice, and pragmatic wisdom. The formal is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The formal serves a vital function—to create a form and structure through which the body life of the church flourishes.

Contemporary ministry situations make it difficult for these two aspects of belonging to always mesh well. For many churches—those in urban areas, in the extended suburbs of larger cities, in college towns, or in areas of high transiency—the organic happens at a pace and with an intensity that the formal finds difficult to process. Relationships form quickly. Persons who are swiftly welcomed find themselves sharing in the ministry of the church before all the formalities of membership can be observed. This is one element of the tension.

A second element is especially apropos to same-sex couples. As welcoming initiates the process of enfolding, especially the forging of relationships, disappointment and frustration are felt when obstacles arise to continuing and completing the process of enfolding. This disappointment and frustration are felt not only by those seeking to become members but also by those within the church community who have reached out in welcome. Friendships and developing spiritual relationships do not

await membership papers. Spiritual gifts are offered and received before formalities catch up. Inasmuch as same-sex couples are welcomed and begin integration into the body life of the church, it will be a not-insignificant challenge from a formal membership perspective to say “thus far and no farther.” Below we address specific scenarios addressing questions of membership.

a. Transfers of membership

The first “belonging” situation to consider is a request from a CRC member in a same-sex marriage or relationship for a transfer of membership. It is not uncommon, for example, for young adults to leave for college and several years of work or graduate school before settling in to a new community and church. Meanwhile, their membership remains in the church in which they were raised, a church which they may be 5, 10, or even more years removed from regularly attending.

Church Order Article 59-d regulates the transfer of membership between Christian Reformed congregations:

Confessing members coming from other Christian Reformed congregations shall be admitted to confessing membership in the congregation upon the presentation of certificates of membership attesting to their soundness in doctrine and life.

A straightforward reading of Article 59 suggests that transfers of membership can occur only when the church that is sending the membership to another church can attest that the person is a member in good standing. Along with the request for transfer, however, comes information that the person requesting transfer is in a same-sex marriage or relationship. This situation could give rise, unfortunately, to the home church (or “sending” church), despite having little or no current relationship with the person requesting the transfer, denying the request and beginning a process of discipline from a distance and without a meaningful relationship.

It seems to us that the appropriate place for membership (whether “in good standing” or otherwise), while focusing on discipling and potential discipline, is where organic belonging is currently strongest, which may be influenced by a number of factors—length of time away from the previous church, connections to the new church, distance between churches, and so on. It makes little sense to have a distant church attempting to pursue discipleship and to exercise discipline.

A situation raised in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* points perhaps to a better way to respond pastorally to a situation of a member erring in doctrine or life but having stronger ties to the “receiving” church than the “sending” church. The *Commentary* explains:

The “sending” council does have other options. It could take appropriate disciplinary steps and continue to work with the [individual] as an “erring” member. It could even ask the council of the “receiving” church for assistance, especially when long distances are involved.

(*Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 359-60)

In such a scenario, the sending church could begin and follow up the process of discipline, relying on the receiving church to carry out the practical ministry of discipling in its place.

We wonder whether another option might also be appropriate and would be consistent with the intent of Article 59. In this option, the sending church includes a notation on the membership papers indicating that questions have arisen regarding the person's doctrine and life as well as the general nature of those questions. It then entrusts to the receiving church the decision whether to receive the membership, as well as the responsibility to follow through on discipling and potential discipline.

If this option is followed, there are some logical steps to be taken. First, the pastor or an elder should have a conversation with the person(s) requesting transfer. It should be an honest conversation that includes discussion of the potential implications of the same-sex relationship. In other words, the request for a membership transfer should be confirmed with knowledge of what the request entails.

Second, there should be communication between the two churches. Inquiry should be made as to whether the church presently holding membership is aware of the same-sex relationship and has formally responded to it (i.e., Is the person requesting transfer currently a member in good standing?).

Third, there should be an agreement as to which congregation is best situated to engage in the discipleship the situation warrants. If it is the original congregation, membership should remain there and pastoral care should be the responsibility of that congregation, with perhaps some assistance from the other church as appropriate. If it is the new congregation and its council agrees to it, the membership papers should be sent with appropriate notations and discipleship/discipline should become the responsibility of the receiving church.

Churches may be reluctant to accept a membership transfer in a difficult pastoral situation, one that perhaps seems likely to shift quickly from discipling to discipline. After conversation about the potential implications of transferring formal membership, some persons will choose to withdraw the request. They may decide to go elsewhere, or to live with the tensions of belonging organically but not formally. Regardless of the person's decision, the hope is that there is a depth of relationship with the person that will motivate a desire to continue in the discipling journey. That is most likely to happen within the community wherein the person has begun to find a spiritual home.

b. Requests for membership

From a formal membership perspective, a non-CRC same-sex married couple or an individual in a same-sex marriage requesting membership in a CRC church sets in motion a series of events that will seem straightforward to some but will seem, to others, fraught with uncertainties. Such a request will be one opportunity, although not the first, for conversation regarding the position of the CRC on same-sex sexual relations. The temptation for some church leaders will be to treat this as the end of the conversation, with the conclusion that membership is out of the question. If that is the case, why prolong the conversation?

We hope that the request for membership would either initiate or continue a conversation in which CRC members who are close to the

couple listen in concert with providing an explanation of the CRC position on same-sex relationships. There should be patience in answering questions. Biblical references should be apt and should be used without condemnation of same-sex oriented persons, in order to discern faithful living as citizens of God's kingdom. There will be a need to listen, and in some situations the couple may be well versed in Scripture and theology as it relates to their relationship. The conversation should avoid the poles of defensiveness and aggressiveness.

The logic of the Church Order on membership and the 1973 report on homosexuality is that a person in a same-sex sexual relationship is committing sin. To become a member, one must indicate their willingness to abide by the teaching as well as the admonition and discipline of the church. If one is engaged in sin, one must either repent (and commit to resisting sin) or be denied membership in good standing (we will address the situation of someone who is already a member of the church in the next section).

Following this logic, a person or couple in a same-sex sexually active relationship should not be accepted as members in good standing in the church. Most membership requests will end with the couple or individual either leaving the community abruptly or slowly disengaging from the church community. Others may live with an uncomfortable disconnect between organic and formal membership, existing in a form of limbo within the church community.

If a person or couple agree to accept the CRC's teaching on same-sex sexual relations and bring their lives into conformity, no obstacle prevents their acceptance as members. That is clear enough. What does "conformity" entail? The 1973 CRC position requires cessation of same-sex sexual relations. The current position does not require dissolution of a civil marriage; nor should the church be heard to require or encourage the dissolution of functioning families.

The foregoing, as we indicated, follows the logic of the Church Order and the 1973 position of the CRC on homosexuality. The realities of ministry are always complex. Some churches and pastors will encounter same-sex persons or couples (as well as other members in the congregation) who are committed Christians and versed both in Scripture and in contemporary theological discussions over same-sex relationships. Their affection for and devotion to Christ are not in question. They have reached a considered opinion that is at odds with CRC teaching. The 1973 denominational position, which constitutes pastoral advice on a pastoral matter, does not require agreement of opinion on same-sex relationships.²⁴ It does, however, bind sexual behavior.

Our pastoral guidance is bound by the mandate to our committee. A pastoral observation, however, to the church at large is that the complexities of ministry will keep membership issues a point of tension. A number of CRC churches are already navigating the challenges of

²⁴ As noted in section I, D of our report, Synod 1975 delineated the status of various synodical reports and pronouncements. The 1973 report on homosexuality constitutes pastoral advice on an ethical matter, and therefore provides rules governing the behavior of church members, but does not conclusively end discussion and debate on the issue. See also DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 165-71.

integrating same-sex couples into the life of the church and for them the logic of being denied membership is experienced as damaging rather than life-giving.

c. Children and baptism

Further questions arise for churches when a same-sex couple has children. The participation of the family in the church community may well begin through involvement in children's or youth programs.

The church as a covenant community has a responsibility to nurture the faith of children so that they know they are loved by God, that Christ has died for them, that the Holy Spirit lives in them, and that they have a purpose in God's kingdom. When a same-sex couple's household includes children, the children need the church as a community of grace for their own faith development, regardless of the relationship status of their parents. In this we follow the example of Jesus, who welcomed children and warned against placing obstacles in their path.

Scripture encourages and the CRC's teaching compels us to welcome the children of same-sex couples into its fellowship and programs. Again, a great deal of discernment and maturity is required. The church should not hide its views regarding marriage and appropriate sexual relations, but it shouldn't unnecessarily emphasize them in a way that causes public awkwardness or shame, especially for children. The church should take special care not to be disruptive or dismissive of family relationships or to undercut parental authority or legitimacy.

If children are of age to make profession of faith, their request for membership and baptism can be treated in distinction from the request of the parents. This will be dependent on the understanding and maturity of the child.

May a church baptize the infants and young children of a same-sex married couple? The Church Order states that "the covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism" (Church Order Art. 56). In baptism, God makes covenant promises to that child. The profession of faith and membership in good standing of at least one parent are necessary for pledging covenantal promises to raise the child to know God's love for the child in Christ.

The CRC has rarely varied from the position that a parent is the appropriate covenantal member to make promises on behalf of the child. According to the Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary, in very rare instances, extended family members who function in loco parentis have brought the child for baptism.²⁵ Churches and leaders should minister creatively but cautiously.

d. Communion

Pastors and other church leaders have requested guidance on questions such as participation in communion. Participation in the Lord's Supper is one of the principal acts of belonging within a congregation. Partaking of the body and blood of Christ is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. While communion is usually considered as it relates to membership in a church, in many churches communion within

²⁵ Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 311-13.

public worship connects a community's members with visitors and new arrivals who are welcomed as part of the larger Christian communion.

Within the CRC, the question of participation in the sacrament is complicated by a diversity of practice with respect to communion. Some congregations still require nonmembers to request permission and receive consistory approval before being welcomed to the table. Emphasis is upon protecting the honor of the table and ensuring that only professing members participate. Visitors and persons who are not yet members are screened before permission is granted. Such CRC churches should continue their practice of welcoming all who are members in good standing of a Christian church to join the table. Unless and until someone is placed under formal discipline and access to the sacraments is denied, the table should remain open.

For many CRC churches, access to the table is moderated in the communion liturgy itself through the three-fold requirements of the invitation.²⁶ The honor of the table is protected in the first instance by God's own self, and the danger of undiscerning participation falls on the person responding to the invitation's expectations. Those who come to the table bear the responsibility of discerning participation.

Churches who follow this practice for communion should remain consistent in approach. People new to the congregation and visitors should be welcomed according to practice. Members in good standing should be welcomed to the table. The church's communion practice for those who have entered same-sex marriage relationships should be no different than for any others whose conduct is deemed contrary to biblical teaching.

Restricting access to the sacraments is a fearsome thing. It is not to be done hastily or lightly. Communion is the church's fundamental expression of oneness in Christ—one bread, one cup, one body. Only with the greatest reluctance and with the greatest procedural safeguards should the church take the step of forbidding access to the sacraments as means of grace. The Lord's Supper and its meaning may well provide an opportunity for conversation with those new to the church, including those in a same-sex marriage, to speak of the relationship between sin, grace, and a life of gratitude.

3. Discipling

The words *discipling* and *discipline* derive from the same root but carry different connotations. In common parlance, a disciple is one who follows a leader; discipline is understood as a penalty imposed in an attempt to bring an offender back in line.

Within the church, *discipling* is an interactive practice that holds us in relationship with Christ, our teacher. The church defines *discipline* positively and restoratively—consisting of measures intended to restore a person to full membership. It is difficult, however, for the term *discipline* to shake its association with a form of punishment, especially when traditional measures such as withholding the sacraments or excommunication are the most public forms of discipline.

²⁶ (1) Awareness of sin and the need of God's grace, (2) trusting in Jesus as the source of salvation, and (3) commitment to living obedient lives in gratitude to God.

So we have chosen the term *discipling*, knowing that discipling may in time and circumstance include discipline. We do so because we encourage the church to think first and foremost of our ongoing relationship with Christ. To jump prematurely to the question “Will the church formally discipline church members who are in same-sex marriages?” is to short-circuit the relationship between Christ and his disciples.

We have intentionally chosen the word *discipling* because we wish to emphasize that a church member who contemplates or pursues marriage in a same-sex marriage does so as a disciple of Christ—a fellow disciple. Pastors and church leaders should understand the situation in terms of discipleship. We are all disciples of Christ—in a discipleship process together pursuing faithfulness to Christ, discerning where God is calling us, and growing in maturity of life and faith.

For a same-sex oriented person who is considering marriage, or who has married, the church may be tempted to move quickly to discipline and a measure of finality. In many situations, the threat or possibility of discipline will break the relationship between the church and the same-sex oriented person or couple. Ending along with that will be the possibility of further discipleship. We encourage pastors and church leaders to show patience and to allow discipling to run its course. A healthy church should not seek to avoid difficult situations by dismissing them.

The process of mutual discipling begins with standing in relationship and with listening to each other. In most cases, a person’s decision to contemplate or to enter into a same-sex marriage is not made casually or lightly. It follows years of questioning, introspection, and prayer. The spiritual aspects of the decision have been treated with deliberateness. The church and its leaders should treat those concerned and shape the church’s response with patience, thoughtfulness, and prayer. The church should not rush to judgment on vital spiritual matters. Churches and members should be given time and space to address these matters.

Ministers and church leaders have a pastoral responsibility to speak with married same-sex couples or persons contemplating same-sex marriage about the CRC’s teaching on sex and marriage. There should be honesty and openness about the personal as well as public ramifications of different courses of action.

Should the person or couple continue in a sexual relationship, Church Order Article 81 (in conjunction with the 1973 report’s designation of all same-sex sexual relations as sinful) lays out a logic of formal discipline. The initiation of formal discipline is a discretionary matter that is not frequently invoked among our congregations today. It should always be a last resort after communication and mutual reflection have failed. It is, however, the appointed conclusion of the CRC’s reading of Scripture and its understanding of Church Order.

We call the church’s attention to a matter that troubles us as a committee. The formal process of discipline leading to excommunication is rarely exercised in our churches today. Perhaps the church will find that its teaching and discipling on same-sex sexual relations will result in either repentance or same-sex persons/couples leaving the CRC without formal discipline. It is deeply disturbing that the one category of sin that the church seems to affirm in its intention to discipline to the point of

excommunication is same-sex sexual relations. We run the risk of living into the stereotype that the world has of Christians.

We also note that differences in the pace and the certainty with which discipling morphs into formal discipline in the situation of same-sex marriage are likely to cause disagreement within the denomination. Some CRC churches are likely to move quickly. Others will move in a slower fashion. Still others will make accommodations in cases of conscience or acknowledgment of a person or couple's situation. The presence of a person's or couple's children may change the dynamics. These are descriptions of how churches are likely to act, not how they should act. We have given our pastoral guidance above in line with our mandate from synod. We do, however, encourage the churches at large to show forbearance in scrutinizing and questioning the process of discipling as carried out in other congregations.

C. *Facing culture and the future*

1. Supporting Christian marriage and the family

The legal acceptance of same-sex marriage in the United States and Canada does not, as we argued earlier, preclude the CRC from holding its own view of marriage and conducting its programs and ministries in consistency with that view.

In an earlier example, we mentioned that some churches and classes have sponsored seminars or conferences on marriage, making them available to all interested persons. There is much to commend about sharing the wisdom of the Christian tradition freely. The church should be intentional in shaping a message of encouragement and openness. Church leaders should think through how they will respond graciously and nonconfrontationally if same-sex couples attend. Conference or seminar leaders should state the church's understanding of marriage clearly but simply and avoid a hostile or aggressive style. They should avoid argument and encourage open conversation.

Similarly, sermons and the teaching ministry of the church that touch on marriage should focus on the divine intentions and blessings that undergird marriage. Undue disparagement of same-sex marriage or using the legalization of same-sex marriage as a prop to create alarm over threats to traditional Christian marriage is unbecoming to the gospel and counterproductive with many people.

There is also a temptation within parts of the Christian community to argue for the absolute superiority of the traditional Christian family and to warn against the damage that will ensue for families headed by same-sex couples. We suggest that this is neither honest nor beneficial. In recent years, courts in the United States have heard extensive arguments over the question whether children raised in families headed by opposite-sex parents fare better than children raised by same-sex couples.²⁷ Whatever differences there may be are too subtle to be statistically relevant. The church will not fare well in the long run if it overstates differences in outcome.

²⁷ For example, the ruling of Judge Bernard Friedman in *DeBoer v. Snyder*, www.freedomtomarry.org/page/-/files/pdfs/MichiganRuling.pdf.

Our pastoral guidance is that the church's gospel ministry is best served by offering the wisdom of the Christian community in support of marriage and of loving, stable family life.

2. Cultural contexts

The committee spoke with a spectrum of ethnicities and cultures across the CRC, including majority and minority communities. Conversations focused on the anticipated response within specific ethnic communities to same-sex marriage. The committee found these meetings instructive.

With due regard for the dangers of generalization, ethnic and multi-ethnic communities support the CRC's 1973 position on homosexuality. Overall, there was only mild concern regarding society's move toward approval of civil same-sex marriage, with uncertainty as to the effect of same-sex marriage on churches and leaders. There was concern, on the other hand, over same-sex marriage and the church. Changes to the CRC's position on homosexuality would cause varying degrees of tension. In the case of immigrant minority persons, first-generation immigrants and those who have spent less time in North America were more likely to consider homosexuality in a wholly negative light. Same-sex oriented persons who are also ethnic minority may need significant pastoral support and enfolding.

3. Young adults and the coming generations

In the opening paragraphs to this report, we mentioned the shift in public opinion regarding same-sex relationships, with opposition to same-sex marriage now a minority position within North America. Nowhere is this shift more evident than among young adults, including Christian young adults and, among them, those who have grown up within the CRC. In a May 2015 poll by the Pew Research Center, 73 percent of Millennials (born after 1980) support same-sex marriage.²⁸ In our own survey, 52 percent of the CRC-affiliated students who responded said they support civil same-sex marriage, and 41 percent believe same-sex marriage should be allowed in the church.

The reasons for this are many, but chief among them is that same-sex oriented persons and same-sex couples are a visible and accepted part of social networks and the lived experience of young adults. They have thought through matters of sexuality with varying degrees of intentionality. Their experiences and opinions often show a critical disconnect with the conclusions of the 1973 report and with its biblical interpretation. In their daily lives they make no distinctions between same-sex oriented and opposite-sex oriented persons. Many do not understand why that distinction should matter in the church.

The pastoral guidance that we offer in this regard is of a cautionary sort and, we surmise, deeply unsatisfying in many ways. Later in this report we will discuss truthful and gracious ways to present the conclusions of the 1973 and 2002 reports. There are limits to what can be done in this regard. At the least, the church ignores the disconnect between young adults and the position of the CRC on homosexuality at its peril. Rather than avoid discussion of same-sex marriage and homosexuality, the CRC

²⁸ www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/26/same-sex-marriage. Accessed August 8, 2015.

will need to undertake it thoughtfully in a way that goes beyond mere taking notice, instead incorporating and responding to the reflections and experiences of the rising generation, as well as continuing to explore the church's understanding of Scripture and of living faithfully in accordance with it.

4. Same-sex oriented persons

Each same-sex oriented Christian is a unique individual with their own journey. This principle was articulated in the 2002 report and remains true today:

Ministry, especially pastoral care, must be specific to each person. Prejudgment is prejudice. Making pastoral assumptions before meeting a person and hearing her or his story is not only poor pastoral care; it also violates an officebearer's subscription to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 43), which reminds us not to "judge anyone unheard."²⁹

Much has changed since the CRC's last report on homosexuality in 2002, and both the cultural conversation regarding same-sex relationships and the conversation within the Christian community have developed and have become more accessible in the past ten years. Same-sex oriented Christians have invested significant energy and effort exploring these resources. They are active in discerning how they will integrate their faith and their sexuality.

The committee had opportunity to speak with same-sex oriented persons in the CRC as well as leaders experienced in ministry with same-sex oriented persons. A significant number of respondents to the committee's survey (326 persons) self-identified as other than heterosexual or not sure. For some, the availability of civil same-sex marriage presents them with a decision not afforded earlier generations. This societal change is accompanied by an increasing number of voices within the wider Christian church wondering whether committed same-sex relationships can be a part of a Christian's faith journey.

The committee received this response from a CRC member who read a draft of this report. She noted that the report prompted

... [a] deep sadness [that] came from the fact that once again this report, much like the 1973 and 2002 reports, relegates LGBT persons to the sidelines of the conversation. The very people whose lives the report seeks to provide comment on are given no voice here. There is a great deal of talk about LGBT people and how pastors and churches should manage such people, but no chance to hear directly the voices of LGBT people within this conversation. Throughout the report there is still a distancing of LGBT people as "those people." There is never a sense that they are "our people" [whom] we love deeply.

This feeling of "othering" and "distancing" is most evident to me in that, in the report, there is great deal of talk about sex within same-sex marriage but very little talk about love. Is this how heterosexual people would talk about their own opposite-sex marriages? Whether or not the committee agrees with same-sex marriage, it seems important to grant a bit more dignity to same-sex oriented members of the CRC.

²⁹ *Agenda for Synod 2002*, p. 317.

The committee has been aware of this regrettable consequence in addressing its mandate but has found this consequence unavoidable in following the teaching of the 1973 report.

In our conversations with same-sex oriented persons in the CRC, a recurring theme has been that same-sex oriented Christians are sensitive to assumptions made by the church and its leaders. More importantly, they are sensitive to the church's desire, both perceived and real, not to talk about homosexuality and related matters such as same-sex marriage. Same-sex oriented respondents to the survey were the demographic most insistent that the church must continue to talk about homosexuality and ministry with sexual minorities.

5. Chaplaincy ministries

Approximately one in ten CRC ministers is a chaplain. Chaplains represent the presence of Christ and the gospel ministry in nonecclesiastical settings: the military, hospitals, hospices, jails and prisons, counseling offices, universities, and workplaces. For chaplains, the institutional settings where they serve are analogous to their "congregations." Likewise, people who work in these places may consider the chaplain to be their pastor. Especially for people who have no religious affiliation or are not part of a faith community, the chaplain may be the only pastor in their lives and the one they turn to for important life events such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals. Chaplains, as ordained ministers, are supervised in their faith and life by a church council.

Military chaplains are in a unique situation. Supervised by and accountable to both the federal government and the church, they must abide by federal nondiscrimination laws, which include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories. Currently in the U.S. and Canada, if a chaplain's endorsing faith group does not allow for same-sex marriage, the chaplain is allowed to refuse to perform a same-sex wedding when asked to do so. If the endorsing faith group allows for same-sex marriage, however, the chaplain must perform the wedding of a same-sex military personnel couple who request it, even if doing so violates the chaplain's conscience.

Since the CRC does not permit religious same-sex marriage, military chaplains will opt out of performing a same-sex wedding. Nonmilitary chaplains, on the other hand, may face a pastoral dilemma, since they are accountable to their workplace policies as well as their local CRC council. If a workplace employee asks the chaplain to perform her or his same-sex wedding, it is important for the chaplain to consult with the chaplain's direct supervisor in the workplace and the council of the church that holds the chaplain's ministerial credentials.

Such a request may present the chaplain with a pastoral challenge, given that the way the chaplain responds will affect the spiritual care relationship with the employee. It may be that the chaplain can affirm the employee, support the Christlike qualities of the relationship, and decline the request to perform the wedding. The chaplain may also refer the employee to another clergyperson who is able to respond to this request without risking her or his ministerial credentials. The goal of such conversations becomes maintaining a caring, supportive, spiritual relationship

while also acknowledging the pastor's own boundaries in the area of same-sex marriage.

The CRC should be sensitive to the potential conflict that might arise for a chaplain whose work is overseen by a CRC council as well as by a governmental or other employer. If potential officiating at a same-sex ceremony is required as a condition of employment, is the chaplain's only option to resign (if that is even possible)? Or may the chaplain lodge his or her objection and officiate in an official capacity (such as a judge or justice of the peace might)? While we would hope that such cases not arise, we would also hope that the supervising church council would grant some leeway within Church Order Article 69 in such an exceptional circumstance.

6. Communicating the 1973 position with grace and truth

Synod requested that the committee explore how the denominational position on same-sex orientation and behavior can be communicated graciously and truthfully in the current cultural situation.

This is a significant challenge. In the current cultural climate even voices of caution and hesitation regarding same-sex relationships may well be heard as bigoted or biased. While the church's witness should never be muted, learning to speak when necessary and in measured tones is the better part of wisdom. We consider three situations in which the 1973 synodical report is likely to be represented.

a. To individuals, especially same-sex oriented persons

Many pastors have faced or will face a situation in which an individual or a couple (same-sex or opposite-sex oriented) inquires about the stance of the CRC. This may be a difficult conversation to navigate well. One minister writes, for example:

We have a member who encourages her daughter and her partner of 17+ years to come to church. Their question is, "What is the stance of the church?" To tell them what the official position is implies a judgment against them whether we intend it or not. The irony in this is their relationship is more stable, loving, and caring than many who serve as leaders of this church.

(Pastor, survey respondent)

Gracious and truthful communication involves attention to both the context and the content of the communication. Regarding context, we suggest the following for pastors and church leaders:

- Familiarize yourself with the current resources available to same-sex oriented Christians committed to a traditionally believing view of marriage.³⁰
- Offer to meet for prayer and study. Agree together to read widely, from a variety of interpretive perspectives for the purposes of discussion and exploration.
- Explore together opportunities for this individual or couple to connect with others sharing a similar journey—either online or in person.

³⁰ See Appendix B.

- Encourage this individual or couple to connect with a spiritual director or mentor (the pastor, someone else in the church or broader Christian community) who can support them in building sustainable spiritual practices.

In terms of content, care should be taken to respect the following:

- Become more than just familiar with the 1973 synodical report. Understand the Reformed contours of its thought and its anchoring in a positive vision of God’s creation.
- Use scriptural texts appropriately. Emphasis should be on the scriptural witness to creation and marriage.
- Avoid emphasis on Hebrew terms of taboo, which are translated sometimes as “abomination” or “detestable.” These terms need to be understood in the larger theological context of the Old Testament, and read in ways that are consistent with a Reformed interpretation of the entirety of Old Testament law in its various forms. Too often, these terms have been used to incite a sense of shame and self-loathing that is inconsistent with the intent of the 1973 and 2002 reports and can be spiritually and emotionally destructive.
- Avoid misuse of texts that apply only tangentially, if at all. The 1973 report provides exegesis of several commonly used texts, noting that each had a context not directly speaking to committed same-sex relationships. When texts are situated within sexual violence, idolatry, power imbalance, and excessive lust, it is important to take such contexts into consideration. Phrases such as “God gave them over . . .” or “will not inherit the kingdom of God” can do great harm when insensitively applied to all same-sex oriented persons. Questions of causation are complex. Declarations about such matters ought not be made on the basis of simplistic application of a biblical text.
- Honor the person’s responsibility in clarifying their convictions and beliefs. Focus on encouraging their commitment to Jesus Christ and cultivating a vibrant spiritual life.
- Entrust this person to the Holy Spirit and resist using shame or fear as motivators to embrace celibacy.

b. In church contexts

In many congregations, aversion to discussing sexual orientation or same-sex marriage leads to an unhealthy silence. Church members and leaders are not always clear about what synod actually recommended in 1973 and 2002, nor certain as to how to bridge the gulf between that advice and the current context. The 1973 report distinguished between same-sex orientation as symptomatic of a disordered creation but not sinful in and of itself, and same-sex sexual behavior, which is considered sinful.

In the survey, we found that 80 percent of CRC ministers polled, 75 percent of CRC students polled, and 57 percent of respondents in the survey’s church member sample personally hold that same-sex attraction is not sinful, as synod advised in 1973. However, a substantial minority of respondents maintain that simply experiencing attraction to the same sex is sinful. In contradiction to the

denomination's position, 14 percent of CRC ministers—100 of the 700 respondents—hold that “being attracted to a member of the same sex is sinful, even if it is never acted upon.” Thirty-one percent of respondents in the church member sample and 17 percent of CRC students similarly believe same-sex attraction itself to be sinful.

Further, 9 percent of ministers polled say that gay Christians should “repent of choosing to be gay,” along with 12 percent of the church member sample respondents and 8 percent of CRC students responding. This belief is also not supported by the synodical reports from 1973 and 2002.

We recommend churches and ministers take note of the following when considering how to communicate the teachings of the 1973 report in the church setting:

- Do not assume everyone is heterosexual in the church, even if you are not aware of anyone who is same-sex oriented. Always speak as if same-sex oriented persons and their loved ones are present. Create a climate in which families will not reject their gay children and where same-sex oriented persons can be honest about all aspects of their personhood.
- Speak with respect and hold others to the same standard.
- Leaders must set the tone and give permission for others to have a generous dialogue that does not jump to polarized extremes.
- Acknowledge the reality that same-sex oriented people are loved by God and that same-sex orientation is not chosen or sinful.
- Be humble: acknowledge that the church and Christians have often contributed to stigmatization of gay people and have tried to keep them from gaining basic rights.
- Make clear that the gospel calls all people to chastity.
- Take intentional steps as a congregation to enfold single members in the day to day life of families, in service, in ministry, and in leadership. This may mean some families and singles living in intentional community together. Only if our churches can become a more supportive community for single people of all kinds will lifelong celibacy be a more viable vocation for same-sex oriented people.
- Serve the local LGBT community. Support local antibullying initiatives. Volunteer at youth homeless shelters or with a suicide crisis hotline. Above all, listen. Initiatives like this will do more than preaching to convey the love of God with grace and truth to the LGBT community.

c. In the public arena

When speaking to persons or institutions outside the CRC, care should be taken to represent the CRC's position accurately and thoughtfully. This involves explanation of both the “what” and the “why” of this position. As Richard Mouw notes in his book *Uncommon Decency*:

The whole point of the biblical perspective is to promote a sexuality that is kind and reverent. So it is important that we present the biblical viewpoint kindly and reverently to those with whom we disagree about sexual standards. Not to do so is to undermine our own message.

Sexual civility is an important way of living out our commitment to the gospel.³¹

There may be skepticism about the practicality of expectations for those who are same-sex oriented. Reference can be made to same-sex oriented Christians who align their lives with this position and who publicly discuss the possibilities as well as the challenges of living in that alignment.

It would also be wise to have the denominational office, through its media representatives, prepare statements and explanatory materials that present the CRC's position in the most gracious and truthful light possible.

In our listening sessions, we were troubled by the repeated occurrence of certain terms. Use of these is less than truthful, and certainly not gracious. These terms were, in most cases, being used by pastors and church leaders. Two terms that should be avoided are

- *Gay lifestyle*—this term is sometimes used to explain one's opposition to *all* same-sex relationships. Saying "I'm opposed to the gay lifestyle" evokes stereotypes of gay bars, promiscuous behavior, surreptitious rendezvous, and a flagrant counterculture of gay socialization—and then applies this stereotype to all same-sex oriented relationships. There is no such thing as "the gay lifestyle," just as there is no "heterosexual lifestyle." There are simply ways people live. It is highly offensive to same-sex oriented persons when opposition to "the gay lifestyle" is invoked.
- *Homosexual/gay agenda*—this term is problematic as well and should be avoided by those in the Christian church. It uses negative associations with the word *agenda* to explain changes within society and to insinuate a coordinated conspiracy to improperly advance the interests of one group over against another. Most social changes are of complex origin. Christians would do best to avoid the language of insinuation and conspiracy. Instead we should speak in terms that resonate with the Christian faith's language of justice, fairness, and flourishing.

7. Observations on the 1973 and 2002 reports and the CRC

Synod 2013, in establishing the mandate for this committee, noted that the 1973 report on homosexuality had "served the church well" in the intervening four decades. In so noting, synod limited the scope of this committee's work to applying the biblical and theological conclusions of 1973. We were not to re-examine the biblical basis of the 1973 report or its theological or ethical conclusions.

We have honored the mandate of synod in our work. We would be remiss, however, if we failed to call attention to several aspects of the 1973 report that require the attention of the church. These are matters that now compromise the ability of the 1973 report to continue to serve the church well. These observations arise from the deliberations of the committee but were also heard regularly in our survey and in our listening sessions with classes and colleagues in specialized ministries.

³¹ Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Press, rev. 2010), p. 94.

a. Language and terminology

It is to be expected that language will shift over a forty-year span. Some of the language issues encountered in the 1973 report, however, make it difficult to recommend it as a resource for the church. Particularly telling was the reluctance among pastors and others who work with young adults to refer those seeking information, pastoral care, or instruction to the 1973 report in response to their inquiries.

Three brief examples should suffice. First, the term *homosexuality* figures prominently, especially in the 1973 report. The term has never gained common usage in society or the church. Its prominent use in the 1973 report is confusing and misleading. Use of *-ism* implies some sort of identifiable movement or cultural force. As such, it contains resonances with terms such as *homosexual agenda* or *gay lifestyle*, terms that have been justifiably identified as inappropriate and harmful within the conversation. Continued use of the term *homosexuality* does not represent the CRC well in this discussion.

Second, the phrases *the problem of homosexuality* or *the problem of the homosexual* are used over forty times in the two reports. To young adults seeking to understand their sexual orientation and its implications for their lives, the repetitive use of the term *problem* increases the likelihood that they will internalize that designation. In other words, it is not a problem “out there,” but they themselves are “a problem.”

Third, the terms acceptable for use to refer to same-sex oriented persons have changed. Terms such as *gay* and *homosexual* carry different connotations today, or we think about the connotations differently than we did forty years ago. The CRC should be sensitive to these language issues. If the 1973 and 2002 reports are to continue, as Synod 2013 said, “to serve the church well,” they need to be revised so that their potential for use remains.

b. Conversion/reparative therapy (sexual orientation change efforts)

Both the 1973 and 2002 reports suggest that the first strategy for dealing with same-sex attraction is to attempt to change orientation. In 1973, not much was known about therapies or strategies for changing one’s sexual attraction. In 2002, there was appreciation that the causes of same-sex attraction were varied and that assessing the potential for change of orientation was made difficult by uncertain research protocols, by lack of clarity over what constituted a successful “change of orientation,” and recognition that certain forms of therapy could do significant psychological and spiritual harm to those receiving them.

Since 2002, the understanding of so-called conversion therapy has changed significantly in light of research and experience. In 2013, Exodus International, the most prominent umbrella organization for ex-gay ministries in North America, officially ended its ministry after acknowledging the ineffectiveness of conversion efforts. Its leaders issued an apology for the harm done by reparative measures.

Since then, the potential harms of reparative or conversion therapy have been highlighted with a movement to ban the practice for minors. In the U.S., four jurisdictions have outlawed conversion therapy for minors (California, New Jersey, Oregon, and the District of Columbia). In Canada, Manitoba and Ontario ban conversion therapy for minors.

We deemed this aspect of the discussion to be beyond the mandate of the committee. We do, however, think that the church has an obligation to give responsible and realistic pastoral advice to those of same-sex orientation. The 2002 report conveyed cautions with regard to the efficacy of conversion therapy. Data and experience since then suggest that these cautions should be amplified and great care taken with any recommendations for therapy and treatments regarding sexual orientation change, especially with minors. While a few persons find the concept of orientation change fits their own experience, in many cases the change has been from promiscuity to chastity or from same-sex relationships to a mixed orientation marriage,³² rather than a change in the direction of a person's sexual attractions. The reality of bisexuality may also account for some of these testimonies. An updated position on conversion therapy is very much needed as an accompaniment to any revision of the 1973 and 2002 reports.

VII. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Dr. Rolf Bouma, chair, and Ms. Julia Smith, reporter, when the majority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage is considered.
- B. That synod receive the accompanying report for information and recommend it for consideration to churches, pastors, and church leaders and members for background understanding and to promote informed discussion on the matter of civil same-sex marriage.
- C. That synod adopt the pastoral guidance contained in section VI of this report as its counsel to churches, pastors, church leaders, and members for addressing the ramifications of civil same-sex marriage as it affects the church and its members.
- D. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.
- E. That synod dismiss the committee.

Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance
re Same-sex Marriage

Dan Borst
Rolf T. Bouma, chair
Jessica Driesenga*
Wendy VanderWal-Gritter
John M. Rottman*
Julia Smith, reporter
Ryan Struyk
Karl J. Van Harn
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*Two members of the committee submitted a minority report regarding specific sections of the majority report.

³² A mixed orientation marriage describes a marriage between a man and a woman in which one or both of the spouses experiences same-sex attraction.

Appendix A Summary of Survey Findings

A. *Rationale*

As the committee's mandate notes, public opinion on same-sex relationships is shifting both outside and within the church. In order to give useful guidance and clarification to the churches on matters raised by same-sex marriage, the committee commissioned a survey as a cost-effective way to gauge the current situation in our congregations.

Our intention in conducting this survey was not to sway opinion or influence future deliberations in the denomination. Rather, as a shepherding committee, we sought by this means to gather the scope of questions, concerns, and experiences present within our community. On a topic that touches strong convictions, fears, and pain, the anonymity of an online survey allows people to share their views honestly without repercussions. While not exhaustive of the survey data, this summary gives an overview of findings that can increase the denomination's self-understanding at this time.

As noted in our report, the survey was not the committee's only avenue of engagement with the churches. The committee also convened several listening sessions with classes and other groups for more in-depth listening around the topic of same-sex marriage.

B. *Methodology*

The survey was conducted from March 26 to June 30, 2014, by the Calvin College Center for Social Research (CSR). The full survey instrument is available from the committee by request or online at www.calvin.edu/go/ssm-survey-preview. Groups invited to participate in the survey are described below.³³

1. **Ministers** (n = 700). CSR emailed a unique link to the questionnaire to all 1,276 currently serving ordained ministers in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC); 700 ministers (55%) responded to the survey.
2. **CRC Students** (n = 587). The committee considered it important to hear the hopes and concerns of younger members of the denomination (the college-age population) and from those preparing to enter the ministry. To this end, CSR sent an email with a unique link to the questionnaire to 1,931 students of CRC-affiliated colleges and seminaries who self-identified at enrollment as CRC members or attenders. The response rate for students was 30% (587 students).
3. **Church Member Sample** (n = 363). Since it is not logistically feasible to survey congregants of all CRC churches, CSR devised a method of hearing from a randomly selected sample of church members. Eighty randomly selected CRC congregations were invited to participate in the study; 23 of the 80 agreed to participate. Each participating congregation provided 40 names and email addresses randomly selected from their church directory, such that a total of 920 congregants were invited to take the survey. Of this group, 363 individuals (39%) completed the survey.

³³ All statements have been tested for statistical significance at the 95% confidence level. However, since most of our data is population-based rather than random sampling, tests of statistical significance are generally not meaningful.

4. **Public Sample** (n = 2,547). In addition to the samples above, 2,547 persons affiliated with the denomination took the survey through a link made available through *The Banner* and the CRC website. While these public sample responses are not representative of the denomination and are only mentioned infrequently in this report, the high response rate and the length of comments submitted by this group indicate the importance of the topic and the desire that many have to share their thoughts and concerns.

A total of 226 survey respondents identified as other than heterosexual—179 of these were respondents in the public sample; 16 were CRC ministers. A further 100 respondents including 21 ministers checked “other” or “not sure” on the sexual orientation question. All survey participants were over the age of 18, and all are current or former regular attenders of a CRC congregation.

The committee wishes to thank all those who participated in the survey for their valuable input and the Center for Social Research for their professional assistance in this project.

C. *Limitations*

The committee cautions the reader to use these survey results lightly and prudently. The pastor and student samples were samples of convenience rather than random samples, and the church member sample, while selected through a random process, is not to be considered representative of all CRC members/attenders. In order to guard against over-interpretation of data from this latter group, we use phrases such as “respondents in this survey’s church member sample” instead of “church members.” Despite these limitations, the committee offers this data as helpful for gaining a broad overview of current (Spring 2014) attitudes to homosexuality and same-sex marriage in our denomination.

D. *Results*

Note: The use of terms below—LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual), same-sex attracted, gay, lesbian, etc.—follows the language used in the relevant survey question.

1. **Timeliness of the Discussion**

There was broad agreement that discussion of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is needed in the denomination at this time:

- 80% of the ministers’ sample agreed.
- 90% of the student sample agreed.
- 76% of this survey’s church member sample agreed.

Younger ministers are more likely to agree: 85% of those younger than 45 say discussion is necessary now, compared with 77% of those older than 45.

One hundred percent of respondents from this survey’s church member sample and student sample who identified as nonheterosexual said discussion is necessary at this time, as did all but two of the nonstraight CRC minister respondents. An overwhelming 173 of the 179 nonstraight

identified respondents in the public sample said that discussion is needed at this time.

2. Knowing Same-Sex Oriented Persons

2.1 Do you personally know anyone in your family or friend circle who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Yes:

- 83% of CRC ministers have an LGB friend or family member, including
 - 82% of male ministers, 97% of female ministers.
 - 89% of ministers younger than 35, 82% of those 35 and over.
 - 86% of White ministers.
 - 41% of Asian/Pacific Islander ministers (other ethnicities range from 74 to 100%).
- 71% of CRC student respondents have an LGB friend or family member.
- 69% of this survey's church member sample have an LGB friend or family member,
 - 56% percent of those with less than a 3-year college degree.
 - 76% of those with a 3-year college degree or higher.
- 84% of respondents in the public sample have an LGB friend or family member.

2.2. How many people in your congregation have disclosed (to you or generally) that they are attracted to members of the same sex?

- 49% of ministers know at least one congregant who has come out.
 - 58% of Canadian ministers know at least one congregant who has come out.
 - 46% of U.S. ministers know at least one congregant who has come out.
- 16% of ministers know three or more congregants who have come out.
- 27% of the CRC student sample know at least one congregant who has come out.
- 24% of this survey's church member sample know at least one congregant who has come out.
- 41% of respondents in the public sample know at least one congregant who has come out.

Comparing these results to the number who know someone in their family or friend circle, it would seem that either there are fewer LGB-identified people in our churches than in our family and friend circles, or that LGB people are less comfortable sharing that part of their lives with others in the church setting.

3. Same-Sex Weddings

At the time of the survey, the majority of respondents had not been invited to attend a same-sex wedding or commitment ceremony. When the survey opened on March 26, 2014, same-sex marriage was legal in Canada, in 15 U.S. states, and in the District of Columbia. By the time the survey closed on June 30, 2014, five additional U.S. states had passed same-sex marriage laws, though these were under appeal in two states.³⁴

³⁴ See <http://graphics.latimes.com/usmap-gay-marriage-chronology/>.

3.1 Have you ever been invited to a same-sex commitment ceremony or wedding?

Yes:

- 12% of the ministers' sample had been invited—the same in Canada and the U.S. (5% attended).
- 3% of the student sample had been invited (2% attended).
- 9% of this survey's church member sample had been invited (7% attended).
 - 20% of Canadian residents in this survey's church member sample (15% attended).
 - 5% of U.S. residents in this survey's church member sample (3% attended).

3.2 If invited, would you attend a same-sex commitment ceremony or wedding?

- Ministers: 15% yes; 39% under some circumstances; 12% not sure; 33% no.
- Students: 34% yes; 26% under some circumstances; 17% not sure; 24% no.
 - 73% of Canadian students would attend, at least in some circumstances; 6% would not attend.
 - 58% of U.S. students would attend, at least in some circumstances; 25% would not attend.
- This survey's church member sample: 18% yes; 27% under some circumstances; 15% not sure; 40% no.
- In this survey's church member sample, Canadians and those (in both Canada and the U.S.) with college degrees are more likely to say they would attend a same-sex wedding.

3.3 Should church members/attenders be free to attend same-sex ceremonies or weddings?

- Ministers: 46% yes; 36% it depends on the circumstances; 13% no.
- Students: 59% yes; 19% it depends on the circumstances; 11% no.
- This survey's church member sample: 47% yes; 24% it depends on the circumstances; 17% no.

3.4 Should pastors be free to attend same-sex ceremonies or weddings?

- Ministers: 41% yes; 32% it depends on the circumstances; 21% no.
- Students: 53% yes; 19% it depends on the circumstances; 16% no.
- This survey's church member sample: 40% yes; 22% it depends on the circumstances; 27% no.

3.5 Same-sex Marriage in Civil Society

Christian Reformed ministers were divided on whether civil society should allow same-sex marriage (the survey predates the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in June 2015):

- 45% of ministers say same-sex marriage should be allowed in civil society; 40% say Christians should oppose it. Among pastors, opposition to civil same-sex marriage was much stronger among men than women, among Americans than Canadians, and among Asian ministers.
- 52% of CRC students say same-sex marriage should be allowed in civil society; 33% say Christians should oppose it.

- Among this survey's church member sample, 39% say same-sex marriage should be allowed in civil society; 49% say Christians should oppose it.

3.6 Same-sex marriage should be allowed in the church (i.e., religious same-sex marriage)

- Ministers: 14%
- Students: 31%
- This survey's church member sample: 21%

Twelve to 15% of respondents from these three groups said that none of the three options listed³⁵ matched their position. This may indicate that many have not yet formed a clear opinion about religious same-sex marriage.

4. Engagement and Education

Eighty-eight percent of ministers have studied the Bible to find answers to questions about same-sex sexuality, and 75% have used books or other resources to learn more about homosexuality. Thirty-eight percent of ministers have attended a class, workshop, or other event concerning sexual minorities. Among CRC students, 72% have studied the Bible to find answers to questions about same-sex sexuality; while 61% of this survey's church member sample have done the same.

Ministers report high rates of having read the 1973 report on the denomination's position (85%) and the 2002 report on pastoral care to LGB people (71%), although this percentage is as low as 28% for Asian/Pacific Islander ministers. Canadian ministers and those under 45 years old are more likely than their counterparts to have attended a workshop or event concerning sexual minorities. Female ministers are more likely than male ministers to have attended a class or event, read the 2002 report, studied other books, and studied the Bible on this topic.

Only 16% of this survey's church member respondents have read the 1973 or 2002 reports. Among CRC students, 11% and 16% have read the 1973 and 2002 reports, respectively. However, it may be that more students and church members have read the CRC reports on homosexuality than reports on other topics.

5. Church Climate for LGB People

5.1 Is the church seeking to provide a hospitable place for same-sex attracted people to know and worship God?

Although 78% of pastors report that they have intentionally tried to show Christ's love to gay people, only 12% say their church is intentionally seeking to provide a hospitable place for same-sex attracted people to know and worship God. A further 35% say that their church is doing this in some ways, and 44% answer "no."

Among church members, only 6% say their church is intentionally seeking to provide a hospitable place for same-sex attracted people to know and worship God; 19% say it is "in some ways"; 32% "don't know"; and 42% answer "no."

³⁵ The three options were (1) same-sex marriage should be allowed in civil society but not in the church; (2) Christians should oppose same-sex marriage in civil society; (3) same-sex marriage should be allowed in civil society and in the church.

5.2 Do you ever hear comments from church members that you believe would be offensive to people in your congregation who are attracted to the same sex?

- Ministers: 61% hear offensive comments.
- Students: 52% hear offensive comments.
- This survey's church member sample: 40% hear offensive comments.
- 75% of nonheterosexual respondents in the whole survey report hearing offensive comments from church members.

5.3 Are congregations a safe place for gay people?

Implicit in the questions about safety is the understanding that a church's culture and power dynamics directly affect the well-being of minority group members. The survey asked about three aspects of safety, defined as follows:

- Spiritually safe: people can explore their spiritual questions and grow in faith as Christian believers.
- Emotionally safe: people can appropriately express their emotions without fear.
- Intellectually safe: people can express their opinions freely about a range of topics.

All three major demographic groups in our survey perceive church to be much safer—spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually—for straight people than for same-sex oriented people.

Ministers:

- 50% say their congregation is a spiritually safe place for gay people.
- 32% say their congregation is an emotionally safe place for gay people.
- 31% say their congregation is an intellectually safe place for gay people.
- 10 to 12% answered "I don't know" to the three questions.
- American ministers have a more positive estimation of the spiritual and emotional safety of gay persons in their congregation than do Canadian ministers, by 8 and 12 percentage points, respectively.

CRC students:

- 70% say their congregation is a spiritually safe place for gay people.
- 28% say their congregation is an emotionally safe place for gay people.
- 25% say their congregation is an intellectually safe place for gay people.
- 17 to 20% answered "I don't know" to the three questions.

This survey's church member sample:

- 45% say their congregation is a spiritually safe place for gay people.
- 30% say their congregation is an emotionally safe place for gay people.
- 27% say their congregation is an intellectually safe place for gay people.
- 14 to 17% answered "I don't know" to the three questions.

In contrast to these results, 71 to 89% of respondents in the three sample groups judge their congregations to be spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually safe for heterosexual people.

“For me personally” responses:

All groups clearly perceive their congregations to be lacking in safety for same-sex oriented persons. However, a more nuanced picture emerges by comparing the “for me personally” answers of straight-identified and non-straight-identified persons. Forty-two respondents out of 1,650 in the three sample groups (2.5%) self-identified on the survey as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or same-sex attracted (LGBQ/SSA).³⁶ Responses from persons in the three sample groups who self-identified as LGBQ/SSA were as follows:

5.4 My congregation is a safe place for me (ministers, students, and church member sample combined)

	Heterosexual (n = 1,500)	LGBQ/SSA (n = 42)
Spiritually safe for me	88%	67%
Emotionally safe for me	73%	54%
Intellectually safe for me	70%	57%

Percentages among non-straight-identified respondents who took the survey via the public link are lower on every count: 50% (spiritually safe for me), 36% (emotionally safe for me), and 41% (intellectually safe for me). Combining the answers of all LGBQ/SSA identified respondents in the whole survey (including the public sample), percentages of safety in their congregation were as follows:

All LGBQ/SSA survey respondents (n = 226)	Agree	Disagree
Spiritually safe for me	54%	30%
Emotionally safe for me	40%	40%
Intellectually safe for me	45%	36%

These responses should give us pause. Thirty percent of sexual minority respondents say their CRC congregation is not a place where they can explore their spiritual questions and grow in faith as Christian believers; 40% are afraid to appropriately express their emotions in the church setting; and 36% feel unable to express their opinions freely in their CRC congregation.

The high incidence of antigay comments as reported above likely contributes to this unacceptable situation. It is well attested that LGB youth are at elevated risk for depression, self-harm, homelessness, and suicide. One recent study found that each episode of physical or verbal harassment or abuse increases the likelihood of self-harming behavior by 2.5 times on average.³⁷

5.5 Have you offered pastoral care to a same-sex oriented person or their family members?

- 81% of ministers have done so at least once.
- 70% of ministers have done so at least twice.
- 21% of ministers have done so more than ten times.
- 18% of ministers have never done so.

³⁶ “Queer” has been reclaimed as a positive umbrella term by many in the LGBTQ community. A further 38 respondents in the student, minister, and church member samples checked “other” or “not sure” on the sexual orientation question.

³⁷ IMPACT (2010), mental health disorders, psychological distress, and suicidality in a diverse sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths; *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(12), 2426-32. Quoted at www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide.

6. The CRC's Position

6.1. *What is the CRC's theological and ethical position on homosexuality?*

Respondents could select all that apply from a range of options, both correct and incorrect.

Ministers (percent identifying correctly what the 1973 report recommends):

- 89% said the CRC views homosexual orientation as not sinful, but views same-sex sexual behavior as sinful.
- 83% said the CRC views homosexuality as a result of the fall.
- 63% said the CRC says that LGB people should be fully included in the life of the church.

This survey's church member sample (percent identifying correctly what the 1973 report recommends):

- 57% said the CRC views homosexual orientation as not sinful, but views same-sex sexual behavior as sinful.
- 56% said the CRC views homosexuality as a result of the fall.
- 32% said the CRC says that LGB people should be fully included in the life of the church.

However, more than 27% of respondents in this survey's church member sample incorrectly said that the CRC says that both homosexual orientation and practice are sinful; 6% of ministers and 17% of students also checked this answer.

Students (percent identifying correctly what the 1973 report recommends):

- 74% identified the distinction between orientation and behavior, as well as homosexuality being considered a result of the fall.
- 50% said the CRC says that LGB people should be fully included in the life of the church.

6.2. *Agreement with the Christian Reformed position*

Approximately two-thirds of ministers (65%), 44% of CRC students, and 41% of respondents from this survey's church member sample personally hold that gay Christians are called to lifelong celibacy.

Eighty percent of CRC ministers, 75% of CRC students, and 57% of respondents in this survey's church member sample personally hold that same-sex attraction is not sinful. However, a substantial minority of respondents maintain that simply experiencing attraction to the same sex is sinful. In contradiction to the denomination's position articulated in 1973, 14% of CRC ministers—100 of the 700 respondents—hold that "being attracted to a member of the same sex is sinful, even if it is never acted upon." Thirty-one percent of respondents in the survey's church member sample and 17% of CRC students believe that same-sex attraction itself is sinful.

Further, 9% of ministers say that gay Christians should "repent of choosing to be gay," along with 12% of this survey's church member sample and 8% of CRC students. This belief is also not supported by the synodical reports from 1973 and 2002.

6.3. *Orientation change*

Orientation change remains a plausible option in the opinion of some ministers and church member respondents. Two in ten ministers (21%) say

gay Christians should “pray to become straight,” and 16% encourage reparative therapy. Respondents were asked to check all options they agreed with in this section:

Gay Christians Should... (check all)	Ministers	This survey's church member sample	CRC students
Pray to become straight	21%	23%	14%
Seek therapy with a view to changing their orientation	16%	20%	11%

6.4. Other life and relationship options for gay Christians

Other life and relationship options the survey listed for gay Christians were as follows. Respondents were asked to check all options they agreed with in this section:

Gay Christians Should... (check all)	Ministers	This survey's church member sample	CRC students
Seek a permanent nonsexual relationship with someone of the same sex	17%	8%	11%
Marry an opposite sex partner if possible	13%	8%	11%
Be permitted to live in a monogamous same-sex partnership as a concession to fallenness if they have tried other options	20%	8%	9%
Be free to follow their own conscience before God with regard to a marriage/a committed partnership	24%	32%	41%
Celebrate the sexual identity God has given them	16%	17%	34%

While 14% of ministers who took the survey hold that same-sex attraction per se is sinful, almost a quarter (24%) say that gay Christians should be free to follow their own conscience before God when it comes to same-sex relationships; 32% of respondents from this survey's church member sample and 41% of CRC students agree.

Of the LGB respondents in the CRC student and church member samples, none believed LGB people should pursue orientation change, whether by prayer or reparative therapy. Notably, none of the 43 LGB respondents in these samples and in the minister sample believe that being attracted to the same sex is sinful, or that LGB people should “repent of choosing to be gay.” Only 6 of the 226 LGB respondents across all samples hold that being attracted to the same sex is itself sinful even if it is never acted upon.

In all samples, American respondents are more prone than Canadians to say LGB people should be celibate, repent of choosing to be gay, and seek reparative therapy. More Americans than Canadians also said that same-sex attraction is sinful even if it is never acted upon.

Among ministers, Asians are more likely than White pastors to believe LGB people should pray to become straight, repent of choosing to be gay, or marry a partner of the opposite sex, while White ministers are more likely to believe that gay Christians should be celibate for life. A majority (53%) of

Asian ministers believe that being attracted to the same sex is sinful even if it is never acted upon. Only 13% of White ministers believe the same.

Respondents younger than 45 are less likely to support orientation change efforts by prayer (12%) and by reparative therapy (10%) than those over 45 (24% and 21%, respectively). They are also less likely to believe that LGB people choose to be gay (7% and 14%, respectively).

7. Other Notable Findings

Thirty-six percent of ministers and 51% of all LGBTQ/SSA respondents said the CRC should conduct a thorough review of the 1973 and 2002 reports. Nine of the 16 ministers who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or same-sex attracted say the denomination should be more welcoming but not bless same-sex relationships, while only 4 of the 19 sexual minority students say the same. Four of the 16 sexual minority ministers, 12 of the 19 sexual minority students, and 86% of sexual minority persons who accessed the survey via the public link believe the CRC should embrace sexual minority individuals and affirm their relational commitments.

8. Common Themes Expressed in the Comments

Survey respondents had the opportunity to write text answers to several questions:

- What practical dilemmas do you encounter related to homosexuality or same-sex marriage (for example, situations at church, in your family, at work, or at school)?
- What do you see as the most pressing questions for your congregation with regard to same-sex attracted people and/or same-sex marriage?
- What are your greatest fears, if any, concerning same-sex marriage?
- What are your greatest hopes, if any, concerning same-sex marriage?

The committee received a wealth of comments on these questions, describing a wide variety of situations, hopes, and fears expressed in people's own words. No summary can do justice to all that is contained in these responses.

We tracked 16 commonly recurring themes in the comments from ministers, from the survey's church member sample, and from 100 LGB-identified respondents from the public sample. It is important to note that this summary reports only on the prevalence of identified themes. Readers should not assume that mention of a theme is uniformly positive or negative.

8.1. Practical Dilemmas

Unsurprisingly, for ministers, the most frequent practical dilemmas encountered regarding homosexuality or same-sex marriage were pastoral concerns. Nineteen percent of the comments from ministers were ministry focused and expressed concern for how people are treated, perceived, and supported or not in the church. The next most common theme (11%) in ministers' comments was church life: questions about church membership, participation in communion, baptism, leadership, and matters of church discipline. Ten percent of the comments from ministers spoke of the desire to welcome people without changing the church's theological stance.

In this survey's church member sample none of the themes was found in 10% or more of the text answers for this question.

In the 100 comments coded from gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons who accessed the survey through the public link, by far the most commonly cited practical dilemma concerned people leaving the church. Twenty-two percent of comments from respondents in this group talked about themselves or others leaving the church over these matters, or expressed concerns that the CRC's stance is harming our mission in the world.

8.2. *Most Pressing Questions for Congregations*

When asked about the most pressing questions for their congregation, 15% of ministers identified questions about how to welcome LGB persons but not affirm same-sex relationships. Pastoral questions were the next most frequent theme—mentioned in 13% of answers. Ten percent of this survey's church member sample also echoed this theme in their answers to this question. Among LGB participants from the public sample the most prevalent theme (found in 9% of comments) concerned matters of church life, such as church membership, participation in communion, baptism, and leadership.

8.3. *Greatest fears concerning same-sex marriage*

The most frequently cited fear from ministers was that of division. Twelve percent of ministers' comments mentioned the possibility of split, division, separation, or schism—either along generational lines, divides/splits within a congregation, or in the CRC as a whole. The next most frequent theme for ministers (8%) was that of legal concerns: mentioning lawsuits, being sued, or fears of losing one's job or ordination status because of one's response to same-sex marriage.

Among respondents in this survey's church member sample, 8% of comments expressed fears that acceptance of same-sex marriage would precipitate moral and ethical decline in society.

Among LGB respondents in the public sample, 11% expressed fears that the church will lose people because of its stance on same-sex marriage. The next most frequent response for this group was fear of how this topic is affecting the church's witness in the world (6%).

8.4. *Greatest hopes concerning same-sex marriage*

Under the category of greatest hopes, 9% of ministers and 9% of this survey's church member sample spoke about welcoming sexual minority people and affirming same-sex relationships; 37% of the LGB respondent group echoed this theme.

The only other themes to reach 6% or more in the comments for this question were as follows: for ministers, the "welcoming but not affirming" theme; and for LGB respondents, the theme of legal concerns relating to the hope for further legalization of same-sex marriage and equal protection under the law.

9. Conclusions

The survey has been a valuable means of listening to the denomination on matters relating to same-sex marriage. While we cannot treat this data as being representative of the denomination as a whole or of any subset of the denomination, results nevertheless give a useful and rich description

of the range of views and questions at a given point in time (Spring 2014). For the purposes of this report we highlight three key findings:

First, large numbers of ministers, church members, and CRC students have same-sex oriented family members and friends. What is more, some of us find *ourselves* to be so oriented. These connections represent a God-given opportunity for individuals, leaders, and churches to learn more about the varied journeys, experiences, and felt needs of same-sex oriented persons—especially those who are fellow believers or are connected to the church in some way.

Second, a fundamental area to address is the way we speak to and about one another with regard to differences of sexual orientation. Offensive language is never appropriate. Instead, the emotional and spiritual well-being of vulnerable persons in our midst should prompt us to listen well, speak charitably, and create a safer environment that could enable same-sex oriented persons to consider their relational options in light of scriptural teaching.

Third, arguably the most important finding revealed by this survey is the extent of our diversity as a denomination on these matters. At one end of the theological and political spectrum, a substantial minority of respondents (including ministers) consider same-sex attraction to be sinful and even support orientation change efforts. At the other end of the spectrum we see a substantial minority of persons who believe same-sex oriented Christians should have freedom of conscience before God regarding their relationships—the same freedom that heterosexual people enjoy. Navigating the challenges that lie before us as a denomination will require much prayer, sustained scriptural reflection, a strong commitment to the unity of the body of Christ, and an abundant measure of the fruit and wisdom of the Holy Spirit promised to us in Christ.

Appendix B Resources

The committee offers the following list of books, articles, and other resources to help churches engage questions around same-sex marriage. Resources have been selected for their usefulness in contributing to well-informed ministry. **Inclusion on this list does not indicate endorsement of the perspectives or viewpoints expressed in any particular resource.**

Legal questions around religious freedom and same-sex marriage will continue to play out in the coming years in North America. While Canadian churches have had a decade to adjust to the reality of civil same-sex marriage, most of the resources currently available in the U.S. context are necessarily based on predictions and speculation. We anticipate that helpful resources for U.S. churches will continue to emerge as American legal scholars begin to respond more fully to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling from June 2015.

History of Marriage

Abbott, Elizabeth. *A History of Marriage*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

Anderson, Ryan T., et al. "The Church and Civil Marriage: Eight Scholars and Writers Discuss Whether Religious Institutions Should Get Out of the Marriage Business." *First Things*, 242, April 2014:33-40.

Cott, Nancy F. *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Civil Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty

Canadian Civil Marriage Act (S.C. 2005, c.33). Published by the Minister of Justice at <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca>.

U.S. Supreme Court Decision on same-sex marriage: *Obergefell v. Hodges*, www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf.

The ruling of Judge Bernard Friedman in the Michigan case *DeBoer v. Snyder*, www.freedomtomarry.org/page/-/files/pdfs/MichiganRuling.pdf (concerning outcomes for children of same-sex couples).

Inazu, John. "What to Expect After the Supreme Court's Marriage Decision." Christianity Today Online, April 28, 2015. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/april-web-only/what-to-expect-after-supreme-courts-coming-marriage-decisio.html.

How the Supreme Court's decision for gay marriage could affect religious institutions. June 26, 2015. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/26/how-a-supreme-court-decision-for-gay-marriage-would-affect-religious-institutions/.

Laycock, Douglas, Anthony Picarello, and Robin Wilson, eds. *Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty: Emerging Conflicts*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Principled Pluralism

Smidt, Corwin. Chapter 3, "The Principled Pluralist Perspective" in *Church, State, and Public Justice: Five Views*. Ed. P. C. Kemeny. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007.

Chaplain, Jonathan. "The Bible, the State, and Religious Diversity: Theological Foundations for 'Principled Pluralism'" <http://www.klice.co.uk/uploads/EST08JC.pdf> (accessed April 2015).

Monsma, Stephen. *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

Dialogue

Mouw, Richard J. *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, rev. 2010.

Kraus, C. Norman, ed. *To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality*. Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press, 2001. (Mennonite circles, covering all sides of the subject, focusing on models for dialogue.)

Swartley, Willard M. *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment*. Telford Pa.: Herald Press, 2003. (Mennonite circles, covering all sides of the subject and a model for congregational discernment.)

Respectful Conversation on Christian Faithfulness and Human Sexuality (a model Christian dialogue covering a variety of topics relating to same-sex sexuality between July 2015 and February 2016). www.respectfulconversation.net/cfahs.

The Colossian Forum (hosts conversations and produces resources for engaging Christian dialogue on difficult issues at the intersection of faith, culture, science, and sexuality). www.colossianforum.org.

Oriented to Love Dialogues, Evangelicals for Social Action (a three-day retreat for in-depth listening and dialogue among Christians on LGBT). www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/oriented-to-love/oriented-to-love-event.

Bridging the Gap (a DVD series for small groups). www.newdirection.ca/shop/bridging-the-gap-conversations-on-befriending-our-gay-neighbours.

Same-Sex Sexuality

While our committee's report has not centered on same-sex sexuality, our committee notes the influx in new resources and scholarship pertaining to same-sex relationships since the Synod 2002 report. Some of these resources will reaffirm the CRC's 1973 report. Others will offer alternative conclusions to the report of 1973. The committee offers this list as a sample representation of current voices in the conversations regarding faith and sexuality that may be useful for study and discernment and for fostering constructive dialogue.

Brownson, James V. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013. (Offers alternative interpretive conclusions to that of the 1973 report.)

Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2012.

Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria. *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2015.

Citlau, Ron, and Adam T. Barr. *Compassion Without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees Us to Love Our Gay Friends Without Losing the Truth*. Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House, 2014.

DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*

Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015. (Offers current argument that reaffirms 1973.)

Fishburn, Janet F., ed. *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2003.

Gagnon, Robert. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: On Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010. (Hill writes as a gay Christian committed to living a celibate life.)

Hill, Wesley. *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2015. (Hill explores the concept of spiritual friendship for gay Christians committed to celibacy.)

Lee, Justin. *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gay vs. Christians Debate*. New York: Jericho Books, 2013. (Lee writes as a gay Christian seeking a more fruitful dialogue in the church. In one chapter, Lee explains why he has come to affirm same-sex relationships.)

Otto, Tim. *Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships*. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014. (Otto, a gay Christian committed to celibacy, critiques aspects of both "sides" in the same-sex marriage debate.)

Stacy Johnson, William. *A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006. (Stacy Johnson writes as a pastor, theologian, and lawyer; the book discusses many different aspects relevant to same-sex marriage.)

Tushnet, Eve. *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2014. (Tushnet explores the concepts of vocation and service as a lesbian Christian committed to celibacy.)

VanderWal-Gritter, Wendy. *Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2014. (VanderWal-Gritter discusses a range of topics important to ministry and invites the church to embrace unity in diversity concerning same-sex marriage.)

Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. New York: Convergent Books, 2014. (Vines, a gay Christian, summarizes current arguments for an affirming position on same-sex marriage.)

Wilson, Ken. *A Letter to My Congregation*. Canton, Mich.: David Crumm Media, 2014. (Wilson shares his journey of seeking to open the conversation on same-sex marriage with his congregation, and he proposes a "Third Way" approach.)

Blogs and Websites

The Gay Christian Network (www.gaychristian.net) supports Christians who are same-sex oriented across a range of theological views. Side B is the descriptive term for those committed to sexual abstinence. Their online community has forums particularly for those holding a side B view (accessed April 2015).

New Direction Ministries (www.newdirection.ca) offers consultation and resources to churches, and connection and community to LGBTQ+ Christians (accessed April 2015).

A Queer Calling (<http://aqueercalling.com>) features the journey of a self-described queer Christian couple committed to sexual abstinence (accessed April 2015).

Spiritual Friendship (<http://spiritualfriendship.org>) features the writings of several gay Christians committed to celibacy and others who hold a traditional view of marriage (accessed April 2015).

Church Facility Use/Pastor Officiating Policy

A number of Christian legal organizations have published materials intended to guide churches and pastors in creating policies that will enable churches and pastors to exercise their religious freedoms with regard to their beliefs on marriage, homosexuality, and other matters. These are written, in most cases, from a conservative evangelical stance.

Pacific Legal Institute (www.pacificjustice.org): Under the "Get Help" menu are materials for bylaws and a model marriage policy.

Christian Legal Society (www.clsnet.org): Church Guidance Webinar materials

We list these in the interests of providing resources to churches and pastors. We do so with reservations. Even a cursory reading of these materials

reveals some provisions and advice that would not be consistent with CRC polity or theology.

Churches and leaders should follow the cautions expressed on these websites: *This guidance is not intended to substitute for legal counsel specific to a church's own circumstances and geographic location, particularly since applicable federal, state, and local laws vary widely. Consequently, it is highly recommended that knowledgeable nonprofit legal counsel be sought for such specific questions and particular issues.*

In late August of this year, the CRCNA denomination sent out materials providing advice to churches regarding adoption of articles of incorporation and a Model Church Facilities document. The committee was unaware that these materials were being prepared. While the materials sent out were helpful, we are concerned that churches and church leaders may be uncertain as to the proper use of these materials. We also have a few reservations about the materials. We include the following observations:

1. Churches and church leaders should note that, despite media warnings of potential legal challenges to churches, the likelihood of litigation regarding building use or officiating is quite low. Litigation is an expensive proposition with uncertain results.
2. A few simple steps can place the church and its leaders in a position to avoid most legal uncertainty:
 - a. Make sure the church's Articles of Incorporation are up-to-date. The model Articles of Incorporation available from the Synodical Services Office should be used as the template. The Articles of Incorporation need not say anything about church policy on marriage or homosexuality, but should address (as the model Articles do) the basis of authority within the CRC.
 - b. Have the church council adopt a Facilities Use policy governing use of the facilities and their availability for rental for weddings and other events. The council will need to determine the level of availability. The safest approach in preventing legal questions is to limit availability to church members or denominational members in good standing, coupled with a requirement that weddings and related activities be consistent with the teachings and understanding of the CRC. If it is decided that others may rent the facilities, it should be stipulated that weddings and related activities should be consistent with the Christian teachings and understanding of the CRC. This Facilities Use policy should be reviewed by legal counsel.
 - c. The Facilities Use policy should be prominently noted on any written brochures and any websites regarding building use and/or weddings. References and links should be provided to CRC statements on marriage.
 - d. The pastor(s) and the council of the church should develop a policy for officiating at weddings consistent with the CRC understanding of marriage. This policy can include a restriction of weddings to church members or to Christian weddings consistent with the CRC under-

standing of marriage. It should include a provision allowing the pastor to refuse or to accept a request to officiate at the pastor's discretion.

- e. If the availability of a pastor to officiate at a wedding is included in a brochure or a website, the policy should be set forth in those materials.

In reviewing the materials sent out by the synodical office, we have concerns that should be addressed in the near future. Some terms used, for example, could create confusion. The "position of Final Authority" is unusual language, and in the CRC the final authority on different issues lies with different bodies. Oversight of property, for instance, lies with the local council. Consistories have original authority on ecclesiastical matters, with classis and synod having delegated authority. It would help if this were clarified in the advice.

On a more important matter, we note that in the advice given in August 2015 churches are encouraged to reference denominational statements on the crcna.org website and the synodical decisions referenced there. However, reference should not be made to website statements, but to the synodical decisions themselves. The website statements are summaries of synodical decisions and written without first thought of their legal relevance. They have no standing in CRC polity, unlike synodical reports. We are concerned that the summary statement on marriage, for instance, opens questions of consistency regarding the church's allowing weddings to be held where one or both partners have been previously married or divorced.

Appendix C

Two Views of Church and State

During the committee's listening session at Synod 2015, delegates were asked to consider four options describing the relationship between the church and the state regarding marriage. The four options offer a spectrum of views that have been found within the Christian church. The options discussed were as follows:

1. Marriage is fundamentally a religious institution. The state should recognize the religious nature of marriage and only authorize marriage as understood by religious authority.
2. Marriage as the covenantal union of a man and a woman is grounded both religiously and by proper recognition of the created order. The state, even if it attempts to be religiously neutral, makes a profound error when it ignores what nature itself teaches, and authorizes civil same-sex marriage.
3. Both the state (civil government) and the church have a direct interest in family structure and well-being, but these interests are not identical. Both the state and the church have latitude (within limits) to define marriage to pursue their legitimate interests, even though those interests may not be the same. The state and the church may end up with different definitions of marriage.

4. The church does not tell civil authority what to do. The church simply defines marriage as it finds itself compelled by Scripture and orders its internal life as Scripture and the gospel requires. What the state does is the state's business.

Option 1 corresponds roughly to a medieval Roman Catholic view, in which the church's understanding of social order is enacted by the state. The Roman Catholic understanding of marriage is discerned in the mutual agreement of Scripture and natural law. The responsible state recognizes and legislates the human flourishing that the natural law identifies.

Option 4 is expressive of an Anabaptist approach wherein the Christian community is uncomfortable with the enforcement power of the state, or what is traditionally referred to as "wielding the sword." The Christian community does not look to the state to enforce Christian moral norms. The Christian community is to be leaven in the world, but does so by maintaining its own pattern of life.

Options 2 and 3 both fit within a Reformed framework, with Option 2 tapping into the Reformed concept of creation order to argue for society-wide acknowledgment that marriage is a gendered and biologically complementary relationship between a man and a woman. While society is pluralistic and civil government should recognize this reality, there are limits to pluralism that are evident within the ordering of creation itself. Option 3, on the other hand, allows for a greater distinction between religious and civil purposes of marriage, and suggests that pluralism in combination with sphere sovereignty allows the state latitude to define marriage in terms different from those of the church. The majority of 2015 synodical delegates identified either Option 2 or Option 3 as the one with which they were most comfortable.

For some, this seemed an academic (pointless?) exercise. Governments in the United States and Canada have adopted legal positions making Option 3 the reality in which we live. For others, though, the discussion was important. Do Christians have an obligation to challenge the government and society on same-sex marriage? Must the church speak prophetically to the state of its errors on civil marriage? Or may Christians support the government in legally recognizing same-sex relationships as part of the state's interest in the good order of society and the just treatment of its citizens?

In the body of our report, we have addressed the realities of the current situation. The state has adopted a view of marriage that differs in significant ways from that of the CRC. In Canada this occurred legislatively—by an act of Parliament. In the United States, despite state attempts to shield marriage from the political process by enshrining traditional opposite-sex marriage within state constitutions (which usually require super majorities to change and both legislative and electorate votes), courts ultimately ruled that restricting marriage to opposite-sex unions violated constitutional guarantees of equal protection and due process.

Certainly the path followed in the U.S. is more susceptible to critique politically. In Canada, one is left to argue that society or its representatives have made a bad choice and to seek a course reversal. In the case of same-sex marriage, changing course is difficult, at least in one direction. To allow same-sex marriage changes little regarding the rights and responsibilities of opposite-sex couples who marry; it allows others to benefit from and enter

into the same rights and responsibilities. To reverse course, however, raises a host of legal and practical issues. Can one undo marriages lawfully enacted? How feasible is it to walk back from a decision already made?

As noted in the committee's report, even conservative justices of the U.S. Supreme Court allowed that a government could legislatively permit same-sex marriage. None said that it was outside the bounds of governmental authority to permit same-sex marriage, despite the fact that six justices are Roman Catholic and have more than passing acquaintance with natural law arguments. The primary legal argument before the Supreme Court was whether a constitutional "right to marry" should be recognized, or whether it would be wiser to see any such changes as the work of the legislative process at the state level.

The overtures of 2013 that prompted synod to establish this committee were not concerned whether same-sex marriage, if adopted, should be done so legislatively or by constitutional interpretation. A question was raised whether Christians had an obligation to "oppose the legality of same-sex marriage . . . in civil society."³⁸ What we suggest is that two lines of argumentation are compatible with a Reformed understanding of church and state. One will imply that Christians should be politically active and call society to reverse course on same-sex marriage. The other leads to a thoughtful acknowledgement of civil same-sex marriage as a way of addressing certain inequities that would otherwise arise in our contemporary, pluralistic society.

A. Marriage as a creational given

The first line of argument has the authority of the historical Reformed tradition underlying it. Going back to John Calvin, the Reformed tradition understood marriage to be founded on both the teachings of Scripture *and* the evidences of creation. These are not separate authorities; rather, the testimonies of Scripture regarding marital relationships echo the observational reflections of persons familiar with the workings of the created world and human society.

Whereas Calvin would have used the language of "natural law"—this is not a matter in which he would deviate from Roman Catholic theology—succeeding generations of Reformed theologians were to speak of creation orders, or the ordering of creation. In creating the world, God established certain structures and institutions through which the divine will for society is manifest. Marriage is one such institution. Marriage as an institution between a man and a woman is grounded biologically and socially as well as biblically.

The basis for that claim is not, in the first place, Scripture, but creation itself. Christians remind society that one does not tamper lightly with the created order. To compromise the ordering sewn into the fabric of creation is to weaken the foundation of society and risk affronting divine wisdom. One can expect ill consequences when society deviates from the proper patterns evident within creation itself.

In this approach, Christians do not speak to society from a dogmatic position (i.e., from a position of revealed faith to an unbelieving world). Christians speak into the common experience of human beings in society.

³⁸ Overture 12, *Agenda for Synod 2013*, p. 419.

They speak into a shared encounter with a world structured according to God's wisdom.

This line of argument in large part informs the 1980 synodical report on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It has a long and venerable history within Reformed thought. It continues to resonate with many in Reformed circles.

B. Malleability in civil marriage

For others within the Reformed tradition, however, there is uneasiness at the confidence and the structural specificity of the creation order tradition. The Reformed tradition exists in a different social, political, and cultural context today than it did in Calvin's Geneva or, for that matter, at the height of the Kuyperian era of the late 1800s. It has been shaped by historical experience and chastened by missteps along the way. It understands the ordering of creation by God in less rigid terms than in traditional Reformed theology, although it takes seriously the biological and social character of human life and relationships.

Creation order theology fared poorly in the twentieth century. The two theological traditions that most emphasized ethical interpretation of creation's structure—the Lutheran and the Reformed—both suffered significantly by overreaching and becoming implicated in social and political errors of great magnitude. Lutheranism was used to promote the National Socialist (Nazi) agenda of the 1930s-1940s; Reformed theology was used to justify *apartheid* in South Africa. In both cases, the inclination to read social and political programs into the structures of creation combined with a peculiar reading of Scripture to implicate the church deeply in injustice and oppression.

This legacy should not cripple arguments from the ordering of creation, but it does encourage a level of humility. The realm of creation is not characterized simply by order, but also by complexity, fluidity, practicality, and creativity. Human flourishing can be found along more than one path.

Within the church, of course, Scripture stands supreme. Within the political arena, however, a Reformed argument on marriage is not an argument from Scripture. It is an argument from shared experience of and reflection on creation. It argues from evidences—sociological, biological, political.

Just such an argument has been attempted in the current debate over same-sex marriage. Christian groups have funded sociological research intended to show that children raised in stable families by heterosexual couples have better outcomes than children raised in unstable families and/or by same-sex couples. The most well-known of these studies was offered as evidence in the Michigan case of *DeBoer v. Snyder*. It withstood neither close scrutiny nor cross-examination and was roundly dismissed. In academic circles it has been discredited. That does not mean its proposed conclusions are wrong, only that they are unsupported by evidence analyzed to date.

The integrity of the Christian community is at stake in research along these lines, and research with what feels like predetermined outcomes is subject to suspicion. There are scholars working on research related to family structure, well-being, and positive outcomes. The *National Marriage Project*, led by University of Virginia sociologist and director Brad Wilcox, is one such venture, although it is not without controversies. It has also been cautious with claims related to same-sex marriage. It is, however, a step in the right direction.

Reformed Christians who adopt a more guarded approach to claims regarding the divine will manifesting itself in the structures of creation may be inclined to allow civil society more latitude in establishing its rules for social structuring. They may also find compelling the need to address inequities and social harms that result from prohibitions against legal same-sex committed relationships.

C. *Concluding observation*

The committee considered it important to include these two lines of argumentation within its overall report, but not as part of its pastoral guidance. A rich theological dialogue can be had between these views (and other variations within the Reformed tradition). Both views are likely to be found within the CRC for the foreseeable future, and it would be commendable if each view would learn to read the other sympathetically.

Appendix D Encouraging Dialogue on Same-sex Marriage

Over the past two years, the study committee has invested significant energy in inviting feedback from churches, ministers, and church members. It is no surprise that our listening, like that of the committee that wrote the 2002 report, has revealed significant diversity in experiences, perspectives, and opinions regarding same-sex marriage in Christian Reformed congregations.

This diversity carries implications for the church. In the larger Christian community in North America, there is a concern that the church's position regarding same-sex marriage and homosexuality is creating a generational divide. In 2007, the Barna group found that 80 percent of churchgoing 16-29 year olds chose *antihomosexual* as the primary descriptor of Christians. For their unchurched peers, this number increased to 91%.³⁹ The church's response to sexual minority persons constitutes a stumbling block for many teens and young adults.

The reality of diverse experiences, perspectives, and convictions leads to a range of anxieties—ongoing commitment to biblical and theological truth, maintaining the unity of the church, keeping the gospel relevant to coming generations—regarding the future of the church. Dialogue is quite distinct from other forms of group communication. The primary purpose of dialogue is not decision-making but enlarged mutual understanding. In dialogue, persons with differing perspectives and experiences commit to listen to one another to seek better understanding of the other's position, recognizing the potential of better understanding of the matter itself. People who are struggling with different questions and interpretations concerning the matter of same-sex marriage have the opportunity to hear not only what other persons think, or wonder, or believe, but why these things are important to them. Rather than using a conversation to develop arguments to discredit the position of the other, dialogue invites participants to temporarily suspend argumentation and debate and to listen carefully.

³⁹ See Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2012).

Some may be wary of the call to dialogue because

- consideration of other perspectives has already occurred and doesn't need to be revisited.
- Scripture and the 1973 report are clear and need no further exploration.
- dialogue could be viewed as an attempt to sway another's convictions or as the opening of the door to relativism or as capitulation to cultural accommodation.

Such concerns need to be heard and honestly addressed. People need to be able to decline the invitation to dialogue without being judged or labeled.

At the same time, it is clear from the listening process of the committee that there are those who desire a safe and open place in which to explore the many complex factors that make an impact on our understanding of same-sex marriage. Commitment to a process of dialogue means to seek greater understanding: understanding of the Scriptures, understanding of the denomination's theological position, understanding of ongoing physical and social science research, and understanding of the journey of other denominations and churches addressing these matters.

The need for dialogue was affirmed by the committee that produced the 2002 report:

Finally, it was clear from many presentations and discussions with individuals and groups, and from the responses by churches, that there is considerable diversity of opinion and feeling within the denomination about individuals with same-sex attractions and ministry to them. We believe it is important for diverse perspectives to be able to be openly discussed and examined. We also believe that it is important that members of our church family who experience same-sex attractions can belong to, openly participate in, and be ministered to within the fellowship of the church.

(Agenda for Synod 2002, pp. 315-16)

A. Is dialogue appropriate for your congregation?

While specific groups of individuals may desire the opportunity for dialogue, not every congregation is ready to take this on as a communal activity. Consider the following questions to help you determine if your congregation has a healthy level of readiness for dialogue:

- Does the congregation have experience discussing matters on which there are different opinions or convictions? What lessons were learned in that process? Did the congregation feel unified during and after those discussions?
- Has the congregation been intentional to welcome people from very different walks of life? Is there ethnic diversity? How are people from other Christian traditions welcomed? Is there space in worship for different expressions? What voices are represented in leadership? Are there people from the local community attending?
- Are there diverse views in the congregation today? How are they expressed? How do people demonstrate an honoring of one another?
- Has the congregation ever gone through an intentional process of reconciliation? What was learned in this process? Was it a positive experience for the congregation?

- How have matters of social justice been addressed in the congregation? Have there been intentional teachings, discussions, or projects?
- Is the congregation a place where people feel safe to share deeply personal struggles?
- Historically, how has the congregation addressed matters of same-sex sexuality? Are there any unresolved matters from the past that will need to be addressed prior to launching intentional dialogue?
- Have there been personal stories and experiences of same-sex oriented people that have had an impact on the life of the community?
- How aware are congregational members of the 1973 and 2002 CRC reports? Have people raised questions about these reports—and if so, how were these questions received?

The more questions a congregation can answer positively in this list, the greater their readiness to engage in healthy dialogue about same-sex marriage.

With the hope of expanding the possibilities for dialogue and limiting the potential for negative effects, we suggest the following guidelines or parameters for conversations regarding same-sex marriage:

1. Consider opening with prayer. A standard, well-known prayer such as the Lord's Prayer would be ideal to set the tone of seeking God together without making the prayer time an opportunity for directing the tone of the conversation.
2. Establish a process for the dialogue that provides fairness for all participants, regardless of their perspectives. Inform participants of the process by which an impartial facilitator will lead the dialogue and ensure many voices are heard.
3. Emphasize that there is no threat hanging over the dialogue. People are encouraged to share their honest perspectives, experiences, and questions. Participants refrain from using ultimatums or penalties.
4. Begin by establishing common ground and shared values:
 - a. Every person present is created in the image of God with inherent dignity and value and is worthy of being treated with respect.
 - b. Participants in the dialogue share a common commitment to serving Jesus as Lord.
 - c. Participants share a commitment to the authority of Scripture and promise to listen carefully to scriptural interpretations.
 - d. Participants acknowledge that the Spirit is present in our dialogue.
 - e. Participants affirm the necessity of such dialogue being a prayerful process.
5. Seek to identify the core issues to be addressed in the time of dialogue.
 - a. Distinguish between moral matters and public policy.
 - b. Clarify priorities in pastoral ministry.
 - c. Identify the impetus for the dialogue.
6. Affirm that the church is a fellowship in Christ, called to enfold same-sex oriented persons. Most congregations already have members who experience same-sex attraction, though they may not have disclosed this reality in the church.

7. Assure everyone, regardless of their experiences or perspectives or proficiency or style of communication, that they are loved by God, that their voices matter, and that they are welcome to participate.
8. Avoid using slogans or name-calling:
 - a. Make clear that negative stereotypes and derogatory language are unacceptable.
 - b. Make clear that it is unacceptable to unfairly categorize or call people homophobic because, as a matter of faith and discipleship, they do not support same-sex marriage. Encourage people to focus on what is said, not who is saying it.
9. Affirm that everyone, regardless of their sexuality, has gifts to use in the church and God's kingdom.
10. Affirm a common commitment to seek justice for every member of society, working together to remove the barriers that prevent others from experiencing the shalom of God.
11. Commit to being patient and gentle with each other when it is difficult to know how to express oneself and when the risks of vulnerability are felt.
12. Allow room for persons to humbly acknowledge and repent of wrongdoing that may come to awareness in these conversations, so that the power of grace and forgiveness may work to restore personal peace and relationships.
13. Represent any position with which you disagree accurately and fairly. Be wary of making assumptions and ask for clarifications when needed. Heed the advice of James 1:19: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

B. Potential questions for dialogue

The following are questions that may prompt helpful dialogue. Some of these were used in listening sessions by the committee over the past two years.

1. Is there anyone in your circle of relationships (family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.) who is in or is considering a same-sex marriage?
2. If you were invited to attend a same-sex wedding, what considerations would go into your decision whether to attend or not?
3. How would you think a church/church leader should respond pastorally and ecclesiastically to the following situations?
 - a. A same-sex couple with children requests to join your church and to have their children baptized.
 - b. A pastor requests the council's permission to officiate at his/her son's/daughter's same-sex marriage ceremony.
4. What questions do you have in thinking about same-sex marriage?
5. What does Scripture have to say that helps in understanding same-sex marriage?

The committee's report on pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage, as noted in section I, B of the majority report, was created through extensive listening, conversations among committee members, conversations with others, study, careful consideration, and prayer. We are thankful to have been a part of this work, and we are thankful for a majority of the guidance the committee has given in response. Even though there are parts we would have chosen not to include or places where we would have chosen different language, we can support much of the committee's report. There are three sections that we are unable to completely endorse. In these three sections—officiating weddings, playing a role in weddings and the life of the church, and membership—we deem that there is more that must be explicitly said.

I. Theologically framing a discussion of same-sex marriage

The discussion of same-sex marriage ought to be understood within the larger framework of what Scripture teaches about marriage: its essence, its purpose, and its obligations. The CRC has most recently addressed these questions in the 1980 statement on *Marriage Guidelines* (as described in section III, A in the majority report).¹ This comprehensive study of the meaning and purpose of marriage, in light of changing societal standards regarding divorce and cohabitation, properly frames a discussion on marriage still today. In our discussion of same-sex marriage, the church can often give the impression of merely saying “no” to questions of same-sex marriage. While the church teaches that Scripture precludes same-sex sexual relationships, it does so in light of a broader, positive teaching of how God designed our relationality, in particular, of how God designed marriage. The report begins to discuss both the biblical teaching on marriage and principled pluralism, but we deem that there is more to be said.

The CRC's 1980 statement on marriage highlights Scripture's clear answers to questions regarding the purpose and meaning of marriage. First, consistent with the historic Christian tradition, the 1980 statement affirms that marriage is a fundamental creational structure instituted by God:

Marriage was instituted by God at creation. Declaring that it was not good for the man to be alone, God created woman as a helper fit for him (Gen. 2:18). Man and woman, created in the image of God, were made for each other to become one flesh in marriage. Thus marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will. It is a God-ordained, monogamous structure, requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife.²

Second, the 1980 statement reaffirmed the purpose of marriage:

Marriage is, therefore, for the benefit and enrichment of husband and wife. Although man was created for fellowship with God, according to Genesis 2 man discovered and God confirmed that man had need also for fellowship and support from a fellow human being. Thus woman was created and marriage instituted so that man and woman could exist in community. Under God's blessing this community of husband and wife would be enlarged by the birth of

¹ See *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 467-85.

² *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 468-69.

children. Thus marriage and family were instituted at creation to meet human need and to achieve the purposes of God (Gen. 1:28).³

Finally, the 1980 statement highlighted the New Testament reaffirmation, illumination, and enrichment of God's purposes for marriage given at creation:

Paul declares that the creational institution of marriage, which affirms that husband and wife become one flesh (Eph. 5:31), contains a mystery (Eph. 5:32). This mystery has now been revealed in the union of Christ and his church, of the Bridegroom and the bride (Eph. 5:23-32). Thus marriage is fully understood and achieves its deepest meaning only when it reflects this spiritual union of Christ and his church.⁴

In the 1980 statement, while marriage is understood as a fundamental creational structure that God has instituted, it is clear that marriage is not necessary for the individual person:

So even now, as Christians await the final coming of the kingdom, the Scripture indicates that marriage is not necessary as a Christian obligation, nor is it necessary for personal fulfillment. All that is necessary for discipleship and fulfillment is membership in the family of God by which one participates in the marriage between Christ and his church. Since the purpose of the marriage institution has been fulfilled in Christ, one may choose or be called not to enter marriage (celibacy is one form of discipleship), or one may choose or be called to be married (marriage is also one form of discipleship). Christian single persons should be able to find in the body of Christ that community of fellowship which every human being needs for effective service and for personal fulfillment.⁵

As noted in section III, A of the majority report, marriage is a creational structure, not eschatological. Marriage was instituted in creation but will be no longer in the new heaven and new earth. As we await Christ's final coming, there is no necessary obligation to the Christian person to be married. The familial relationships established in creation remain important as we await the final coming of the kingdom but are secondary to the relationship that God has established with his people in Christ. Marriage (and family) is not the most important relational reality; the most important reality is the family of God seen in the relationship of Christ to his people. This ecclesial family includes those who are single and those who are married, and it ties them together in a deeper, eschatologically enduring way, for when the kingdom of God fully arrives, there will be no more marriage: only the family of God.

These are not the only creational purposes to be found in marriage; however, marriage is also a foundation for society. "Implied in marriage is the family; in the family is implied society; in society is implied unity, community, and cooperation of the human race."⁶ Within marriage and family we see all kinds of relationships that will later develop in society. Marriage, then, should not be seen as something separated from the rest of society. Rather, its structure helps provide the structure of society.

³ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 469.

⁴ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 469.

⁵ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 471.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, "Christian Principles and Social Relationships," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 122.

While the 1980 statement on marriage did not say much explicitly on marriage as the context for sex, this too is an important, biblical concept. Marriage as the proper context for sex is, of course, implied in the 1980 affirmations of husband and wife becoming “one flesh” in marriage and of marriage as the context for family and children. Lewis Smedes makes the point clear in *Sex for Christians* as he discusses what Paul writes about sexuality:

[Paul] meant that “immorality” included sexual intercourse outside marriage. And if unmarried sexual intercourse was wrong, it was a serious wrong. . . . God’s will is that we abstain from fornication, not giving way to the “passion of lust like heathens who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:5). Fornication is sin; intercourse by unmarried people is fornication; therefore intercourse by unmarried people is sin.⁷

Put positively, marriage between one man and one woman is the God-designed context for sex. This statement is repeated time and time again in Scripture: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure” (Heb. 13:4), and “the husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife” (1 Cor. 7:3-4). These are two examples among many. Marriage, understood biblically, is the proper context for full sexual expression.

Finally, marriage is not an end in itself. Christian marriage is to serve in God’s redemptive purpose as it is patterned after the example of Christ’s relationship to his people—establishing a new community in Christ, molding people for living in the family of God, experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation, growing together in unity, loving one another as imitators of Christ.

It ought to be repeated time and time again that marriage is not a necessity—or a given—for any individual. We, as a church, often still fall prey, through our words and our practice, to the elevation of marriage as something that is necessary for a fulfilled life. We are wise to remember, in word and deed, that the purposes of marriage are indeed fulfilled in Christ. The family of God is now the foundational place where our need for community is met and where we grow in our relationship to God and others. While the church can rightly celebrate the joy and the beauty of marriage, we must also remember that marriage is not a necessary part of the life of the Christian. One can become spiritually mature, live a rich and fulfilled life of service to God, serve the church, and serve the world without being married. The over-exaltation of marriage as something that one needs in order to become mature, hold places of leadership, have a complete life, and other such ideals imparted via implicit and explicit messages is something that the church must rid itself of. We ought to proclaim in word and deed, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 7, that singleness is a legitimate and important calling for some believers. However, as we proclaim this, we must bear in mind the grave responsibility to *the church* as a place of welcoming, enfolding, encouraging, and communing with those who are single. Singleness is not a solitary task. As singleness is a legitimate form of discipleship, the church must become the kind of community that creates space for healthy, life-giving, communion-filled singleness. This is a high call to the church, one that has explicit meaning in the current discussion of same-sex marriage. Given the church’s

⁷ Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 108.

call to live in accord with a traditional, biblical sexual ethic, our churches have to be a place in which celibacy is a viable option.⁸ The body of Christ must live out the call to communion and relationship modeled by Christ's own relationship with the church.

The biblical teaching on marriage, then, seen in Scripture and espoused in the CRC's 1980 statement on marriage, can be summarized by the following statements:

1. Marriage is a fundamental creational structure instituted by God.
2. Marriage is a covenanted relationship established by the mutual vows of one man and one woman to be husband and wife to one another and to live together as such.
3. Marriage between one man and one woman is the God-designed context for full sexual expression.
4. Marriage exists for the benefits and enrichment of the husband and wife; it is a relationship that was created to meet the human need for community and to achieve the purposes of God.
5. Marriage, by its form and the implications of family and structure, also has a fundamental role as a means of structuring society.
6. The New Testament affirms the importance of marriage, now highlighting the ways that the marriage relationship between a husband and wife points to the relationship between Christ and the church.
7. The marital relationship is fully understood when it reflects the relationship between Christ and the church—a relationship marked by characteristics such as love, permanence, respect, faithfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
8. The relational purposes of marriage and the need for community are now primarily seen, understood, and felt in the relationship that God has established with his people in Christ; marriage is not necessary for the Christian person.
9. Singleness and marriage are both legitimate forms of discipleship that the Christian person may be called to. The body of Christ, therefore, has a high calling to be the community of fellowship for all people—single and married—where individuals can find ways to serve God and grow in their relationship to God and others.
10. Marriage, though a permanent relationship between a husband and a wife until “death do us part,” will not be an eschatological reality. In the new heavens and new earth, there will be no marriage; instead, there will be only the family of God.

The importance of a proper understanding of, and living out of, marriage is underscored by the CRC's 1980 statement on marriage. This statement

⁸ Wesley Hill describes the practical longing and need for a type of community that enfolds the single person beautifully when he says: “As a single person, I acutely need intimacy and loyalty from my friends. I’m eager for them to say to me, ‘We love you because you’re ours,’ without leaving an escape clause. Part of the reason I need that kind of friendship is because I don’t think marriage is in my future. I’m gay, and also committed to the traditional Christian view that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. When I contemplate a lifetime of celibacy, I know I want committed friends who will walk beside me on the journey. . . .” For the full article, see: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/september/why-cant-men-be-friends-wesley-hill-friendship.html?share=/Pceul5CuHwyT8rdo8t3t0Yf11CVb8aU&paging=off>.

endorsed marital vows as critical to uphold in a time when divorce rates were rising inside and outside of the church. In the midst of divorce, the church is called to uphold the permanence of marriage, calling spouses to confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and obedience. This report instructed church leaders to listen when couples in the midst of divorce come to them, so that the church can understand

the attitudes and behaviors of each spouse toward the other, how these affect the marriage relationship, and what God teaches concerning these attitudes and behaviors. But the church must not only listen, she must also speak in confrontation and with promise. Where overt sinful conduct is present, the church must address the Word of God in rebuke.⁹

Listening and understanding were highlighted as critical parts of relating to a culture with shifting ideas about the permanence of marriage. However, this was the beginning of the process, not the end. The 1980 statement on marriage urges churches to consider the purpose of discipline. In situations of divorce, which this statement primarily responded to, formal discipline may be a helpful way to help urge couples toward repentance and reconciliation.¹⁰ While taking caution not to exercise formal discipline in any situation leading to divorce, discipline was to be used if one or both spouses showed disdain for biblical teaching and would not repent of their sins.¹¹ This call to exercise discipline, repeated throughout the report, was explicitly stated in the “Guidelines for the Ministry of the Church” section in the 1980 study committee report on marriage guidelines, adopted by Synod 1980.

Our current social context is again experiencing a time of changing attitudes toward marriage. Rather than changing social norms regarding the permanence of marriage, our society is now experiencing a changed legal understanding of who may be married; that is, a changing of the legal status of marriage as between one man and one woman to the recognition of same-sex marriage as well (see section II of the majority report). In light of this changing legal definition of marriage, we again ask, How do we respond to different understandings of marriage? The 1980 study committee report on marriage guidelines, though focused on a different question, can be instructive to the church today as we again wonder about how to respond to changing societal understandings of marriage. The pattern of genuine listening, then responding with biblical counsel—using discipline as a response to continued hardness of heart—is the right paradigm for us to continue to employ.

As we listen and seek to understand the changing societal and legal understandings of what constitutes marriage, we note that in our current context civil and Christian marriage have come to take on very different forms. This is most clearly seen in the different definitions of marriage in the church and the state. As noted in the majority report (section V, B, and earlier), it is not new that church and state have defined marriage differently, for different purposes, in their own contexts.

In the midst of our observance of the differences in kind and content of the church and state definitions of marriage, we must continue to remember that, at its core, we are talking about something that is constitutive of a single

⁹ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 482.

¹⁰ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 482.

¹¹ *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 482-83, 485.

relationship. Without the marring of sin, marriage would be seen in its true form by both church and state. As we recognize the blurring of what defines marriage in our society, we are wise to recognize three additional truths:

1. Within the church too we see sin's divisive and destructive power. Christians are not immune to sin's marring power. We too show misunderstandings and wrongdoings in our understanding of marriage and sexuality. As we acknowledge this, we ought to do so with repentance and a willingness to follow God's law, looking to Scripture as our rule and guide for life.
2. As we come into relationship with those who do not hold to the church's definition of marriage, demonizing the other, making blanket assumptions about the other, or isolating ourselves from those who hold different views than we do is unacceptable. Such actions are not indicative of the gospel.
3. Different definitions of marriage within the church and the state do not give us the option to divest ourselves of engagement in the state or to delegitimize the role and power of the state.

Given the added legal element in the question of same-sex marriage that currently faces the church, we must add to the paradigm given to us by the 1980 report on marriage. In addition to genuine listening, then responding with biblical counsel—using discipline as a response to continued hardness of heart—we must also think about the way that we engage in and respond to a state that defines marriage in a way that is different from the biblical understanding of marriage outlined above. As noted in section V, A of the majority report, the state's definition of marriage does not require the church to change its definition of marriage. Rather, it raises questions about how the church relates to the state in light of these different definitions.

Principled pluralism (see section III, B of the majority report) provides a helpful framework for the latter question: How do we engage in and respond to a state that defines marriage in a way that is different from the biblical understanding of marriage? This framework clarifies who is responsible for what, especially after the fall, which has *necessarily* broken human political and social solidarity and introduced fundamental differences on the meaning and practice of things like marriage, ethics, and more. Principled pluralism understands that both the church and state are given relative authority within their respective areas—that is, while God has the complete authority, God has given limited authority in different areas, such as the church, the state, and society. Unlike God's authority, which extends to the entire created order, the relative authorities given to different areas for their own tasks and purposes go no further. The state, in carrying forth the task of public justice, may well become a forum for deliberation and hot debate as pluralist voices struggle to maintain, challenge, and reform received social and political wisdom. The Christian too is part of this politics of principled pluralism, but we know and have come to expect that the state will often only capture in part, or at times actually contradict, the reign of Christ. Christians nonetheless remain committed to that work of the state, knowing no *just* society can prescribe Christian ethics. Within the framework of principled pluralism, Christians remain deeply involved in the public square,

to which all people come to bring their distinctive and theologically rooted convictions into the political sphere.

In the case of same-sex marriage, both the state and the church have relative authority with respect to marriage. In this relative authority, however, we recognize the supreme authority of God as the one who created and ordained marriage. We can affirm that there are real, divine structures built into creation by God that can be understood by all people. Without the marring of sin, marriage would be seen in its true form by both church and state. The reality of sin, however, makes these structures more difficult to find by observation alone. It ought not be a great surprise, then, that in seeking to understand *what* marriage is, humanity may come to multiple definitions. The state, within its own relative authority, has the responsibility to seek to understand marriage so that it can rightly define it. While this may not lead the state to the biblical understanding of marriage, we ought not forget that the state has a legitimate, God-given relative authority different from the church's relative authority. In the legal and civil questions surrounding the changed status of same-sex marriage in Canada and the United States, this is important to keep in mind.

Christian engagement in the state ought always first to affirm God's supreme authority and the validity of the structures God has set in place. Second, citizens ought to affirm the relative authority of the state and the church. Third, Christians ought to be aware of the pervasive nature of sin in society, affecting both the church and those who are not a part of the church. Affirming God's providence and eschatological vision of a new heavens and new earth in which God's justice and peace will be made fully known, Christians should be encouraged to engage in the struggle to change those things in society that sin has corrupted. But we should engage in this change recognizing the important voice that others have in a pluralistic society and affirming the truth of God's Word. This still leaves the question of *what* change we should seek to engage, a question to which principled pluralism does not give exact answers. As noted in the majority report, Appendix C presents two ways of applying a Reformed understanding of the relationship between church and state.

While principled pluralism does not give us exact directives for how to engage the state, it can help us understand the connection between, and the distinctions between, the church and the state. Principled pluralism gives Christians tools to make sense of the world in which we now live and how to posture ourselves in light of it. As these distinctions are delineated, we begin to understand the different operative rules within the various spheres we inhabit. For example, principled pluralism alleviates the pressure to either have the church speak for the state or the state speak for the church. It should relieve us, further, that the state *cannot* "change" the definition of marriage any more than it can "change" the law of gravity—it has neither the competence nor the authority to exact a change of fundamental, created reality. This does not mean the state has no *interest* in definitions of marriage, since marriage and the family are the foundation of every human society. It does, however, mean that as states err further and further from the structures of creation, we can expect severe social and political fallout.

This also means that we may respond to questions of same-sex marriage differently in ecclesiastical and civil settings. In the church and in the state there are necessarily different relative authorities. It is under this framework,

then, that we determine proper action within each area. While principled pluralism does not give us definite answers as to how Christians ought to act, it does shape the way we think through our current situation, where the church's definition of marriage is different from that of the state. Different definitions do not necessarily have to be threatening; nor must we have a singular response in all areas of life.

II. Areas of disagreement with the report

In light of the church's theological teaching on marriage and our framework of principled pluralism, we note three areas of disagreement with the majority report: (1) officiating same-sex weddings, (2) playing a role in weddings and in the life of the church, and (3) questions of membership. The sections below include references to related sections in the majority report.

A. *Officiating same-sex weddings*

1. Legal aspects for pastors (cf. majority report section VI, A, 2, a)

The report provides helpful guidance regarding the legal aspects for pastors in officiating same-sex weddings.

There are very strong constitutional and legal protections for religious freedom and religious organizations in the United States. Canada's decade of experience with the legality of same-sex marriage also highlights the protection of religious liberty in Canada.¹² The situations highlighted in the report that may cause potential difficulty for pastors in the United States and Canada are important to note.

However, we deem the report to be insufficiently strong in its advice to churches regarding what to state on their website and/or in their articles of incorporation. Because of the growing incongruity between the CRC's convictions about marriage and the view accepted in our society, we regard it as important to stress that it is critical for churches to be clear and direct in what they state on their websites and in their articles of incorporation and other governing documents.

To enjoy the protections of religious freedom, it is important for the pastor and church to make clear in the church's documentation and website their identity as belonging to the Christian Reformed Church. Legally and politically the most critical factors helping pastors and churches to be protected by these laws are *clarity* and *consistency* in the application of religious principles. For this reason, churches ought to be explicit in stating their identity and in citing the beliefs and statements of the CRC, in this case particularly regarding the CRC understanding of marriage, and adopt policies specific to officiating and hosting weddings. Churches and pastors ought to be mindful of projecting and protecting their church identity so as not to make the outside world and government recategorize a facility or practice as outside the sphere of freedom of religion or belief.

The denomination has recently provided helpful guidance regarding this matter. For further resources on how to update your church's website

¹² For more on religious freedom, specifically regarding the situation in the United States, see *Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations* (by Steve Monsma and Stanley Carlson-Thies). For an extremely useful summary of Canadian legal and political precedent, see Janet Epp Buckingham, *Fighting over God: A Legal and Political History of Religious Freedom in Canada* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2014).

to reflect the beliefs of the CRC, articles of incorporation, and other official forms, please see the statements shared by the executive director of the CRCNA. These statements can be found at www.crcna.org/SynodResources under the headings “Model Church Facilities” and “Attachment to the Articles of Incorporation Form.”

2. Marks of a religious marriage (cf. majority report, section VI, A, 2, b)

As earlier noted, there are differences in kind and content between the ways the church and the state define marriage. Nonetheless, it remains the case that virtually all North American religious marriages are also civil marriages, with a single ceremony solemnizing both the civil and the religious marriage.

Therefore, to address the question regarding the types of marriages a pastor ought to solemnize, it is important to understand what makes a wedding religious. As noted by the report,

Typically, a religious wedding initiates a marriage between Christian believers. What makes a wedding religious? Certainly setting plays a part. A wedding in a church sanctuary surrounded by the symbols and expressions of the Christian faith suggests an intent to seek God’s and the Christian community’s blessing on a marriage. More specifically, three things distinguish a wedding solemnizing a religious marriage:

- a declaration of marriage (following the exchange of vows) using the formula “by the authority vested in me by the church of Jesus Christ and by the State/Province of . . .”
- liturgical elements that invoke the name of God and prayers that express God’s blessing on the couple
- acknowledgment that the couple’s vows are being stated and the marriage is being solemnized “before the face of God”

These explicit marks are important indicators of religious marriage. However, there may also be instances in which there are no explicit references to God, any particular Christian doctrine, or use of a declaration of marriage that uses the formula mentioned above, but still is performed by an agent of the church. Though such an instance would strip away important Christian elements of a marriage, such a solemnization of a marriage by a minister of the Word would still mark the marriage as a religious marriage. For a purely civil marriage, there are civil alternatives to having a minister of the Word perform the wedding ceremony; a justice of the peace or a civil officer could officiate. While the guidance of the report suggests that there may be rare instances in which a minister might officiate a civil same-sex wedding ceremony, we understand that suggestion to be incompatible with the theology and polity of the CRC.

A minister of the Word in North America is both an agent of the church and an agent of the state. As previously noted, there is thus not often a purely “religious” or purely “civil” marriage that occurs in North America. While the minister functions as an agent of both church and state, it is important to remember that ministers are “authorized to function as agents of the state only as a matter of convenience. Their being an agent of the church must weigh more heavily.”¹³ Ministers are given authority from the state to solemnize weddings on the basis of their ecclesial status

¹³ Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010), p. 372.

as being ordained to the office of minister of the Word. The *office* of the minister therefore has an attendant civil authority, but his or her civil authority proceeds first and foremost from the minister's office as a minister of the Word. The minister's role as an agent of the church is always primary. Thus, no ceremony performed by a minister of the Word has the capacity to be purely civil, even if the ceremony is stripped of the explicit markers of a religious wedding. In all cases of a pastor officiating a wedding ceremony, the pastor is doing so by way of his or her ecclesial office.

The majority report states that the religious markers listed above are what makes a wedding ceremony religious. We deem that information insufficient, noting that a pastor's role in officiating a marriage also is a critical component of a religious marriage.

3. Officiating a civil same-sex marriage (cf. majority report section VI, A, 2, d)

The majority report states,

Most requests to officiate at a wedding involve an implicit request for a religious as well as civil marriage ceremony. Where such requests involve a same-sex couple, the above pastoral guidance applies.

Given the discussion of religious and civil marriage noted above, the involvement of an agent of the church (that is, a minister of the Word or another person whose ability to solemnize marriages is given on the basis of their affiliation with an ecclesial body) necessarily means that the marriage is not *merely* civil, even if the explicit marks of the wedding would indicate as much. Thus, pastors cannot officiate a civil same-sex wedding ceremony. Were they to do so, the ceremony would, in some way, have the marks of a religious ceremony, because the pastor would be officiating on the basis of ecclesial office.

However, in the case of a pastor being asked to officiate a civil same-sex wedding, in light of the biblical teaching on marriage and the primacy of the role of the pastor as agent of the church, guidance that suggests there may be, under certain circumstances, latitude for a pastor to officiate a civil same-sex wedding is in conflict with the theology and polity of the CRC. First, a pastor, whose authority to officiate weddings is based on ecclesial status, cannot perform a *merely* civil ceremony. Second, officiating a same-sex wedding would be in conflict with the CRC's teaching on marriage. Again, a marriage ceremony, even stripped of the explicit marks of a religious ceremony as listed in the majority report section VI, A, 2, b, cannot be merely civil if a pastor officiates the ceremony. A pastor officiating a same-sex wedding with no explicit religious marks, then, would again be contrary to the teaching of the CRC. The same pastoral guidance given for solemnizing a religious same-sex marriage should apply in this situation. When a pastor has acted in violation of the Church Order, as in the case of officiating a wedding that is contrary to the Word of God, one must first take the matter up with the consistory of the church and then go through the established church polity to address the situation.

It is important to note, however, that while officiating a civil same-sex marriage is not consistent with the CRC's understanding of marriage, Church Order Article 69 (regarding the solemnizing of marriage), and the CRC's teaching on homosexuality stated in both the 1973 and 2002

synodical reports, there may be situations where two individuals married in a civil same-sex marriage could be fully consistent with CRC teaching.

As noted in the majority report, there could be a same-sex couple committed to living within the bounds of the 1973 report on homosexuality—that is, two same-sex oriented individuals committed to celibacy who do not seek a religious marriage but may have due cause to be civilly married. Even more likely would be the case of a couple that has already been married and is now entering the church. In the latter case, it could happen that a same-sex couple with children, through the course of many conversations, Scripture reading, and pastoral guidance, becomes convicted that a same-sex sexually active relationship is not consistent with the teaching of Scripture. This couple could determine that the legal, medical, and personal protections provided to themselves and their children through civil marriage are important to their well-being, and they could decide to maintain a legal married status. Were that couple to maintain celibacy within their relationship, their civil marriage could be in line with the teachings of the church on same-sex relationships. In other words, *remaining* in a same-sex, celibate relationship may not be in conflict with biblical teaching on sexuality and marriage. Such decisions ought to be made in concert with the consistory of the church and with deep deliberation and prayer. Were the couple to decide to remain married in a celibate relationship, the couple and the consistory would be wise also to discuss together what to communicate, and how best to communicate, about these decisions to the church body so as not to confuse the public witness of the church in regard to same-sex marriage. A Christian person—or a current member of a church—entering into such a relationship would, however, be in conflict with the church’s teaching on marriage.

In situations such as these, again principled pluralism is a helpful framework. The state does have the relative authority to establish and uphold civil marriages. Within this area, a definition of marriage different from that of the church would be upheld and protected. It would not necessarily be inconsistent to uphold the church’s views on marriage and same-sex sexual behavior while still maintaining the legal protections afforded by the relative authority of the state. This framework can help negotiate the difference between an instance in which someone is married in a civil same-sex ceremony and an instance in which an agent of the church officiates a same-sex marriage. In the case of the former, we affirm what is noted in the report (at the end of section VI, A, 2, d):

At the very least, however, these examples demonstrate that a civil same-sex marriage is not inherently in conflict with the CRC understanding of same-sex orientation and behavior nor the church’s position on marriage.

As we have noted, however, we do not take this to mean that a pastor may officiate a same-sex marriage.

4. Playing a role in a same-sex wedding (cf. majority report section VI, A, 4)

A Christian person may have a wide range of involvements in a same-sex wedding, and no report could hope to be exhaustive. We hear stories about florists, bakers, and photographers struggling to come to terms with supporting or providing services for same-sex weddings. We, the writers of the minority report, affirm what the majority report says:

Providing these services to same-sex couples may violate the conscience of some individuals in our churches. Others may feel no burden of conscience to refuse services to same-sex couples. Such decisions are best made on an individual level. Just as we do not mandate that members do not provide catering for bar mitzvahs or arrange flowers for a wedding between two atheists, providing services to other people does not inherently imply an agreement with the event taking place or with every aspect of the customer's life.

However, we deem there is more to be said. There is more to "playing a role" than providing business-related services for the day of a wedding. Within the committee's work of listening to various classes in the CRC, questions often came up with regard to how a Christian might respond to a request to participate in a same-sex marriage ceremony itself.

For laypeople asked to participate in the ceremony—standing up, Bible reading, preparing music (and so forth)—we further affirm the above, that some may feel a burden of conscience to refuse to participate while others may choose to attend and participate as they would in another religious ceremony. Participation (of various forms) does not *need* to imply endorsement. However, Christians should understand that same-sex marriage is inconsistent with biblical teaching about marriage. Participation in a same-sex marriage runs the risk of placing such members in the position of supporting a relationship that is contrary to Scripture.

Ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors (that is, all officebearers of the church) must be held to a different standard. Since those in that office will be seen as operating out of their ordained roles, they should avoid accepting roles in same-sex wedding ceremonies because such acceptance and participation can easily be seen as supporting a sinful pattern of sexuality.

The advice for officebearers is different because it is harder for them to act independent of their office, which bears authority on the basis of the confessional and doctrinal positions of the church and the denomination. Officebearers may well attend a same-sex wedding (as they might attend an interfaith wedding) but ought to refrain from playing a role. If officebearers participated in a same-sex wedding ceremony, they would be embracing a higher risk of endorsing the same-sex relationship, because the authority of their office might be associated with endorsing a relationship precluded by the Bible.

B. Belonging

1. Membership (cf. majority report section VI, B, 2)

The committee's majority report raises important dimensions of membership as it pertains to same-sex couples. Such couples, though without official membership, may already be involved in the church and integrated into the life of the body in some, if not many, ways. The relational dynamics surrounding questions of membership are important to consider. However, there are other dimensions of membership that we think are important to highlight as well, particularly the connection between membership and discipline and questions of participation in the life of the church.

Membership in the church is necessarily complicated at present, partly because church discipline and practical discipleship have become major challenges for many congregations today. In a context in which discipline has often become a bad word, it is important to remember the clear

relationship between discipling and discipline. In fact, as Article 78 of the Church Order puts it,

The purpose of admonition and discipline is to restore those who err to faithful obedience to God and full fellowship with the congregation, to maintain the holiness of the church, and thus to uphold God's honor.¹⁴

There is a close and essential relationship between making disciples and discipline. The Heidelberg Catechism refers to church discipline as a key for opening and closing the kingdom of heaven,¹⁵ and the Belgic Confession lists discipline as one of the three marks of the true church.¹⁶ Discipline, in short, is something every Christian *necessarily* experiences as part of their regeneration in Christ, and in this respect the elders of the church truly do hold "keys of the kingdom" for building true faith. Marriage itself, we should not forget, is a structure of discipline, of *discipleship*, to which some are called.

Understanding discipline as a part of discipleship is the attitude that consistories should consider when deliberating on membership for same-sex couples. The goal of discipline, unambiguously, is a restoration of right relationship as Scripture teaches. But the path is about creating disciples, not simply fencing the membership or excluding the often already marginal.

Membership, in the first place, is certainly open in all its forms (including leadership) to Christians living lives of celibate, same-sex attraction. But membership questions for noncelibate same-sex couples need to follow the path of discipleship laid out in the Church Order. The above advice on divorce is useful for the church here too:

The church must not only listen, she must also speak in confrontation and with promise. Where overt sinful conduct is present, the church must address the Word of God in rebuke.¹⁷

As noted earlier, same-sex marriage, unless it is a celibate marriage, is incompatible with the criteria for soundness in doctrine and life. Discipleship for members erring in life or doctrine, as noted in the Church Order, results in discipline as a next step to urge the member to repentance and restored full fellowship (see Church Order Art. 78). While the Church Order used to require that congregations follow exact "steps of discipline,"¹⁸ there are no longer specific steps that must be taken in order to enact discipline; consistories are now given greater freedom in the exact modes of operation for church discipline. Discipline is further complicated because some consistories no longer possess markers and means for discipline, having opened communion tables and attendance to a wide range of participants. Many churches also have categories of "regular attender" or other such designations for those who are committed to a church body but have not become formal members, to whom

¹⁴ DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, p. 400.

¹⁵ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 83, 85.

¹⁶ Belgic Confession, Article 29: The Marks of the True Church.

¹⁷ *Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 482.

¹⁸ See DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 411-12. These steps were (1) private advice not to partake of the sacrament, (2) public announcement and prayer in worship without the name, (3) public announcement and prayer with the name, and (4) public announcement in worship that an excommunication of the named person will take place at a certain time unless there is repentance.

discipline would apply. With this, many churches embrace members and nonmembers in nonordained (that is, not elder or deacon) leadership roles in the church, so those who are not members may already be serving in many capacities in a church. They may be Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, vacation Bible school volunteers, greeters, and more.

If a member enters into a same-sex marriage, he or she becomes subject to the regular admonition and discipline of the church. As stated by Church Order Article 81-a,

Members who have sinned in life or doctrine shall be faithfully disciplined by the consistory and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from membership in the church of Christ.

Consistories may first wish to address such a member as simply “under discipline.” If the member is placed under discipline, this may also include informing the member that until he or she heeds the admonition and discipline of the church, the member is no longer in good standing and for the time being is not permitted to participate in communion (see also VI, B, 2, d of the majority report; the church’s communion practice for those who have entered same-sex marriage relationships should be no different from its practice for those who are in other sorts of relationships that the Bible identifies as sinful). It may be that this discipleship fails to produce repentance, at which point church discipline also has the task of removing the pretense of allowing the church to keep in standing a member obviously at odds with the teaching of the church. But this is certainly not the goal; in the administration of discipline, we must always keep the goal in mind: repentance and restored fellowship. Consistories are wise to remember that “preventive discipline,” that is, both churchwide teaching on sexuality and marriage and loving confrontation outside the bounds of formal discipline, is the most effective means of discipline.

Finally, in the survey and in the listening sessions conducted by the committee, broader questions of participation arose. Most frequently, these questions surrounded day-to-day participation in the life of the church. As in the discussion above, someone in a same-sex marriage could have a wide range of involvements in the life of the church, and, again, no report could hope to comment on all the possibilities. Broadly speaking, however, it is important to make a distinction between participation in the life of the church and participation in its leadership. As with any person who seeks to participate in worship or other aspects of the life of the church, those in same-sex marriage relationships should be allowed, and encouraged, to participate. The level of participation should be no different from what has been made available to any other person desiring to explore life in the church community. It cannot be repeated enough that all people are to be welcomed into participation in the worship and other aspects of the life of the church. Soundness in life and doctrine is not a precondition for participation. Including anyone who desires to participate into the life of the church, however, does not necessitate including all in leadership roles. Leadership roles such as elder, deacon, and any ministry leadership role should be limited to members in good standing.

2. Requests for membership (cf. majority report section VI, B, 2, b)

Initial membership in the church always begins with the sacrament of baptism and the vows that new members take before they submit to this sacrament. In the case of infant baptism, the vows come later in the public profession of faith. In profession of faith, the noninfant member affirms the baptismal vows taken by his or her parent or sponsor on his or her behalf.

In these vows the church member promises to “forsake the world and to put to death” his or her “old nature and to lead a godly life.” Further, the professing member promises to “submit to the government of the church” and also, if he or she “should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline.”

When a person enters a same-sex marriage, he or she violates his or her baptism vows. Since same-sex marriage undermines the biblical teaching on marriage, the issue of having become delinquent in doctrine arises. If the same-sex marriage initiates a relationship that involves sexual activity, the issue of delinquency in life also surfaces, since the Bible disallows same-sex sexual activity. The Christian Reformed Church’s reports on homosexuality have affirmed and reaffirmed this biblical teaching (see section I, D of the majority report).

If a member in good standing enters into a same-sex marriage, he or she becomes subject to the regular admonition and discipline of the church. If a person in a same-sex marriage wishes to become a member of the church, he or she ought to abandon that sexual relationship as part of his or her forsaking the world, putting to death the old nature, and beginning to lead a godly life. This commitment is part of taking or accepting his or her baptismal vows. Particularly in the case of same-sex couples who are raising children, breaking the social relationships that having and raising children involves is not desirable or necessary. In addition, abandoning a same-sex relationship in seeking membership need not mean more or less than a commitment to celibacy as a member of the church.

The pastors and elders will need to discuss these matters as they arise with Christian love and compassion as part of the process of preparation for baptism or membership in the church. In the case of members who enter same-sex marriages, the church needs to be both compassionate and deliberate in confronting such members, as it would in admonishing and disciplining any other sin.

II. Recommendation

That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Ms. Jessica Driesenga and Rev. Dr. John Rottman when the minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage is considered.

Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance
re Same-sex Marriage
Jessica Driesenga
John M. Rottman

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I. Introduction

The Christian faith was born out of persecution. The story begins even before Christ walked the earth. The ancient Israelites experienced the brutality of violent suppression and displacement because of their identity as God's chosen people. After the New Covenant established through Christ, the early disciples risked their freedom and lives as they struggled to establish the early church in an empire that worshiped another human being as a god. Even as Christianity emerged as the dominant religious faith in Europe, persecution remained a common part of life, sometimes as the result of grievous conflict among Christian groups themselves. During the Protestant Reformation, many of the founders of our own denomination's traditions were forced into exile or prison, and the intended audience of their writing and preaching was often persecuted congregations in their home countries. And we cannot wash over the complicity of many of these Reformation leaders themselves in acts of violent suppression against religious dissenters.

Today the persecution of Christians is a global phenomenon—and a growing problem. In too many places Christians face a daily horror of brutal violence and harassment, either at the hand of the state or by extremists in society. The bloody insurgencies of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab in Africa; the ruthless destruction by Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq; the interreligious conflicts in India and neighboring countries; the struggle of nonregistered Christian communities in China and elsewhere in Asia: these are experiences of tens of millions of Christians throughout the world every day. But even in Western democracies, where legal protections for religious liberty are relatively strong, the threats to faithful presence in society can be quite real, even if they are indirect and less severe. Many Christians in North

America are increasingly anxious about their own religious freedom.¹ All of these concerns cry out urgently for a Christian response.

But *how* should we respond? Here we confront a tension. On the one hand, Christ himself, who suffered and died at the hands of an oppressive government and hostile public, declared the persecuted “blessed” and promised them the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10). Indeed, we can point to many examples in which persecution appears to have strengthened the church in the long run. On the other hand, the church experiences persecution as an evil that Christians have an obligation to combat. It is a violation of *shalom*, a wrong that diminishes who we are as imagebearers of God. Any effort by Christians to address persecution will need to address this tension between the “blessedness” of the persecuted and the injustice of persecution.

II. Our mandate

We submit this report as a first step in a response by the Christian Reformed Church in North America to the problem of religious persecution and threats to religious freedom across the globe. The specific goals of this report, as overtured by Classis Toronto and mandated by Synod 2013, are as follows:

- a. Provide a Reformed framework that establishes a biblical and theological grounding for religious liberty and the injustice of religious persecution.
- b. Propose individual and group action that empowers the church in our increasingly secularized North American setting to walk alongside and intercede on behalf of those who are subject to religious persecution or denied religious liberty at home or abroad.
- c. Report on [the committee’s] progress to Synod 2015 and provide the completed study to Synod 2016.

(Acts of Synod 2013, p. 641)

The mandate is remarkably ambitious. First, synod asks the committee to cast its vision across the globe, a forthright recognition that geography matters when considering the profoundly varied experience of religion-based conflict. Egypt, Canada, Pakistan, the United States, Nigeria, China—these are very different contexts for the practice of religion and therefore require different responses. Second, synod asks for a biblical and theological grounding for two concepts—religious liberty and persecution—that are themselves deeply contested among theologians, philosophers, and social scientists. Indeed, the second point is related to the first: intellectual disagreements often come to light most clearly when we compare perspectives on liberty and persecution cross-nationally. Consider, for example, that while Anglo-American models of human rights justify a robust response to religious persecution, non-Westerners often reject Western notions of rights as too individualistic, at best, or downright imperialistic, at worst.

While these aspects of the mandate are daunting, it is difficult to see how any serious treatment of persecution could avoid addressing them. And the committee’s initial work confirms Classis Toronto’s sense of urgency. The experience of our own denomination is illustrative. For a denomination of its size, the CRCNA has an unusually large international outreach, with staff in numerous ministry fields throughout the world working with hundreds of

¹ While scholars often use the terms religious liberty and religious freedom in subtly different ways, for the purposes of this report we will use the terms interchangeably.

indigenous ministry partners. In whatever form—traditional evangelistic missions, development work, media ministry—this physical presence has exposed people and infrastructure to threat in many regions that lack robust protections for religious expression. Even in the United States and Canada, where safeguards for religious liberty have been relatively strong, church leaders and ordinary parishioners have been raising alarms about a gradual erosion in both legal protections and cultural tolerance for faithful Christian living.

In this report, the committee hopes to address these challenging aspects of the mandate in a way that both edifies and engages the church. As with any report of this kind, we have had to make choices about points of emphasis, lest we chase intellectual rabbit trails and lose our general audience. (We have provided a companion website to this report to provide deeper analysis and other resources: www.crcna.org/persecution.) While we delve into biblical theology, church history, and confessional frameworks, we have often traded breadth of analysis for a careful focus on what we consider the most relevant ideas and insights. We have also sought to illustrate the realities of persecution and religious liberty by telling the stories of members of the CRCNA both in North America and abroad. Above all, we wish the report to be *useful*. Our recommendations are multifaceted and multilayered, with suggestions for leaders and ordinary members alike.

The committee, which includes academics, clergy, a retired diplomat, and CRCNA ministry partners (some with extensive experience abroad), has met as a whole on three occasions (October 2013, February 2014, and July 2014). We developed a division of labor with several smaller groups working on specific sections through most of 2015, complementing many hours of work by individual committee members. The committee has presented initial findings to CRCNA leaders and outside scholars and practitioners for feedback before issuing this report. Dr. James Payton, Jr., a member of our study committee, also served as a liaison to a special stakeholding organization within the CRCNA, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. In addition, Calvin College has supported the work of the study committee by providing research assistance through the Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics and through the Center for Social Research. (We thank Calvin students Joshua Nederhood, Jenny Lamb, and Joshua VanderLeest for their capable support.)

The committee quickly recognized that the mandate raises a host of key questions and tensions, including the following:

- What should we do with the overall biblical message—a message Christ himself articulates (e.g., Matt. 5:10)—that persecution can be a “blessing” to believers and the church?
- How does that square with the church’s experience of persecution as an injustice that we have some obligation to combat?
- How do we define persecution and religious liberty?
- How can the church, in contrast to other institutions, confront legal systems or public officials that condone or perpetrate systematic abuse of people of faith? What are the proper limits to those interventions?
- As an organization, are there resources the CRCNA could provide its members and partners—both in North America and beyond—to address their concerns about persecution and religious freedom?

- At a more interpersonal level, how might the church address the conditions for distrust and animosity across and even within faith traditions—conditions that are so often the root of the problem of persecution?
- Does the church have a perspective on pluralism that might help us address the political and social dimensions of persecution?

These are wide-ranging and complex questions, but the study committee has benefited from the fact that the Scriptures and the historical experience of the church provide keen insight into answering them. In section III, we explore three interrelated *contexts* for assessing the problem of religious persecution from a Reformed perspective. The discussion commences from a focused biblical exegesis (III, A), which sets up theological discussions rooted in church history (III, B) and in the Reformed confessions (III, C). Taken together, these approaches—exegetical, historical, and systematic/confessional—provide a framework for the rest of the report.

Section IV of the report tackles the problem of persecution as it is experienced in the world today. We provide working definitions of religion, religious freedom, and persecution, and in light of those definitions we examine how violence and harassment have affected the modern church. We give special emphasis to the CRCNA's experience in both North America and abroad, using an extensive global survey of the denomination's international ministry staff as a key piece of evidence.

We conclude with recommendations that are focused on two goals: (1) orienting the North American church around the suffering of brothers and sisters across the globe and (2) mobilizing the church against that suffering (see sections V-VI). We have considered the efforts of other churches and denominations, but we have also noted that those efforts are surprisingly rare. To the extent that we have adapted those peer efforts, we have been mindful of our denomination's unique global footprint and distinctive beliefs and practices.

III. Context for the problem: Three Christian perspectives

A. *The story of Scripture: A biblical perspective*

We are created for right relationships—relationships with God, with each other, and with the whole of creation. The Bible calls that state *shalom*—a state we come from, and a place we are going to. As our confessions declare, this relational nature reflects our exceptional status as imagebearers of God. (We discuss the confessional tradition in section III, C.)

God created us for these relationships, but the fall shattered them. God intervened to promise redemption, but time would unfold with conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The sweep of the biblical narrative suggests that persecution is one consequence of this loss of *shalom*. At times, the ancient Israelites experienced persecution because they were God's chosen people, but they also persecuted prophets sent from God to summon them back to faithfulness. Persecution continued and intensified in the New Covenant, as the early disciples struggled to establish the church in the Roman Empire.

Scripture speaks of persecution inflicted on God's people but also of God's work of deliverance and even of blessing in the midst of persecution.

While God himself does not send persecution, divine revelation indicates that his redemptive purposes can work *through* it—as embodied and fulfilled in the person of Christ, who suffered and died as a result of the complicity of a Roman authority with the wishes of a hostile crowd.

In the Old Testament, the chief instance of the persecution of Israel is their slavery in Egypt. A new pharaoh, who comes to power after Joseph and his generation die, enslaves the Israelites, working them ruthlessly, and, many years later, when Moses requests that they leave Egypt to worship God, another pharaoh persecutes them even more (Ex. 1:1-5:21). God systematically judges the Egyptians and the gods they worship because of Pharaoh's refusal to grant God's people the religious liberty to serve him. As God himself says, "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD" (Ex. 12:12). God shows that he is sovereign over Israel and over the nations that would harass his people.

But ancient Israel is too often disloyal to God the Redeemer. Again and again God warns the Israelites not to practice the religious rites of neighboring nations that would lead them into idolatry. In the times of the judges and kings, Israel nevertheless turns again and again to idols. While God sends punishment and then deliverance, Israel does not respond with faithfulness. While God sends his messengers, the prophets, to call his people back to him, the people repeatedly refuse to heed, and instead they persecute God's messengers (cf. 2 Chron. 36:15-17). Both Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:12) and the first martyr in the New Testament, Stephen (Acts 7:52), emphasize this sorry pattern.

Along the way in the Old Testament, not only the messengers/prophets of God suffer persecution; so do Israelites who walk in God's ways. Psalmists cry out about persecution they face for fidelity toward God (cf. Ps. 9:13; 69:26; 119:84-85). In captivity and exile, those who remain faithful to God and his commands also experience persecution. When three Hebrew young men refuse to bow to and worship Nebuchadnezzar's image, they are thrown into a fiery furnace. But God protects them dramatically, leading not only to their deliverance but also to a heathen king's confessing God throughout his empire and protecting God's worship (Dan. 3). Further, when Daniel refuses to change his prayer practices because of a repressive religious edict by King Darius, he is thrown into a den of hungry lions. But God protects him, and Darius also confesses God's greatness to the whole of his kingdom (Dan. 6).

Though these are merely foretastes of what Jesus would later accomplish by letting himself be persecuted and crucified, they carry with them Jesus' intention for his followers: the ability to remain faithful in the face of persecution, without bitterness toward persecutors, to help God's name be made known to all peoples.

That is the substance of Jesus' teaching on persecution, when in the Sermon on the Mount he tells his listeners (Matt. 5:10-12):

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.—Matt. 5:10-12

A bit later Jesus adds, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45; cf. Luke 6:27-36). While training the twelve apostles to go out into ministry,

Jesus equips them to endure the persecution to come, knowing that God is sovereign and this life is fleeting: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28; cf. Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:1-2, 23-27).

In the New Covenant, persecution becomes the backdrop for the diffusion and display of the power of the gospel. Consider the contrast that occurs with the coming of the Holy Spirit: at Jesus’ crucifixion, his disciples flee. But, in the Book of Acts, after being fully equipped by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the same disciples face persecution boldly, and the power in them works in others to convey the truth of their message. After Peter and John heal a man lame from birth, Peter seizes the opportunity to preach the gospel, and many who hear him believe his message (Acts 4:4). The Jewish religious leaders arrest Peter and John, and Peter also preaches to *them*. Forbidden to speak in Jesus’ name, Peter and John respond with trust in their Sovereign God: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

In the New Testament, Christ-followers forgive their persecutors, loving their enemies as Jesus has taught (Matt. 5:44; 6:14), a response that eventually transforms not only a people but an empire. This is illustrated beautifully in the story of how Stephen witnesses to the truth about Jesus. While being stoned to death, he responds by forgiving his persecutors: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). And there is no need for violence to force or manipulate conversions, or to bring peace with former enemies. God answers Stephen’s prayer and works within the heart of Saul of Tarsus until Christianity’s earliest and fiercest persecutor acknowledges Jesus as Lord and plants many churches throughout the world of his time (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-31; 11:19-30; 12:25-28:31).

God’s story reveals good even in times of persecution. But the Bible does not leave us with the message that suffering through persecution should simply be endured—even welcomed and encouraged—as a blessing. Especially for those of us who are generally free to practice our faith, our obligation is to use that freedom to seek the restoration of right relationship and to pursue that same freedom for others. The writer of Hebrews prompts us with a two-edged message. He reminds believers of how they had once “endured in a great conflict full of suffering” (Heb. 10:32-38). He calls these believers to maintain their faith in the face of suffering. To the others (like most of us, who are not affected by severe persecution or do not face it directly), the message is “Remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Heb. 13:3). If we have religious liberty, it is intended to bring about God’s *shalom*, and we are called to extend that liberty to others, even to those who are spread far and wide in other parts of the world.

The author of Hebrews and the apostles all knew that because of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and imminent return of the Son of the Sovereign God, the advance of the kingdom has become possible not only through religious liberty but also in religious persecution. In the spirit of faith, hope, and love, the early church could confidently endure persecution while strengthening each other in love. They could even show kindness and forgiveness to their persecutors to help them “escape from the trap of

the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:26). Today God calls each of us, in our own way, to join the Suffering Servant, to endure persecution with courage, to come alongside those being persecuted, and to make intercession for transgressors, even persecutors (Isa. 53:12).

The Bible's final book indicates that persecution will be the lot of God's people until the end of time. It describes the persecution of the church as outright war: "Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). God has put a longing and a hope for that lost *shalom* within his imagebearers. Thus, as Christians, we do not simply seek to stop persecution or to embrace religious liberty: we seek *shalom* with God and with others, even in times of persecution, and even when following our conscience endangers the freedoms we hold dear.

B. The story of the church universal: A historical perspective

As we have seen, already during the time of the apostles the church experienced persecution. Persecution continued as a constant threat—and too often a brutal reality—for the first three centuries of the Christian era. Some ancient church leaders wrote to Roman rulers, protesting the injustice inflicted on Christians; others wrote to encourage Christians to stand firm; and others—some leaders and many lay members—suffered gruesome torments and martyrdom. The records kept and copied in subsequent centuries include stories of horrendous suffering and brutality, of faithfulness and apostasy alike, and of the wonder of having this end with the declaration of toleration from Emperors Constantine and Licinius in 313 A.D. Respected church leaders had written, urging that faith and religion must not be forced—that religion coerced is religion corrupted.

This advice was not followed, however. The conversion of Emperor Constantine did not signal the end of religious persecution. While the Christian faith now suddenly and unexpectedly knew the favor of imperial authority and correlative religious liberty, rulers soon decided to use the strong arm of the state to enforce religious conformity. So, while religious persecution had ended for the Christian church, it was inflicted on those judged by the church as defective in teaching and practice. Soon enough, those condemned as heretics bore the wrath of the state because of their views; exile, punishment, and persecution were their lot. When Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity the state religion in the 380s, a door opened not only to new opportunities of Christian influence on the empire but also to further use of force against people who did not conform in faith and religious practice. Beginning in the fourth century, Christian emperors persecuted Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, Samaritans, Jews, and the remaining pagans.

The pressures on people who did not conform continued on an intermittent but often ruthless basis. This alienated Syrian and Coptic Christians—denounced as Nestorians and Monophysites—from the Christian empire, which alternately wooed and then hounded them from the fourth through the seventh centuries. With such constant pressure and periodic persecution, Middle Eastern Christians ended up welcoming the invading forces of Islam when they arrived in the seventh century. Even though relegated to

second-class status in the Muslim realm, these Christians found rule by Muslims less onerous than persecution by orthodox Christian rulers.

Along the way, as generations passed, some who had adhered to Christianity converted to Islam, thereby avoiding the social, vocational, and personal restrictions that fell upon non-Muslims. By the 13th century, though, with Muslim realms under assault from Turks, Crusaders, and Mongols, reaction set in with vigor against Christians. Persecution was ordered or at least allowed by various Muslim rulers; some Christians accepted martyrdom, while others apostatized, converting to Islam. This pattern continued during subsequent centuries, with especially harsh reprisals against the remaining Christians during the past two hundred years to the present.

This ongoing pattern of persecution—always possible, occasionally threatened, and too frequently enacted—ended up virtually extinguishing the Christian presence in the Middle East. What remains today are mere remnants of what were large and vigorous churches. While Coptic Christians have managed to survive to the present, religious persecution has decimated their numbers, which stand now at about 10 percent of Egypt's population. The Church of the East (called "Nestorian" by its opponents) and the Jacobite Church (dubbed "Monophysite" by its opponents) now exist in drastically shrunken numbers and in restricted enclaves, which are currently being expelled by the forces of the Islamic State, committed to exterminating the last vestiges of Christianity in the region.

In Western Christendom, from the early Middle Ages on through the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the pattern of religious persecution for nonconformity continued. During this long period, religious tolerance was notable mostly by its absence—so much so that the few areas that tried it in the 16th century seemed bizarre exceptions to a sanctified norm. The crusading ideals propounded at the end of the 11th century and sporadically thereafter welcomed the force of arms to reclaim territory and to deal finally with those who professed another religion—whether Muslims in Palestine or Albigensians in southern France.

Our own forebears in the Protestant Reformation did not break this pattern: in Zurich, Anabaptists were drowned in the Limmat River by order of the Reformed city council. Intra-Protestant tensions led to hostilities between Lutherans and the Reformed that helped bring on the Thirty Years' War. Eventually, an exhausted Christendom welcomed the separation of church and state arising from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which brought the era of religious wars to a bloody end.

Since then, Western Europe and the North American nations that emerged have emphasized a distinction between the power of the state and the claims of faith. Religious liberty has been proclaimed and, for the most part, practiced. But during the 20th and early 21st centuries, this pattern has devolved into a secularism that comes off as disdainful toward any and all religious truth claims. Postmodernism, in what has been called our "post-Christian era," demands a toleration that brooks no final truth claims.

This means that the Christian church in the West now faces pressures we have not previously experienced. Though preceding generations might have held to the easy assumption of a common Christian background in our society, morals, and attitudes, that is no longer possible for committed Christians in the present. This pattern could even accelerate and confront us

with religious persecution in the foreseeable future. But when we recall what Christians in other historical periods or geographical regions have endured or are facing today, we are challenged with the undeniable necessity of scaling back our complaints and trying to utilize the freedoms we cherish to protect the religious liberty we still enjoy.

The story of religious persecution and religious liberty in the history of the church offers us much to consider, reasons for confidence as we encounter whatever may yet come, and the invitation to show necessary humility as we reflect on what so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have experienced over the years.

C. The story of confessions: A theological perspective

The historical experience of the church was the seedbed for its confessions. The Three Forms of Unity—the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618-1619)—are received by the Christian Reformed Church in North America as the true teaching on the message of Scripture and of God for his people. They are also received from a place and a time in which very real challenges to freedom of religion or belief were only starting to be worked out politically and in society.

The Belgic Confession (BC) itself, the oldest of these doctrinal standards, was prepared by Guido de Brès (who died as a martyr in 1567) to prove to his Catholic persecutors that adherents to the Reformed faith were not rebels. A year after its writing, a copy was sent to King Philip II with the declaration that the Reformed church stood ready to obey the government in all lawful things but that they would “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire,” rather than deny the truths of the confession.

The Heidelberg Catechism (HC), a somewhat warmer and more personalized teaching on the faith, was itself written under certain duress to address disunity and widening persecutions in the church. Even the Canons of Dort (CD), finished in 1619, were written before, and in some ways in anticipation of, the terrible religious wars that would sweep through the European continent, concluded (arguably) only with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). The basic code of political redress in that treaty, *cujus regio ejus religio* (the ruler determines the religion of the realm), was still very far from what we would consider freedom of religion or belief. Religious persecution in some cases became even more severe after the treaty, as the state religion became the sole prerogative of the ruler, who had an absolute right to impose his faith upon his subjects. Under this principle, foreign rulers had no legal grounds to intervene to protect their coreligionists. Although religion as the basis for interstate warfare was thus removed, at least theoretically, rulers were free to persecute those of their subjects who dissented from the state church.

Our Three Forms of Unity are therefore no strangers to times of serious religious persecution and are the historical results of extreme turmoil, disagreement, and persecution within and by Christian states and groups. From them we can give a picture of religious liberty and its place in a Reformed theological perspective.

The confessions speak resoundingly to the idea that respect of religious freedom for *all persons*—Christian or otherwise—is a biblical imperative. It is rooted first in the opening chapters of Genesis and in the doctrine of the

image of God. “Let us make mankind in our image” (BC, Art. 9; see also HC, Q&A 6), God says in Genesis 1:26. Further, we learn that though “devils and evil spirits are so corrupt that they are enemies of God” (BC, Art. 12), God did not abandon his imagebearers “to chance or fortune” (BC, Art. 13) but keeps watch “over us with fatherly care, sustaining all creatures under his lordship, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father” (BC, Art. 13; see also HC, Q&A 1).

Still, the fall of humankind terribly breaks that first image. “By their sin they separated themselves from God, who was their true life, having corrupted their entire nature,” and “made themselves guilty and subject to physical and spiritual death, having become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all their ways. They lost all their excellent gifts which they had received from God, and retained none of them *except for small traces* which are enough to make them inexcusable” (BC, Art. 14, emphasis added). That basic disobedience—that breaking of *shalom*, as we described earlier—has spread through the whole human race and through creation itself (BC, Art. 15). It is so fundamental that no good thing, and certainly no salvation, can be realized apart from God’s saving grace (BC, Art. 16-17). Therefore any justification (BC, Art. 23) or good work (BC, Art. 2) is an unmerited gift and free grace of God (HC, Q&A 12-15, 59-61).

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* shows we are a totally fallen, wicked race who cannot of our own power, or of common grace, be saved (CD, Point I, Rejection of the Errors, IV). Yet while salvation is lost to us, except through Christ (HC, Q&A 20), the traces of God’s image linger, and even the tiniest trace of that image *demand*s respect and dignity—demands a reverence of our fellow human person. It is, in fact, these traces (given in common grace) that make possible any human life and society after the fall.²

For our purposes, this means two things:

- Because only God can save, any human coercion of religion is necessarily futile, and probably idolatrous, claiming for the persecutor a power of correction and salvation that can only rightly belong to God.³
- In matters of religion it is the duty and calling of Christians to steward and advocate freedom of religion or belief as fundamental to the recognition of the sovereignty of God.

As a committee, we have often found it useful to frame these confessional insights in terms of *pluralism*. By *pluralism*, we do *not* mean merely that we are all exposed to cultural diversity. In the Reformed tradition, *pluralism* has the deeper normative meaning that God gives us houses of worship, families, schools, and other societal structures to shape human identity and society as a whole. As a gift from a sovereign God, these associations and

² See the CRCNA 1924 position on “Common Grace,” as distinguished from special or saving grace. See *Acts of Synod 1924*, pp. 113-50; *Acts of Synod 1926*, pp. 108-31; *Acts of Synod 1959*, pp. 23, 110-16, 417-24; *Acts of Synod 1960*, pp. 113-15; *Acts of Synod 1961*, pp. 68-70, 561.

³ This prohibition against coercion extends to both state and church. In the CRCNA’s instructions on discipline of members, for example, the denomination urges consistories to foster faithful *discipleship* of “members who have sinned in life and doctrine” (CRCNA Church Order, Art. 81). This process of discipline, even if it results in the exclusion of a member from the church, is focused on turning members toward sincere repentance, not forced agreement.

institutions generally ought to operate freely, *even if* they embody perspectives and practices that Christians reject.⁴

A basic problem of this kind of “principled pluralism,” however, is whether and how multiple confessional communities can be meaningfully joined in a common polity. This problem—or paradox—has vexed believers of many faith traditions, including members of the Christian Reformed Church. Indeed, it led Synod 1958 to revise the Belgic Confession’s position on the role of state (*Acts of Synod 1958*, pp. 28-31, 174-80),⁵ judging as *unbiblical* the original admonition of government to uphold sacred ministry, and to remove and destroy all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist, while further promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Article 36 on “The Civil Government”). The substituted paragraphs in Article 36, while calling on government to restrain human lawlessness, punish evil people, and protect the good, confirms government’s task of “removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship” (BC, Art. 36). This should be done, further, “while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority,” so that “the Word of God may have free course” (BC, Art. 36).

This corrected doctrine means two things:

- Christians should not only expect but actively safeguard confessional diversity as part of the proper task of government in a world marked by the fall.
- Christians should reasonably expect to live and work alongside persons of diverse and contradictory faiths, who are partners—as surely as our Christian brothers and sisters—in our work to build *just* societies.

There is therefore a basic doctrinal call to what some have called interfaith dialogue, or what others in the best meaning of the term simply call pluralist democracy.

The *mission* of God’s people is “to call everyone to know and follow Christ and to proclaim to all the assurance that in the name of Jesus there is forgiveness of sin and new life for all who repent and believe. The Spirit calls all members to embrace God’s mission in their neighborhoods and in the world: to feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and free the prisoner. We repent of leaving this work to a few, for this mission is central to our being” (*Our World Belongs to God*, para. 41). And while it is true that the whole world belongs to God, no act of human power, and certainly no political act, can render to God things that are already properly his own. We bear witness to hope, but we never coerce or demand witness in return, lest we claim for ourselves God’s sovereignty and become idolaters.

Nevertheless, this mission is a *public* mission. The mission of God’s people transforms not merely human hearts and minds but also societies

⁴ See chap. 5 of Stephen Monsma, *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011). For a more philosophical account, see Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).

⁵ See *Acts of Synod 1938*, pp. 16-20; *Acts of Synod 1943*, pp. 107-14, 415-51; *Acts of Synod 1946*, pp. 38, 398-428; *Acts of Synod 1947*, pp. 83-85; *Acts of Synod 1952*, p. 68; *Acts of Synod 1954*, pp. 49-50; *Acts of Synod 1958*, pp. 28-31, 174-80; *Acts of Synod 1963*, pp. 36, 466-67; *Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 71.

and cultures. Religion is practiced not just in private but also in public space. Its freedoms are both individual *and* corporate, personal *and* institutional—and both aspects must be safeguarded. The gospel of the Christian church is a public proclamation, one which upends both our social and our private lives. It transforms human hearts, but it also transforms our lives together.

Christians therefore have a calling, delicate and difficult as it may be, to advocate and encourage respect for the public practice of religion within their own societies (*Our World Belongs to God*, para. 53). Where governments repress or deny these freedoms, we understand that they are violating not only their most basic task but also the dignity of human persons afforded them as imagebearers of God. And where governments break this covenant and forbid the true worship of God, Christians are obligated to disobey (BC, Art. 28). Any state repression of public worship constitutes one meaning of *persecution*. Churches, as well as individual Christian citizens, should do what they can to combat this evil.

Religious liberty will one day pass away in the last judgment (BC, Art. 37), when the desire of the nations will find its consummation in the bowing of every knee and the confession of every tongue. In that day the mission of God's people will find its completion, the paradox of confessional pluralism will be resolved, and the image of God restored to fullness in his church. We labor faithfully toward that day, bearing as best we can God's image here and now, and defending the dignity of its traces in all of those around us.

IV. The problem today

A. *Approaching the modern problem of persecution*

The message of these biblical, historical, and confessional perspectives is quite clear: Even if our sovereign God uses persecution for his purposes, we must still view the experience of persecution as a real evil that we have an obligation to confront as a church and as individuals.

What is less clear is *how* to confront the problem. We live in an era of threats to religious belief and practice that is both perilous and profoundly complex. Consider the following real life examples:

- In places as varied as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Sudan, governments often use anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws to subject Christians (and other religious minorities) to a wide range of human rights abuses, including the death penalty.
- Gordon College, a Christian institution of higher education in Massachusetts, was the object of withering public criticism after its president signed a July 2014 letter asking that President Obama carve out a religious exemption from an executive order banning sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination by federal contractors, sub-contractors, and vendors. The public controversy resulted in several government agencies canceling agreements with Gordon; in addition, Gordon's accreditation agency revisited its previously positive review.
- In the past several decades, as many as two-thirds of Christians in the Middle East have left the region in response to direct threats from their governments and extremist groups. In Iraq, the drop has been precipitous: in 1990, 1.2 million Christians lived in the country; by 2013, the number had dropped to less than 200,000. Recent advances by the Islamic

State have pushed even more Christians out of the northern regions of Iraq. Thriving networks of churches in Baghdad that once rivaled those in Constantinople and Rome are now almost entirely forgotten. Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, with their ancient communities of Maronite, Assyrian, and Coptic Christians, respectively, have seen similar declines.

- In July 2015, an Ontario court upheld the decision of a provincial regulatory body to reject accreditation for a law school at Trinity Western University. The decision was a reaction to the requirement at the Christian university that students abstain from “sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman.”
- In the early 2010s, Chinese public officials prevented Shouwang Church, a large Christian congregation in Beijing, from purchasing a gathering space, leading many members to worship in public spaces in protest. In 2011, several church leaders were put under house arrest without serious due process, and ordinary members continue to be regularly detained and fined. The case was an early example of recent crackdowns against unregistered churches (sometimes called “house churches”) throughout China.
- In 2010, the pastor and elders of First Hamilton (Ont.) CRC appeared in a hearing before a provincial human rights tribunal to answer the charge that they had refused to hire a job applicant because she was living with a man outside of marriage.

This list could go on for many pages. But we offer these examples simply to illustrate that people of faith and houses of worship face a variety of constraints on their religious practice. In just these few examples, we observe significant differences in (1) the *source* of constraints (government, organized extremist groups, ordinary citizens), (2) the *objects* of constraints (individuals, houses of worship, faith-based institutions, entire faith traditions), (3) the *context* (diverse yet increasingly secular Western governments or authoritarian regimes with little tolerance for minority perspectives), and (4) the *nature* and *effects* of the actions against faith (inconveniences, loss of public status, displacement, confiscation of property, death).

This variation affects the way we approach the problem of persecution. Yet we also see common threads running through these examples. After all, each has to do with *religion* and with a claim to *religious liberty*. So before we press more deeply into the modern problem of religious persecution, we want to carefully define these terms as we use them.

B. Defining religion and religious liberty

We start with a working definition of *religion*, which will help us better understand the limits and meaning of *religious liberty*, and what constitutes persecution.

In recent Western history, religion has often been perceived as a set of “private” beliefs and practices in contrast with a neutral “public” space in which religion ought not be taken into account. Some (though certainly not all) commentators talk about the “separation of church and state” in these terms. They mean not only that the state should not support institutional forms of religion but also that religion should stay out of public life altogether.

A Reformed perspective totally rejects this way of thinking. Faith is not merely a set of beliefs and practices that we trot out on Sunday or in the

privacy of our homes; faith is not and should not be compartmentalized. Our Christian commitments permeate all aspects of life, because our God lays claim to all aspects of life. *Religion*, in this theological sense, is our lived experience, both individually and corporately, as imagebearers of this sovereign God. Put another way, *religion* is “the understandings and practices of communities and persons that are lived out of love for and in obedience to God.”

This definition captures several critical points:

- Religion is not merely a belief but a bodily and often public *practice*.
- Religious practices often occur in communities; therefore the organizational forms of religion and its freedoms are an essential part of any definition.
- The primary test of conscience for whether an activity or belief is religious is the person or the community itself, as the meanings and boundaries of the religious can shift from place to place and time to time.
- Religion is ultimately about living lives of “ordered love,” as Augustine would say. For Christians, this way of life is expressed in the great commandments to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. But any religion expresses its own loves.

This definition shapes our theological understanding, but we also use the term *religion* in a different (though not opposed) way favored by social scientists. We borrow here the definition from international relations scholar Daniel Philpott: “communities of belief and practices oriented around claims about the ultimate grounds of existence.”⁶ This social scientific approach encompasses a broader range of beliefs and practices than our theological definition, which is rooted in Christian assumptions. As a committee, we often use this definition because religious persecution is an evil for all people of faith, not just Christians.

Our understanding of *religious liberty* (or *freedom*) assumes these definitions of religion. The definition has two elements: (1) “the capacity to manifest fully, in public and private, one’s religion without interference from the state”; and (2) “the obligation of the state to protect citizens from anyone who might threaten the expression of those citizens’ faith.” In other words, religious liberty both limits and empowers the state: government *ought not* to restrict religion unreasonably but *ought to* provide a safe environment in which religious persons and communities can thrive.⁷

⁶ Daniel Philpott, “Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2009): 183-202.

⁷ This way of thinking about religious freedom is also consistent with widely accepted international norms. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948, states in Article 18 that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” The full text of the Universal Declaration is found online at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>. A similar but expanded definition is found in Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, to which both the United States and Canada are parties. The full text of the Covenant is found online at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>. For a deeper discussion and broader resources about religious freedom, visit <http://henry.calvin.edu/civic-engagement/religious-freedom.html>.

This definition assumes that confessional pluralism—accepting that many religious expressions can coexist in the same political community—is an appealing value. Of course, no society will have full agreement on why pluralism is appealing. Still, in pluralist societies, people can come to a *mutual resonance* on political and social virtues that enable their society to function.⁸ People agree on these virtues, although they may disagree on why they think the virtues are important. For instance, we can disagree about the nature of God and why human rights exist or matter but still agree on the value of human rights. In this sense, religious freedom is politically pragmatic. Diverse citizens can best cooperate on common goals when they aren't fighting violently over different views of God or transcendence.

But religious freedom is less obviously a good *theological* idea. Is it not only right but also compassionate to *allow* religious and theological error to persist in a society? Or does not God command the coerced correction of the unbeliever and the heretic? Advocates of religious freedom answer “yes” to the first question and “no” to the second. To restate our argument from our discussion of the Reformed confessions:

- Because God created humankind in his image, each person is owed dignity out of respect for that image, which includes what has become described as “freedom of religion.”
- Because only God has the power to save, any human coercion of religion is necessarily futile and probably idolatrous, because the persecutor claims a power to correct and save that can only rightly belong to God.
- Therefore, it is the duty and calling of Christians to advocate for freedom of religion or belief as fundamental to recognizing both the image of God in humans and the sovereignty of God over them.

What do these convictions mean in practice? Muslims, Jews, atheists, agnostics: we all bear the image of God. This is the most fundamental theological reason why Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians have joined together to defend religious freedom. We are not indifferent to the truth and to the worship of the true God, but we know that any coercion in faith, any repression or violence, violates the image of that same God. Those in the Reformed Protestant tradition of Christianity add that any coercion is also a denial of the sovereignty of God and that salvation in Jesus Christ can only be received as a gift.

We recognize, of course, that there are potential risks in defining religious freedom in this expansive way. If religion extends to a wide range of beliefs and practices, then religious freedom is a very powerful claim. It is also a claim that can be misused. Three conditions for religious freedom are worth noting here.

- *Religious freedom belongs to real people and communities; it does not belong to the abstraction “religion.”* Religious liberty is always the possession of persons and communities, never the possession of an abstract notion of “religion” as a whole. For example on the surface, cases brought by the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations claiming “defamation of religion” may seem to be about the public protection

⁸ We borrow the term *mutual resonance* from Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

of religion. But in practice these claims are often used as justification for powerfully restrictive blasphemy and apostasy laws. “Religions” as abstract entities do not have a legal right to protection from scrutiny, disagreement, or criticism.

- *Religious freedom protects people and communities from unreasonable restrictions of their faith; it does not protect them from offense and ridicule.* Mere social disapproval of one’s religion, even if one takes deep offense at that disapproval, is not a violation of religious liberty. Religious freedom allows believers to manifest their faith without unreasonable interference; it does not protect them from exposure to ridicule. Christians in North America must be especially careful to disentangle feelings of offense from real threats to religious liberty.
- *Religious freedom is not absolute.* While religious freedom should extend broadly, it cannot be strictly absolute because some religiously motivated behaviors may endanger the basic freedoms of others. Freedom of religion, though a fundamental right governing public justice, *must always be realized simultaneously with other basic duties and rights*, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, and more. Determining the lines where “reasonable” accommodation of religion ends is a difficult challenge and calls for wise legal and political judgment. But drawing those lines is necessary for any state that seeks a balance when the goods of safety, peace, order, and liberty are in tension.

C. *Persecution and religious liberty at home and abroad*

So what do these definitions of religion and religious liberty mean for religious *persecution*? Our working definition of *persecution* is simply “the unwarranted violation of religious liberty.” If religious liberty protects the faithful from threats to their religious expression, then religious persecution occurs when those threats become a reality and the state fails to prevent these violations or even perpetrates them.

Violence or harassment that targets religion can sometimes be very difficult to disentangle from other triggers (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class, caste). For example, the CRCNA’s Office of Social Justice and World Renew have recently highlighted the humanitarian plight of the Rohingya people, who have been fleeing persecution in Myanmar (Burma).⁹ The Rohingya are both an ethnic and religious minority, and they are also generally impoverished. So is the root cause of persecution their ethnic difference? Their Muslim faith in a generally Buddhist country? The desire of the powerful to take the land of the poor? Researchers use careful social scientific methods to try to answer these questions and determine when people or institutions are threatened specifically for their faith. But often religion is one factor among many that contribute to persecution.

This research reveals an ominous quickening of the pace of religion-based persecution over the past decade. Data from the Pew Research Center, a key observer of religious freedom around the globe, suggests that the breadth of social hostilities—violence or harassment by nongovernmental actors—has increased at a particularly shocking rate. In 2007, 45 percent of the world’s population lived in countries with social hostility rates labeled as “high”

⁹ <http://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/human-rights-advocate-speaks-crc-about-rohingya-refugees>

or “very high” by Pew analysts; just seven years later, the percentage had increased to 73. (Government restrictions also rose, but less sharply—from 58 percent of the population living under high restrictions to 63 percent.)¹⁰

These growing hostilities have left few religious traditions untouched. But on nearly every measure, the suffering of Christians has been most widespread.¹¹ Part of the reason has been the rapid growth of Christianity in densely populated areas of the global south and east, where its emerging presence has put the Christian faith at odds with established religions and/or unsympathetic governments. But some of the deepest crises for the church have come out of regions where it has its deepest roots. One of the most agonizing facts about religious persecution today is that Christianity is facing near eradication in many areas of the Middle East, the birthplace of the faith.¹² We have already noted precipitous drops in Christian populations in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, with similar trends in Pakistan, Malaysia, and Sudan.¹³ We are left with a disheartening conclusion: While persecution of the church appears to stoke its growth in some places (e.g., China), persecution often kills the church in others areas—and for long periods of time.

We cannot gloss over the reality that this targeted purging of Christianity is happening largely in Muslim-majority countries from North Africa to southern Asia. We hasten to add that we do not raise the point to suggest there is no basis for tolerance in Islam. But anti-Christian persecution in Muslim-majority countries does pose a profound challenge for interfaith relations—and fostering peace among people of different faiths is an important strategy for addressing persecution. We take up that challenge in sections V-VI of this report.

There is no doubt that religious persecution is on the rise in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. But do we see similar patterns emerging in the very different context of the West?

Many Christian voices in North America have recently used the word *persecution* to describe the experience of people of faith in what seems to be an emerging “post-Christian” Western culture. The paradigmatic example is the Christian baker or florist who faces public ridicule, loss of business, or legal action for refusing to provide services at a same-sex wedding. We need not settle the question of how common this sort of threat might be in the United States or Canada; it is enough to say that, bakers and florists aside, Christians and Christian institutions have faced increasing challenges to their faith practices in recent years. But are those experiences a problem akin to persecution?

In answering that question, it is important to first consider the *context* of the constraint on religious practice. We have already established that

¹⁰ Peter Henne et al., *Latest Trends in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2015).

¹¹ One of the first scholars to note these disturbing trends is Paul Marshall, currently a Senior Fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute. See his path-breaking *Their Blood Cries Out* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1997) and, more recently with Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2013). We provide a bibliography of other books on the topic at the companion website to this report.

¹² Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008).

¹³ Kevin R. den Dulk and Robert J. Joustra take up the causes and implications of these changes in chap. 2 of *The Church and Religious Persecution* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin College Press, 2015).

religious liberty is not an absolute, and governments must consider religious practices in light of other compelling public goals. This point implies the importance of *due process*, the fair consideration of a claim to a right to practice religion under publicly available rules, usually by a court or similar public tribunal. It's possible that such a claim may receive due process but that the state may then refuse to protect the right. In such a case, because the claim received fair consideration under rules that attempt to strike a reasonable balance between freedom and social stability, the restriction on religious practice would not be a form of religious persecution.

Consider again the examples noted earlier: Gordon College, Trinity Western University, and First Hamilton CRC have faced very real challenges to their commitment to a traditional Christian view of marriage and sexual intimacy. But they also have recourse to legal institutions and constitutional norms that provide opportunities to seek protection.¹⁴ Their experience would be profoundly different if the context shifted and they were facing local officials in, say, China or Pakistan, where due process is often unavailable and rules governing religion violate a principled pluralism.

Still, while the rule of law in North America and other Western countries often prohibits the worst kinds of persecution, real tests of faith can and do occur in these environments. Scores of state interventions into the activities of people of faith throughout the U.S. or Canada over the past two centuries could be interpreted as persecution. We can think of many contemporary examples:

- The Christian student group that loses access to a public university campus because it requires its leaders to be believers.
- Muslim groups that hit repeated regulatory roadblocks to constructing Islamic community centers.
- Clergy who endorse political candidates from the pulpit and thereby risk losing their churches' tax-exempt status.
- Pharmacists who refuse to obey a state regulation requiring the sale of so-called morning-after and week-after drugs, which they believe are, in effect, abortifacients.
- Incarcerated persons who are forbidden from worshipping together on their holy day.
- Native American tribal leaders seeking restoration of sacred burial grounds that have been bulldozed for road construction.

In each of these examples, there is a genuine public limit on the freedom of individuals or organizations to act on their faith. By our definition each *could be* a type of persecution. But much depends on whether we see the competing claims of government as "reasonable" according to some legal standard. It is beyond the mandate of this committee to review the contested history of those legal standards in the United States and Canada (the report's companion website offers a précis). But suffice it to say here that in all of the recent cases in North America, the constraint on freedom pales in contrast with the

¹⁴ As of summer 2015, Trinity Western's case remains on appeal, and Gordon is seeking compromise with local officials outside the legal system. First Hamilton CRC's case was resolved in its favor because the tribunal concluded that the church did not take the applicant's lifestyle into account in making its hiring decision. Note that the question of whether existing law would allow First Hamilton CRC to take the applicant's lifestyle into account was not addressed.

real violence and abuse that many Christians and people of other faiths experience in desperate settings such as Pakistan, Syria, and northern Nigeria.

The upshot is that North American communities could claim “persecution” in rare circumstances. But we urge restraint in using that word when we compare our situations with the context and severity of persecution that our brothers and sisters around the world often experience.

D. *A snapshot of the CRCNA*

The Christian Reformed Church has its roots in the United States and Canada but finds itself at the center of the problem of persecution in many places and many ways outside its North American home. As of early 2015, the CRCNA has 239 missionary and development workers around the world, as well as hundreds of partners in ministry. Given the size of the denomination, this global footprint is remarkable. CRCNA field staff are supported by 1,103 churches and 245,217 total members, yielding a ratio of one field staff member overseas per 1,026 members.¹⁵ For comparative purposes, consider that the Southern Baptist Convention’s 4,733 “appointed field personnel”¹⁶ are supported by 15,735,640¹⁷ total members (1 per 3,324 members) and that the United Methodist Church’s 327 “missionaries” (approximately a third of whom serve in the United States)¹⁸ are supported by 7,299,753 domestic members (1 per 22,323 members).¹⁹

Many of these staff serve in countries where there has been considerable governmental restriction and social hostility toward religion. The accompanying maps display the Pew Research Center’s scoring of government restriction and social hostility overlaid with the countries that CRCNA staff are currently serving.²⁰ Darker shades suggest higher levels of restrictions or hostility (the CRCNA does not have a significant presence in lighter shaded countries). The overall impression is that our field staff have not balked at serving in hotbeds of anti-Christian hostility.

¹⁵ 2014 *Yearbook* (<http://www.crcna.org/welcome/membership-statistics>).

¹⁶ <http://www.imb.org/1307.aspx#.VTvT-SFViko>

¹⁷ <http://www.sbc.net/media/pdf/FastFactsAboutTheSBC.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.umcmission.org/Explore-Our-Work/Missionaries-in-Service/Missionary-Profiles?retain=true&PagingModule=1736&Pg=16>

¹⁹ <http://www.umc.org/gcfa/data-services>

²⁰ In terms of governmental restrictions on religion, Pew considers a range of factors, including lack of serious constitutional protections for religious expression; controls on collective gatherings, public preaching, or proselytizing; limitations or outright bans on religious conversion; censorship of religious literature; regulation of religious dress; religion-based discrimination in eligibility for public benefits; compelled religious education; and state refusal to intervene when disfavored religious groups are faced with mob violence. In countries with the greatest restrictions, religious adherents routinely face physical intimidation or corporal punishment, imprisonment, fines, other criminal sanctions, and even the death penalty. In terms of social hostility toward religion, researchers looked for evidence of mob violence related to religion, religion-related terrorism or so-called “honor” killings, and harassment of religious minorities, among other factors. To recognize violence or abuse as “religion-related” is, of course, a difficult matter; after all, these kinds of conflicts could be rooted in a range of causes. Researchers used careful social scientific methods to disentangle religion from other triggers of social hostility (e.g., ethnicity) while recognizing that sometimes multiple factors can work together to explain the effect (e.g., the intersection of ethnicity and religion).

Social Hostilities around the World

Levels of Social Hostilities in each country the CRCNA serves as of 2013



Government Restriction around the World

Levels of Government Restriction in each country the CRCNA serves as of 2013



Source of country data: Pew Research Center

Of course, these are countrywide statistics; the experience of staff may vary greatly depending on the specific regions in which they serve. In summer 2014, the Henry Institute and the Center for Social Research at Calvin College, at the request of this committee, administered a survey to all CRCNA field staff in World Missions, World Renew, and Back to God Ministries International. We asked a range of questions about demographics, type of ministry, and experience of both governmental restrictions and social hostility; we also provided ample opportunity for open-ended responses and suggestions. (Some visualizations and additional information are available at www.crcna.org/persecution.)

Nearly 20 percent of respondents reported experiencing some kind of government restriction on their work. Many cited limitations on public preaching and evangelism; a few highlighted limits or even outright bans on the dissemination of information through print literature or broadcast media, among other restrictions on teaching, private gatherings, and corporate worship in a church setting. Very few had experienced severe punishment as a result of their activities, but the survey results did suggest that some CRCNA field staff had experienced violence and property confiscation, either directly or, more often, vicariously through affected ministry partners. Field staff in Protestant-minority areas also noted repeatedly that government support for religion (e.g., funding for faith-based education) is unevenly distributed (or not distributed at all, but enjoyed only by majority schools). The most common open-ended responses, however, suggest that staff do not directly experience persecution because they have learned how to avoid or defuse situations that might result in violence or harassment. Field staff are clearly savvy about how to operate in their various locations.

Fifteen percent of respondents to the survey reported experiencing “moderate” or “strong” social hostilities (violence or harassment from nongovernmental actors) toward themselves or close associates. About 10 percent had experienced property damage they could attribute to religious conflict, and the same number attested to displacement, physical assault, and detentions of their closest ministry partners.

Some staff praised specific denominational efforts to address faith-based conflict, including positive feedback for the CRCNA Crisis Management Team, as well as a couple of mentions of the Salaam Project (an initiative to learn about Islam, discussed below). One missionary was happy to note that in contrast to training provided thirty years ago, the “[staff] orientation now includes a lot more cross-cultural and security awareness training.” Others acknowledged how the CRCNA, in the words of one respondent, “maintains presence and supports relief and development efforts whenever it is possible and feasible.” A staff member was pleased with how CRWM “discerned with us and confirmed our call to remain in [the area] while extremist activity increased.”

Even in cases where respondents recognized problems, many suggested that the CRCNA, as an institution, is increasingly willing to engage in these kinds of issues. A staff member suggested that the CRCNA “has become more aware and engaged in matters related to justice, freedom of conscience, and human rights,” concluding that “there is dialogue.” Another was “impressed with the commitment of the church to engage with religious freedom and persecution in other countries,” noting also the “concern, help,

and prayer . . . expressed by churches and supporters” in times of “natural disasters and during social riots.”

Others, however, were unsure if the CRCNA could have a greater role in addressing persecution. One bluntly stated, “I’m not sure what CRCNA can do at this point.” Some points of contention included doubts about the denomination’s ability as a large institution to address individual incidents on a microlevel, as well as paralysis resulting from both theological divisions over just war theory and Christian pacifism and political divisions in North American politics.

Field staff were given opportunity to rank several strategies for promoting religious liberty. The greatest priority was to develop greater resources to guide corporate and individual prayer. Developing better interfaith relationships, strengthening informational networks, and advocating for better foreign policy followed close behind. Other strategies with moderate support included highlighting religious persecution and religious liberty in congregation-based adult education, worship, and *The Banner*. Very few saw much relevance to North Americans petitioning foreign governments or to the CRCNA investing more in physical security for field staff.

The open-ended suggestions revealed a different side to staff views. Most were convinced that the CRCNA needs to have a better contextual understanding of the issues surrounding religious persecution. As a CRWM staff member put it, “I don’t think the CRCNA as a whole understands persecution very well. For one, they haven’t experienced it. They also have a hard time understanding the dynamics involved in why persecution happens, and would likely be content with addressing the symptoms of the problem rather than getting at the root issues.” Others claimed that the denomination needed to understand the nuances of why fighting persecution in certain religious environments, such as the Islamic world, might be difficult or even counterproductive. Four respondents urged that the CRCNA could better educate its domestic congregations, and several others suggested that the CRCNA should speak out for domestic religious freedom.

V. Two goals for the CRCNA

The experience and suggestions of CRCNA field staff lead us into the formulation of several recommendations. They remind us, on the one hand, that confronting religious persecution is an immense—and perhaps bewildering—undertaking. On the other hand, they represent the personal side of our clear theological imperative as Christians to act as moral protagonists in the fight against religious persecution.

So what are the church and its members to do? The challenge in answering this question is to avoid expecting too much or too little. The church as an institution has tremendous capacity to articulate a vital moral concern and a vision for change. The church is at its best when it clarifies God’s purposes and gathers people together around those purposes for mutual encouragement. The church also has a role in organizing people to pursue God’s purposes in the world. But the church is not the state or a school; it is also not an interest group or think tank. It has a key role, but that role is limited—to use a familiar Reformed inflection—to its own sphere.

Our recommendations for the CRCNA are organized around two goals. First, we need to *orient* the church to think seriously about global persecution

and threats to religious freedom. We outline a series of ideas for fostering a moral vision, with an emphasis on liturgical practices, information dissemination, and interfaith opportunities. Second, we need to *mobilize* and organize the resources—both moral and physical—of our churches, and this includes a substantive yet limited role for denominational agencies. These recommendations are far from exhaustive, but they are places to start the church in the powerfully necessary work of dealing with this urgent problem at home and abroad.

A. *Orienting the church*

We begin with a challenge: The CRCNA must orient itself around the problem of religious persecution. The North American church in general has been reticent to address religion-based violence and religious liberty issues. The CRCNA, with its Reformed grounding and outsized global footprint, has every reason to push against the trend.

And in some ways it has done so. The CRCNA is unique because it has participated in two types of activities that are relevant to combatting religious persecution but are rarely both used by the same denomination. Denominational agencies within the CRCNA have invested considerably in ecumenical initiatives, typically favored by mainline denominations, and have given some attention to fostering religious freedom, a focus that is more common among evangelical denominations.²¹

These efforts are admirable, but they are also insufficient. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) has not addressed persecution directly; neither the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) nor Canada's Centre for Public Dialogue (CPD) has placed religious persecution and religious freedom near the top of their agendas; and the denomination itself has provided few materials that highlight religious persecution as a matter of concern for public worship.

Perhaps the best indicator is attention to the problem of persecution in *The Banner*, the denomination's primary organ for framing key issues and mobilizing opinion. We analyzed all *Banner* content from January 2001 to April 2014. We cast a very wide net for any commentary or reporting related broadly to religious persecution or liberty in North America or abroad. We searched for stories on religion-based violence or harassment, court cases or legislation about religious liberty, opinion pieces on pluralism, the legal status of faith-based organizations, and everything in between. After post-9/11 coverage subsided, *The Banner* settled into a pattern of reporting on these matters only a half-dozen times a year (on average). Most of those reports were brief and passing notes about a conflict in a far-flung region with no serious framing or context for the event.

We call the denomination and its churches to refocus on this problem. To build a movement against persecution, the most fundamental thing the church must do is preach and practice a theology that religious freedom is for *all persons*. Practicing that theology entails being willing to work across lines of difference to develop political and social virtues while allowing freedom to disagree on reasons for doing so. Not only is this political-theological work necessary for a principled pluralist society, but it is also work that no

²¹ To see the contrast between Protestant traditions, see den Dulk and Joustra, *Religious Persecution and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin College Press, 2015).

ambassador or member of Congress or Parliament is well suited to do. It is explicitly the work of religious communities: churches, mosques, temples, and theological societies. The massacre of Christians must be stopped, but Christian churches do not deploy armies or diplomats. Churches preach a gospel that calls us to *shalom* in belief and action.

1. Pray

Practically, liturgical acts can help reorient the church to preaching a gospel that rejects persecution in favor of *shalom*. Popular books about Christian responses to suffering commonly list prayer as a first response. Indeed, exhortations to prayer are so familiar that they can seem obligatory, a standard line that deserves a few words before moving on to the *real* practical solutions. We do not envision prayer as a brief stopping point before more important matters. We emphasize prayer—more specifically, prayer as part of public worship—precisely because it is a key starting point in building a faith-based movement against persecution.

God desires that Christians pray together to establish communion with him. In the Reformed tradition we also believe that God listens *and* responds to our prayers, albeit in ways that are often mysterious to us. The fact that God listens and responds to us is humbling and emboldening at the same time. It should certainly give us the confidence to call out to God to protect brothers and sisters who are vulnerable to persecution.

These ideas about prayer are theological bedrock, but they are not all there is to say. Our prayerful confessions, intercessions, and thanksgivings are not simply out of our hands once we “give them up to God.” The *process* of prayer—of naming suffering and the people who suffer, of identifying what gives us joy, of confessing where we fail and when we doubt—is deeply formative. To describe it another way, prayer orients our perspective around God’s purposes. Prayer is a living ritual that clarifies needs, focuses attention, and strengthens resolve in believers who pray. Praying *together* is a sacred act of both mutual encouragement and mutual accountability. Public prayer, and public worship generally, *forms* the church liturgically—it not only expands imagination but over time forms our desires, the ordering of our loves.

This leads to a key recommendation:

Recommendation: 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.

One of the many benefits of public prayer in public worship is that it fixes the objects of prayer in our collective memory. It is deeply reassuring to victims of persecution to be remembered, whatever God’s response to prayer might be. In a February 2015 letter from northern Iraq, Chris Seiple, president of the Institute for Global Engagement, reported the terrible violence suffered by Dominican Sisters there. One sister shared, “We want to thank you for caring about our future when nobody else does. . . . You

give us hope that there is a future.”²² Hope is not an idea; it is a practice. And to be remembered, to be known, and to be loved by a community, not merely by a person, is a powerful liturgical act of the church.

When praying about persecution, we should pray together for *specific* people and places. Persecution is not an abstraction; we should not treat it that way in prayer. Unfortunately, identifying people to pray for is not a difficult task. Church-sponsored missionaries and development staff can be in harm’s way. Church members may also regularly hear of risks to people they know and trust, if members pay attention to newsletters, emails, and other reports from the field. Given the relatively large global footprint of the CRCNA, rare is a North American church member who has more than two degrees of separation from the human toll of persecution.

Another approach to praying about persecution is to focus regionally rather than personally. Churches might consider the ready-made resources of organizations such as Voice of the Martyrs, which provides a useful “Prayer Map” to prompt churches to focus prayer on regions with urgent need.²³ We can imagine the denomination adapting a similar map to the ministries of the denomination.

2. Worship, Bible study, and adult education

Prayer is a significant yet not isolated way to respond specifically to persecution. Preaching the Word and experiencing the sacraments do the same. Collective worship at regular intervals, particularly on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, can focus congregational life around stories of persecution that are often lost in the busy day-to-day of church life. Adult education classes, Bible studies, prayer gatherings, and other small groups are also places to gather and disseminate information, including the plight of the persecuted.

The denomination has done relatively little along these lines. The OSJ has highlighted the International Day of Prayer and made resources available to churches (http://www2.crcna.org/pages/osj_religious_persecution.cfm), including some liturgical materials (e.g., prayer litanies, some suggested songs, and a video about persecution in Syria and Iraq). But these resources are not extensive and need updating. Hence we make another overall recommendation:

Recommendation: That synod direct the Board of Trustees to instruct the Office of Social Justice to continue and expand the practice of urging every congregation to participate in the International Day of Prayer, devoting worship services that day to the pressing issue of religious persecution.

In addition to broad-based efforts such as the International Day of Prayer, the CRCNA should develop its own internal resources for orienting church life around the issue of persecution. To start the denomination down that road, the study committee itself has produced original resources to serve as springboards for adult education and Bible study. These resources include the following:

²² Chris Seiple, letter to “Friends of The Cradle Fund (TCF),” February 19, 2015. Subject: “You Can Cut Our Throats, but Our God Is Stronger than the Sword,” Trip Report, Northern Iraq, 7-11 February 2015.

²³ See <http://www.persecution.com/public/prayermap.aspx>.

- *Bible Study on Religious Persecution*: Naji Umran, Ken Van De Griend, and Ruth Veltkamp have developed an extensive Bible study on persecution that could be used individually or in small groups. The Bible study results partly from their work on the study committee, but it also draws from their experiences in missions in different parts of the globe (Umran in Egypt, Van De Griend in Southeast Asia, Veltkamp in Nigeria).
- *The Church and Religious Persecution*, coauthored by study committee members Kevin R. den Dulk (Calvin College) and Robert Joustra (Redeemer University College), explores both the nature of persecution and the role of the church in addressing persecution. The book, part of the “Calvin Shorts” series, is brief, accessible, and written with church-based adult education in mind.

Readers can find information about both resources (among others) at www.crcna.org/persecution.

3. Intercultural, interfaith, and ecumenical efforts

It is one thing to know the statistics on violence and abuse targeted at believers worldwide. It is another to *empathize* with the people behind those statistics, to make their plight a part of one’s own story. Stories about the suffering of specific people and organizations that are known and trusted do a lot to help us accomplish the latter. And there are no better institutions for telling those stories than houses of worship.

One critical but often overlooked way of sharing such stories is through ecumenical and interfaith opportunities. After all, people of all faiths suffer persecution; the violence suffered by religious minorities is often “equal opportunity.” When radical groups like the Islamic State cut their deadly swath through Syria and Iraq, it has frequently been *other Muslims* who have suffered. This is not to make light of the suffering of Christians, Yazidis, or Baha’is but to make the point that reformist or heterodox Muslims often suffer alongside people of other religions. In many Muslim-majority countries, days will likely come when those who stand between harm and Christian religious communities will be reformist Muslims acting on the best in their faith to defeat the worst of human tyranny.²⁴ These people also deserve our prayers and support.

Within the denominational structures of the CRCNA, the EIRC oversees and engages in both ecumenical and interfaith initiatives. Even so, the EIRC faces limits in what it can offer regarding questions of religious liberty and religious persecution. Its mandate itself does not highlight persecution, religious freedom, pluralism, or even simply peace across lines of difference. And while the CRCNA has extensive bilateral ecumenical contacts with particular Reformed denominations around the world (under the category of “ecclesiastical fellowship”), few of these churches are located in places of current conflict: the CRC has ecclesiastical fellowship with three such denominations in Nigeria and with one each in Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Cuba, Egypt, and Sudan. Three of the churches in the second category, “in formal dialogue,” are located in countries

²⁴ Examples of this kind of heroism already dot the landscape of the Middle East and North Africa. Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani, who has made extraordinary gifts—at real peril to himself—to besieged Baha’is in Iran is only one example.

where persecution and/or interreligious conflict have recently occurred: Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan. However, the “in formal dialogue” status is more limited in scope and does not rise to the level of close cooperation. Neither of these categories of church relationship offers much likelihood of close familiarity with actual instances of religious persecution.

More promising are the possibilities opened by the CRCNA’s wider ecumenical engagements. Since the CRCNA is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), we have ongoing contact with hundreds of Reformed churches around the world. Many of them are situated in nations or regions where interreligious conflict and/or persecution has recently occurred—such as the Middle East. In the main, though, these churches have relatively small memberships in comparison with ancient Christian groups of the region that have usually borne the brunt of recent persecution. The EIRC should try to help keep the CRCNA and OSJ updated on developments, challenges, and conflicts faced by other WCRC churches when and as they face persecution. Trying to do so, however, will be difficult given the limitations of the WCRC’s small staff, which must carry on all of the organization’s endeavors. As recent WCRC initiatives have shown, it may be unwise to add further responsibilities to the already overburdened WCRC staff.

Perhaps a more promising venue for such an endeavor is the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The GCF is the broadest of all ecumenical organizations, with participation from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Charismatic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Holiness, and African Instituted churches. Within the past year (2015), the GCF held a conference dealing with the main themes of this study committee. Several of the representatives in attendance at the conference came from churches that have recently experienced or are threatened with persecution and martyrdom. The personal and ecclesiastical contacts made possible through this conference, with the rich resources offered by the position statements it enacted, offer the CRCNA much to consider as it seeks to understand and address the problem of religious persecution in the world today. While the staff of GCF is even more limited in number than that of the WCRC, this recent conference offers possibilities for the CRCNA (both the EIRC and OSJ) toward keeping contact with and disseminating much more information, not only about other churches in the world that are facing regular, ongoing threats of persecution but also about initiatives taken by churches elsewhere to stand in support of and solidarity with persecuted churches.

With regard to interfaith initiatives, the EIRC is only beginning to step into this area. In 2010, the EIRC adopted (with synod’s approval) a mandate for interfaith dialogue. While various interfaith initiatives have been taking place over the past many years, the EIRC recently recognized that it was not able to devote enough attention to developing this component of its mandate more fully. Synod 2015 approved that the EIRC set up an interfaith subcommittee, which will meet regularly and seek to enhance and carry further what can be done by the CRCNA in this area, reporting to the EIRC.

And there are bright spots in the CRCNA’s work in this area. The CRCNA’s Salaam Project, which offers training programs and other resources to teach the church about the Muslim faith and engages with

Islamic communities through interfaith dialogue, is an emerging model worthy of extension and emulation.²⁵ Previously a collaboration of several CRCNA ministries, the program is now housed within Home Missions and focuses primarily on major urban areas in Canada (Montreal, Toronto/Hamilton, Calgary, and Edmonton) where there are large populations of Muslims. Still, the program's resources are open to the wider CRCNA.

An overlooked area is the role of individual CRCNA churches, as well as the denomination as a whole, in the longstanding ministry of care and hospitality for refugees. World Renew has a robust refugee sponsorship program, and various denominational ministries, including OSJ and Canada's Centre for Public Dialogue, provide additional resources for refugee ministry. OSJ has gathered the stories of specific congregations, recording rich testaments to this ministry.²⁶ The denomination spoke to refugee issues in a 2010 report to synod, though primarily in the context of migrancy of labor. We see a real opportunity for these various efforts to highlight religious persecution as one of the root causes of refugee migrations. In a story about Fremont (Mich.) CRC's refugee ministry, a leader in a partner organization stated,

Churches today face an uphill battle in our attempts to understand and build bridges cross-culturally. Refugee ministry is an opportunity to learn to appreciate and accept cultural differences. Involvement in refugee ministries means changed attitudes and changed lives for both church members and the refugees involved. Church partners start asking bigger questions: Globally, why are countries producing refugees? What can we do to help? And ultimately what injustices can we help change locally?²⁷

We know that interfaith dialogues and other forms of cross-cultural engagement could help enhance awareness on the part of CRCNA members and congregations of other religious traditions and thus overcome fear and/or stereotypes. The charge of xenophobia or Islamophobia is too easily applied to North American religious communities. But meeting, dialogue, and friendship with our neighbors of other religions will not only provide a defense from this charge but can also prevent reactionary and dangerous violence often done in the name of religion.

These kinds of conversations across lines of religious difference have proliferated throughout North America and Europe in recent years. While they take a variety of forms, the best formats have a pluralistic, not relativistic, spirit. Pluralistic formats assume that differences are real and fundamental, that people have deeply held beliefs that lead them to think and act in distinctive ways. The conversations expose participants to each other as human beings—as creatures who bear God's image, despite our differences—and build empathy for people who face suffering. Interfaith experiences can also have the practical effect of broadening the social movement for religious freedom to include the full range of faith traditions that suffer the scourge of persecution.

²⁵ See <http://www.crcna.org/salaam>.

²⁶ See http://www2.crcna.org/pages/osj_refugeestories.cfm.

²⁷ Quote from Jotham Ippel, formerly the program director of the refugee ministry of Bethany Christian Services; http://www2.crcna.org/pages/osj_thach.cfm.

Recommendation: That synod instruct the EIRC and direct the BOT to instruct World Renew and the Centre for Public Dialogue to consider their work with interfaith and refugee groups and to strategize ways in which to communicate about the injustice of persecution with the rest of the denomination.

B. *Mobilizing the church*

The CRCNA can help to reorient our moral focus around persecution. But a movement against persecution also needs to organize people to advocate (“call forth”) its purposes, to *mobilize* churches to act in line with moral concerns and information. Our churches are remarkably well-positioned to mobilize against global persecution.

Persecution is a much bigger problem than the experiences of a single church or denomination. A problem of this magnitude requires a systemic or political response. At the same time, many governments do not have a great incentive to tackle the problem. Some are great violators of religious freedom themselves. Others have competing interests—trade, security, etc.—that they rank over religious freedom. To influence government leaders to see differently, citizens have a role, especially when democracy allows it.

We are not suggesting that the CRCNA needs lobbyists, lawyers, or public relations specialists to push domestic legislation or greater attention to international human rights covenants. Professionals are already working in a host of religious liberty and antipersecution groups around the world. Churches have the greatest influence when their advocacy is strategic, not tactical—that is, when they present a moral vision and communicate the breadth and depth of support for it rather than getting into the nitty-gritty of whom to lobby, where to litigate, or how to craft policy language. Church members as *Christian citizens* can and should be engaged at both the broadest and most specific levels. But churches as *institutions* should shape the moral vision of their members and speak prophetically to the larger society while refraining from the technical and specific work of public policy.

Where does that leave agencies within the CRCNA? On the one hand, we can think of no other matter pertaining to public justice *for* and *within* the church that is more important than its own freedom to practice and proclaim the gospel. As the key offices within the CRCNA committed to fostering public justice, the OSJ and the CPD in Canada clearly have a role of mobilizing the denomination around the issue. On the other hand, these organizations are not intended as a denominational interest group or public interest law firm.

A first step would be for these ministries to make religious persecution one of their top three priorities. The OSJ and CPD have committed tremendous resources in recent years to immigration, climate change, and the rights of indigenous peoples, and the study committee recognizes those issues are timely in public discussions and relevant to church members. But we find it difficult to suggest that these important matters ought to crowd out an issue like persecution, which has quite a direct impact on the church itself.

A second step would be for these ministries to demonstrate their commitment by devoting staff resources to the problem. We could imagine designating a larger part of a staff person’s portfolio to the collection and distribution of up-to-date information about persecution to CRC congregations and to those who join the OSJ network. In addition, it would be a step forward to

identify champions in CRC classes or congregations who could serve as point persons through whom regular information about persecution could be distributed to ordinary members. A network of contacts could work with pastors and worship coordinators to facilitate more frequent reference to and intercessory prayer about situations of persecution being faced by fellow Christians.

Recommendation: That synod direct the BOT to ask the Office of Social Justice to ensure the collection and distribution of up-to-date information about persecution to CRC congregations and to those who join the OSJ network.

Even so, the study committee does not perceive a need for intensive capacity building within denominational agencies. One reason is cost; we are cognizant of stretched budgets in the denomination. But perhaps more important is that key groups associated with the denomination, including the Henry Institute at Calvin College and the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., already focus much of their attention on issues of religious persecution and religious liberty. To add a layer of denominational effort would be redundant. This suggests, however, that the denomination could do better at collaborating with these other organizations to adapt their work to the efforts of the church.

To communicate in this context requires going outside church circles. Our churches ought not hesitate to encourage parishioners to engage elected officials or to support high quality advocacy groups and think tanks focused on this issue, including the Pew Research Center, the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, and Voice of the Martyrs. Other sources include the Henry Institute at Calvin College and university-based institutes at Notre Dame, Georgetown, and Emory.

If churches or parishioners find themselves in conflict with the state over their religious identity, they should have quick access to serious political and legal representation. Several public interest law firms are especially skilled at addressing religious liberty claims, including the Becket Fund and the Center for Law and Religious Freedom at the Christian Legal Society. The CRCNA itself enlisted the aid of some of these organizations in crafting "Model Church Facilities and Wedding Policies," which can help churches in the United States prevent conflicts over restricted access to property for weddings or other events. Readers can find out more about these and other resources at the committee's companion website. The point here is to focus on acting as a church—to teach, to cajole, to recruit volunteers, to advocate—but not to cross a line into work that belongs with other institutions.

VI. Recommendations

- A. That synod give the privilege of the floor to Kevin R. den Dulk, chair, and other members of the study committee when the report is addressed.
- B. 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.

C. That synod direct the Board of Trustees to instruct the Office of Social Justice to continue and expand the practice of urging every congregation to participate in the International Day of Prayer, devoting worship services that day to the pressing issue of religious persecution.

D. That synod instruct the EIRC and direct the BOT to instruct World Renew and the Centre for Public Dialogue to consider their work with inter-faith and refugee groups and to strategize ways in which to communicate about the injustice of persecution with the rest of the denomination.

E. That synod direct the BOT to ask the Office of Social Justice to ensure the collection and distribution of up-to-date information about persecution to CRC congregations and to those who join the OSJ network.

F. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty and dismiss the committee.

VII. Conclusion

The global experience of religious persecution is one of the great moral challenges of our time. It is terrifying in scope and brutality—and thus bewildering. The goal of this report is (1) to ground our thinking in both Scripture and history and (2) to propose practical strategies for denominational response. We should no doubt be prudent; it is easy to be counterproductive, especially when responding to a problem as deeply complex as persecution. But while we should be concerned about doing more damage than good, we ought not let that concern paralyze us. We are *called* to act—all of us.

Yet for all our effort, all our focus on outcomes, we must remember that our calling is faithfulness to God's purposes and promises. To be faithful does not necessarily mean we will see clearly the fruits of our activity. In places where religion-based conflict is deeply entrenched, we shouldn't even expect to see change in our lifetime. When the prophet Isaiah calls out, "How long, Lord?"²⁸ God does not offer a timetable. But he does make a promise.

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²⁸ Isaiah 6:11

Creating a New Family: A Circle of Conversation on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery



“Creating a New Family”
from *Kisemanito Pakitinasuwın*
(*The Creator’s Sacrifice*)

—Ovide Bighetty, 2002;
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The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

—Colossians 1:15-20, NIV

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

—John 17:20-23, NIV

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Appendix A: Mandate for the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force

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“We are meant all, all to belong to this family, this human family, God’s Family.”
—Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I. Preface—creating a new family

Jesus, as the firstborn over all creation, lived and died and rose again to create a new, reconciled, and unified family of God—indeed, to reconcile *all things* to himself. This *already, but not yet* promise, is the hope of the world and a call of the church as collaborators with Christ in a broken world. In the course of our work as a task force, we have seen, felt, and struggled deeply with manifestations of brokenness in the long arch of the history—and present reality—that is the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD). As people of Reformed faith, we articulate an understanding of both the depths of sin in the human heart and Christ’s power to reconcile all things. Fully living that articulated theology is a journey—a commitment of generations of the church—to discern and act upon brokenness and sin in our collective history. Therefore, we hope that the reflections and recommendations in this report serve as an invitation to an ongoing circle of conversation, discernment, and action for reconciliation and justice, recognizing that the Doctrine of Christian Discovery has made an impact on us all—Indigenous people and settlers. In this journey of reconciliation, Christ is indeed creating a new family that honors diversity and the need for the healing of broken relationships.

In the pages that follow, we trace the history of the DOCD in North America. The DOCD is part of a thread of systemic evil and *fallen thinking* in church and society. Fallen thinking was present in the dark heritage of colonialism, assimilation, and *cultural genocide*.¹ Fallen thinking accepts the

¹ *Cultural genocide* is the term used by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to describe the results of the Indian Residential Schools system in Canada.

historical lies that before the fifteenth-century arrival of Europeans the lands of North America were *terra nullius* (“empty land”) and the people sub-human. Fallen thinking has made settler and majority cultures deaf to the truth and beauty that are alive in Indigenous peoples and cultures, and deaf to the truth that Creator God’s common grace was present with the Peoples of the Land before European missionaries arrived.

A. *Some terms used in this report*

1. Why a circle of conversation?

First of all, this report is written and outlined as a circle of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Reconciliation, and it reflects our journey as a task force. Thus we try in these pages to reflect that journey by incorporating diverse voices and stories. On the title page we begin with Christ’s re-creational mission of reconciliation and unity, calling the church to be a new family. Following that, we provide historical background on the DOCD in North America and then probe, from several perspectives, the Fall and *fallen thinking* in processing the theological dissonances of this history and its ministry implications. We transition out of our Fall section with the telling of stories on the impacts of the DOCD because in coming to know our common story in its full truth, we become a real family. We then return—full circle—to Christ’s call to unity and reconciliation.

But now to a fuller explanation about the importance of the circle. One of the results of the DOCD is broken relationships, misunderstandings, and deafness toward each other. Our task force has been blessed with a diverse mix of Indigenous people, settlers from minority communities, and settlers of European origin. Over the course of our mandate, we have learned to hear each other as kin, as relatives in Christ. But learning to hear and know each other has been a challenge fraught with tension.

Our early agendas as a group were standard fare for a CRCNA study task force: opening in prayer, brief personal updates, focusing in on our tasks, and then closing in prayer. This was a clear-cut linear approach that focused on tasks and deadlines. The early results were, to be charitable, a little flat. In our standard, Euro-settler-defined process, we were not fully hearing all the voices and stories at the table. The result was stagnant momentum and tension among us as a group of imperfect people. Our story began turning around when we stepped away from a process and task orientation and employed a *circle* of conversation in which every voice and story is important and sought out. These circles helped us hear each other, and particularly Indigenous voices, much more clearly. The circle has been for us a powerful tool to begin crossing cultural barriers and uncovering the reality of our historically rooted brokenness. This journey has included raw tensions and, by God’s grace in the circle, growing trust and kinship.

As the CRCNA grapples with the legacy of the DOCD, we expect there will be tension and difficulty. Learning and adopting the practice of “the circle” from our Indigenous members has been critical to the outcome of our task force deliberations. We believe the wider church will also find this to be a wise and useful practice.

2. Why Doctrine of Christian Discovery?

We have chosen to use the term *Doctrine of Christian Discovery* deliberately. The more common term is *Doctrine of Discovery*. Referring to this doctrine as *Christian* discovery is a recognition of its theological and Christian roots. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues explains:

We maintain, that the principle declared in the fifteenth century as the law of Christendom, that discovery gave title to assume sovereignty over, and to govern the unconverted natives of Africa, Asia, and North and South America, has been recognized as a part of the national law [Law of Nations], for nearly four centuries, and that it is now so recognized by every Christian power, in its political department and its judicial.²

Policies of colonialism have undeniable roots in a Christian worldview of fifteenth-century Europe. Using the term *Doctrine of Christian Discovery* reminds us of its foundations in a worldview within Christendom.

3. Vocabulary old and new

The history that we have worked with comes with a staggering array of vocabulary to refer to the people who lived in North America before colonization. Some of the terms we have encountered are *savage*, *Indian*, *Pagan Native*, *Native American*, *First Nations*, *Aboriginal*, *Indigenous*, *People of the Land*. In any quotations that follow, you will see some of this vocabulary. However, in an effort to be as respectful as possible in our writing, we will use the following terms: *Native American*, *Indigenous peoples*, and *Peoples of the Land*, and, where applicable, the legal terms *Tribal* (U.S. law) and *Aboriginal* (Canadian law). Non-Indigenous people in North America are part of a five-century pattern of migration. In recognition of this, throughout this document, we refer to non-Indigenous people as *settlers*.

B. *The origins and mandate of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force*

1. The origins

In June 2010, synod requested the formation of a Creation Stewardship Task Force in response to debates concerning climate change. As this task force was being formed, a number of CRC members and staff from Canada suggested that Indigenous Christian perspectives on creation care would be an important element of any study.

Ultimately the Creation Stewardship Task Force would include scientists, educators, theologians, and an Indigenous person. In the course of their work, the task force was introduced to the Doctrine of Discovery. The question, gently and persistently raised, went something like this:

Why do we—human beings and all created things—find ourselves in growing crisis of environmental degradation and a warming climate? Please consider that it may be, at root, because the dominant cultural and religious values that have shaped our modern world (Western European)—in spite of

² Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ninth Session. Preliminary study of the impact on Indigenous peoples of the international legal construct known as the Doctrine of Discovery, www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E.C.19.2010.13%20EN.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).

having many good results—harbor a fatal flaw: The belief that we—as the highest expression of God’s creation—are called to dominate, use, and “save” all other created things—including people who have not yet seen this light. The papal bulls of the age of exploration that codified the Doctrine of Discovery are the clearest example of this fatal flaw. It is this doctrine that underpins our (the dominant culture’s) attitudes toward and treatment of Indigenous peoples and the earth. It is experienced by Indigenous peoples and by other created things as predatory. Until we confront this flaw, we cannot be transformed into proper stewards of creation.³

Once the task force more clearly understood the potential implications of the Doctrine of Discovery, it included in its report to synod a section briefly describing the doctrine and its effects. But it was clear that a serious analysis of and response to this new information was outside of the task force’s scope. Consequently, the Creation Stewardship Task Force recommended that synod authorize a subsequent task force to more adequately explore this issue. The recommendation passed unanimously by the delegates to Synod 2012.

In September 2012, the Board of Trustees (BOT) approved a mandate and a core group of three persons to select additional members for an appropriate Doctrine of Discovery Task Force. The group was given several years to work and was asked to submit its report for consideration to Synod 2015.

2. The mandate

In summary⁴ form, the task force’s mandate is to “facilitate a discovery process—a learning process of the following questions in order to come to a shared understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery and its consequences.”

The mandate’s specific questions are as follows:

- How and why did the Doctrine of Discovery come to be, and what was the role of the church and European social/cultural attitudes in its creation and propagation?
- What were its principal effects on Indigenous peoples during the age of conquest, particularly in what is now Canada and the United States?
- What, if any, are the continuing effects of the Doctrine of Discovery and its legacies (such as related legal instruments or cultural attitudes) on Indigenous peoples, and do these effects vary in cause and manifestation in different locations in the United States and Canada?
- Has the Doctrine of Discovery and related instruments both expressed and shaped the dominant (European) culture in the United States and Canada and affected our ways of relating and ministering to each other in ways that may not be well understood or acknowledged? If so, how?

³ A summary of Ted Charles’s contributions on the Doctrine of Discovery to the Creation Stewardship Task Force.

⁴ For the full mandate, please see Appendix A.

The mandate continues with suggestions on ways to make its work as participatory as possible by including “testimony from native and aboriginal peoples in the United States and Canada regarding questions posed in the mandate.” The task force was also asked to “take into consideration the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.”

Finally, the task force was asked to “report to the BOT by September 2014,” and then on “to Synod 2015.” The BOT later extended that deadline to 2016.

II. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery: A North American history

This section provides a summary of the history of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD) and its effects and consequences in North America. The doctrine set forth a principle that justified colonization and codified racial hierarchies in the law, placing European, Christian nations in the position of power. The doctrine began with a series of papal bulls that granted dominion of Catholic nations over non-Christian peoples and lands. It evolved as a legal construct alongside colonial history, was encoded in the judiciary of settler nations,⁵ and continues to influence legal and policy decisions today. It provided the intellectual framework that dictated how non-Natives interacted with Indigenous peoples, and it became the basis of international law, effectively legalizing colonization.⁶ We remain mindful that no single experience of the doctrine from a Native perspective exists and that Native peoples have been active participants in their history while living in a context that included the doctrine. We also acknowledge that to analyze the doctrine’s full effects would require scrutinizing the entire history of the Church in a global context (for example, its effects on African slave trade and colonization), which is beyond the scope of this project. Our focus here is limited to the historical dynamics of the doctrine in North America.

A. *Origins of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*

The DOCD’s roots spring from centuries of European interactions with racialized “others” through religious conflict. The language of “discovery” in the context of the Americas evolved in a worldview forged in the Crusades, which then evolved into conquest and colonization. Medieval Europe was governed by a number of Christian states under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Pope. Monarchs went to war with the Pope’s blessing, and papal bulls governed the ways Christian states interacted with non-Christians in these conflicts. The Crusades arguably established a mental framework hierarchizing humanity: Muslim Moors were considered less human than soldiers of Christ. In 1452, Pope Nicolas V, in the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, established the dominion of Christian nations over non-Christian by authorizing Portugal to conquer and enslave “Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ.” Three years later, in *Romanus Pontifex*, he extended this dominion to specific lands and reaffirmed the enslavement

⁵ These include the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, notably the nations that initially refused to sign on to the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

⁶ An extended documentation of the legal aspects of this chronology (with full citations) can be found in the literary review by Seth Adema, accessible at www2.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/cpd/Lit%20Review%20final2.pdf.

of non-Christians. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the *Inter Caetera*, which delineated ownership of newly discovered lands in the Americas and established the sovereignty of Christian nations over those continents and peoples.

Together, these papal bulls ushered in the Age of Imperialism by authorizing the taking of land and labor by Christian nations from non-Christians. By building a theological justification of dominance over “the other,” Westerners easily rationalized the oppression of non-European peoples in the Americas. Ironically, those who developed the doctrine knew so little at that time about the peoples it victimized that they are in no way accurately reflected in the papal bulls.

Defining the Indigenous peoples of North America was one of the most important intellectual projects underlying colonization. Before substantive encounters with Natives, Europeans could follow the ancient Greek tradition, encoded in mythology, of imagining the “other” as a monstrous, nonhuman being (e.g., cyclops, minotaurs, gorgons, sirens). (This derisive othering contrasts with the way many Indigenous peoples tended to view those who were different from themselves: as deities.) Encountering instead very unmonstrous humans raised difficulties for the Europeans: if settlers accepted that the Indigenous peoples were fully human, the logic of discovery would have fallen apart, since all the land in question had already been discovered by Natives.

Europeans relied instead on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD) and the principle of *terra nullius* (Latin for “unused or empty land”), a legal construct that assumed Indigenous peoples occupied the land not in a European sense (ownership) but rather in a way like fish occupy water or birds occupy air. European lawyers, philosophers, and theologians expanded the notion of *terra nullius* to apply to lands not farmed or land ownership not governed according to European standards. This notion ignored the fact that Native cultures comprised complex social, political, and economic structures based on collective ownership of land. Europeans asserted that “pagan” Aboriginals could not hold rights to the land in the same manner as Europeans. This assertion became the origin of the term “Aboriginal Title,” which invariably included fewer rights than the rights of dominion asserted by Western powers.

B. The Doctrine of Christian Discovery in the early colonial period

During the European race for empire, economic motives fueled colonization, and the principles of the papal franchise evolved as a secular tool of land acquisition and possession of laborers in the form of slavery. The doctrine was applied unevenly because it was subject to competing European powers and was challenged by personal encounters between Indigenous peoples and European settlers. The practical implications of the DOCD lay in wait until the European states mustered political, military, economic, and social capital to marginalize Indigenous peoples.

In the meantime, subcultures developed in the fur trading hinterlands that were inconsistent with the rationale of the DOCD. Many European men married Indigenous women following Native rituals and practices (marriage à la *façon du pays*, or “in the custom of the country”). These marital unions were treated without prejudice, causing consternation among European clergy.

Another area of cultural convergence involved *voyageurs*, French-Canadian adventurers who traded in the interior on a seasonal or multiyear basis, and their Indigenous colleagues in the fur trade. The Métis constitute an entire culture based on this dynamic interaction between settler and Indigenous peoples. In the American West, among the Spanish settlers, and on the East Coast, similar interactions with Natives occurred on the margins of the early colonies. Those who interacted with Indigenous peoples on a daily basis recognized fully the humanity of Native peoples, contradicting the assumptions of the DOCD.

Protestant monarchies moving away from Catholic rule retained the intellectual paradigm in which Western religion, civilization, and knowledge were superior to non-Western. King Henry VIII affirmed the DOCD and applied its principles to England's early North American colonization. Nevertheless, early Dutch settlers apparently recognized the rights and humanity of the Haudenosaunee enough to enter into a Two Row Wampum treaty in 1613 based on covenantal principles, solemnized through ceremony, and witnessed by the parties and the Creator. The Two Row Wampum had deep significance in Indigenous-Settler relationships: white belts with two purple rows running parallel, representing two canoes traveling alongside each other, neither interfering with the other. The Dutch did not ultimately honor this treaty, but the Haudenosaunee still do.

The writings of New England Separatists and Puritans and their dealings with the Natives clearly reflect a theology reinforcing the ideologies of the DOCD. Separatist leader William Bradford's journals outline the belief that divine providence ordained their colonialism. He refers to the Natives as "savage barbarians" despite recounting stories of help received from, and a treaty made with, the Wampanoags. The Puritans likewise claimed possession of the land as an inheritance predestined for them. They believed they were a New Testament Israel and the New England colony the New Jerusalem. Puritan leader John Winthrop, in his 1630 speech "A Model of Christian Charity," exhorted his fellow settlers in their colonial project to love God and one another, to be a "city on a hill." He prays that they may follow God's ordinances so that "we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it." He ends by (mis)quoting Deuteronomy, specifically identifying his fellow Puritans with Israel by connecting their voyage across the "vast sea" to Israel's crossing of the Jordan River to enter the promised land: "[if our hearts turn away from God] we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea [river] to possess it."

A poignant example of the devastating effects of these beliefs during the Puritan era can be seen in the Pequot War, and specifically in the massacre at Mystic, which historians argue set the pattern for America's approach to Indian relations. In 1637, the British colonial militia, on its way to engage with the Pequot warriors at Pequot Harbor, instead detoured to the settlement at Mystic. While the mostly noncombatant Pequots slept, the British burned their huts and killed 600-700 Pequots as they fled from the flames. The Native allies of the British were so shocked by this bloody slaughter that many of them abandoned the English troops. Captain John Mason, in his account of the war, quotes Psalm 44:1-3: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our Fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in

the times of old: how Thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how Thou did afflict the people and cast them out. . . .” He ends his account by noting, “Thus we may see, how the face of God is set against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. . . .”⁷ Some Christian colonists apparently condemned this violence because Captain John Underhill responded to accusations of brutality in his own narrative:

It may be demanded, Why should you be so furious? Should not Christians have more mercy and compassion? Sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents. Sometimes the case alters, but we will not dispute it now. We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.

Historian Alfred Cave notes that the Pequot War “cast a long shadow” on U.S. history:

The images of brutal and untrustworthy savages plotting the extermination of those who would do the work of God in the wilderness became a vital part of the mythology of the American frontier. Celebration of victory over Indians as the triumph of light over darkness, civilization over savagery, for many generations our central historical myth, finds its earliest full expression in the contemporary chronicles of this little war.⁸



Figure 1 John Gast, “American Progress” (1872)

In this “mythology,” Native Americans were cast in the role of the biblical Canaanites who were to be destroyed or driven from the promised land. American exceptionalism and the concept of Manifest Destiny grew naturally from Puritan typology and rationalized the violent subjugation of Natives. This worldview extended to other colonial enterprises with long-term effects, most notably, slavery and the slave trade.

C. *The Royal Proclamation of 1763*

As settlement expanded and Europeans continued to rely on Indigenous peoples for daily survival in the colonies, the British government, at the close of the Seven Years (French and Indian) War, issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The proclamation’s purpose, as the British interpreted it, was to secure their acquisitions from the French in the war and to normalize the settlement of the frontier while it reserved preemptive land rights for the British crown. It did this by demarcating a border along the Appalachian Mountains (the “Proclamation Line”) to the west of which no prospectors could acquire Indigenous lands. King George of England claimed exclusive authority in

⁷ John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War* (New York: Kneeland and Green, 1736). E-text digitalcommons.unl.edu/ (accessed 21 July 2015).

⁸ Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 168.

land acquisition and trade with Natives. The Royal Proclamation referred to these lands as “our dominion” and under the protection of the crown. A confederacy of Indigenous nations resisted this new “dominion” in what is known as the Pontiac Rebellion.

Dissatisfied American settlers considered the proclamation a betrayal that surrendered vast tracts of potential settlement land, interfering with their ambitions. From a British perspective, the proclamation helped manage the conflict with Aboriginal nations and the colonies as they moved toward independence. From the colonists’ perspective, however, the Royal Proclamation was so abhorrent that the Declaration of Independence refers to it twice as cause for the revolution, first citing, in the seventh justification, that King George has been “raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands”; and, second, in the final justification, citing how King George’s actions have “excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the *merciless Indian savages*, whose known rule of warfare, is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions” (emphasis added). The tensions between Britain and the newly formed United States of America relating to the Royal Proclamation were only fully settled in the drawing of borders after the War of 1812. Unsettled, however, were the rights of Indigenous peoples, who remain encoded in the United States’ founding document as “merciless savages.”

Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows argues that the Royal Proclamation was the documentary copy of a treaty between the First Nations of North America and the British Crown. It secured British territories while the First Nations could maintain their sovereignty. Borrows specifically notes that the treaty was sealed by Wampum Belts, the sacred mechanism used in the early 1613 treaty with the Dutch. Many experts argue that the Royal Proclamation was and remains the basis for Aboriginal self-government.

D. Nineteenth-century codification of the doctrine in North American law

In the spirit of the Royal Proclamation, the new United States passed trade and intercourse acts granting the federal government the right to govern all Native American relations. The U.S. Supreme Court specifically encoded the DOCD in a secular court through three decisions between 1823 and 1832 by Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, now termed the “Marshall Trilogy.” The principles of the Marshall Trilogy remain the basis for U.S. Federal Indian policies. In these decisions, Marshall borrowed language from previously articulated Indian policies that included rhetoric about “Indian savagery” to establish the legal framework supporting colonial practices. Although the Supreme Court has recanted other racially charged decisions, this language has persisted. Constant reference to these decisions has led to the problematic assumption that American Indian policy has been a straightforward application of the doctrines set out in the Marshall Trilogy, but the decisions’ inconsistencies and variability in interpretation has come to characterize Indian law in general.

The first and most influential case in the Marshall Trilogy, *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823), codified the notion that the United States inherited the right of discovery from the British and had an absolute right to the land. At stake in the case was whether Piankeshaw Natives had sovereign rights over the land they sold (contrary to the Royal Proclamation) in 1773 and 1775.

The purchasers then ceded this land to the government during various military actions or by treaty. In 1818 the federal government sold some of the lands to defendant William M'Intosh. This sale was contested on the basis that the Piankeshaw did not have title over their land and therefore could not sell it to private parties in the first place. The court found that "discovery gave title to the government by whose subjects, or by whose authority, it was made, against all other European governments, which title might be consummated by possession."⁹ Another result of this ruling was that it created a single-buyer market, guaranteeing the acquisition of Native American land at the lowest cost.¹⁰

Considering the many personal interests involved in the case, the court viewed its decision as a procedural act, but the case took on a meaning far beyond the imaginings and intent of the court. By codifying the fifteenth-century papal bulls into federal case law, *Johnson v. M'Intosh* became the basis for legal and policy decisions in the United States and Canada and was referenced by the U.S. Supreme Court as recently as 2005 in *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*.¹¹ The case addressed the problem of European claims to land in North America, and it also determined Native American rights to the land and made it possible to eliminate those rights. Asserting the principles of the DOCD transformed Indigenous occupants from owners to tenants, while the U.S. government claimed the rights of a landlord, including the right to eviction. This distinction marginalized Indigenous societies, denied the existence of their natural rights, and contributed to an attempt to eliminate them culturally without waging outright war or explicitly stating government goals.

The state of Georgia acted soon after the decision in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* by passing legislation that culminated in the Indian Removal Act. In 1828, Georgia suspended the rights of the Cherokee under state law and seized their lands in the hope that they would be forced to leave. In 1830, the federal government passed the Indian Removal Act authorizing the U.S. president to negotiate the removal of Native Americans from the Southern states on to federal land west of the Mississippi. These actions were legalized in the subsequent Supreme Court decisions of the Marshall Trilogy.

In 1831, John Marshall's court reinforced the principle of U.S. jurisdiction over Native lands in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* but then tried to mitigate its repercussions in *Worcester v. Georgia* the following year.¹² In *Cherokee*, Marshall found that the Cherokee nation, seeking relief from restrictive Georgia state laws, did not have the jurisdiction to sue as a "foreign" or sovereign nation. He declared them a "domestic dependent nation" and described their relationship to the federal government as a "ward to its guardians." Marshall attempted to mitigate these repercussions in *Worcester v. Georgia* by recognizing Indian nations' sovereignty. This case involved the missionary Samuel

⁹ *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543, 573 (1823, emphasis added).

¹⁰ Details of the case reveal many troubling realities besides the ethnocentrism and racism reflected in the decision. Historical records reveal that power, greed, political rivalries, and religious bigotry all played a part in the decision. See a detailed summary of this matter in the comprehensive literary review by Seth Adema, accessible at www2.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/cpd/Lit%20Review%20final2.pdf.

¹¹ *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*, 54 U.S. 197.

¹² *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1, and *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515.

Worcester, who was convicted under Georgia law of residing on Cherokee land without a state license. Marshall ruled against Georgia, arguing that the U.S. government had an exclusive relationship with Native Americans and, thus, Georgia could not enforce state laws in Cherokee territory. Neither the state of Georgia nor President Andrew Jackson—nor later settler judiciaries—enforced the decision. In the wake of the Marshall cases came the mass removal of Native Americans from their lands—what many settlers had long desired.

The Marshall cases built on the religious and racial prejudices in the Doctrine of Christian Discovery that dehumanized Indigenous peoples. Biblical imagery continued to be reflected in U.S. legal decisions regarding Native Americans and the land, particularly Old Testament stories of conquest and possession of the land. The legal discourse continued to assert the superiority of the dominant culture and used a “Christian” and “heathen” dichotomy for persuasive purposes.

The contradiction between Christian charity and the oppression and dehumanization that flowed from the Doctrine of Christian Discovery did not go unchallenged. Opposition to the Indian Removal Act was led by Theodore Frelinghuysen in the U. S. Senate, who was criticized for his overtly Christian appeals: “God, in his providence, planted these tribes on this Western continent, so far as we know, before Great Britain herself had a political existence. . . . [They] are justly entitled to a share in the common bounties of a benignant Providence.” In 1833, Native Methodist minister William Apess (Pequot) rebuked the “white man” for the nation’s crimes against Native Americans and African slaves that flowed from the belief in white superiority:

Can you charge the Indians with robbing a nation almost of their whole Continent, and murdering their women and children, and then depriving the remainder of their lawful rights, that nature and God require them to have? And to cap the climax, rob another nation to till their grounds, and welter out their days under the lash with hunger and fatigue under the scorching rays of a burning sun?¹³

Apess asks, “Is it not the case that every body that is not white is treated with contempt and counted as barbarians?”¹⁴

The belief in the inferiority of Indigenous cultures led to attempts not only to deny Indigenous land rights but also to wipe out Indigenous culture through assimilation and attrition. These practices developed alongside legal battles concerning Indigenous rights. In both the United States and Canada, these attempts were facilitated most notoriously through the establishment of Indian boarding schools and legislation designed to force Indigenous cultures to adopt Western practices of land ownership and governance.

From 1820 to the 1970s, Christian missionaries and churches established schools as an outreach to Natives not only in an attempt to facilitate their conversion to Christianity but also to “civilize” Indian children and thus enable their survival in the larger society. In 1879, the U.S. government formally established Indian boarding schools designed to strip Native

¹³ William Apess, “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man,” in *A Son of the Forest and Other Writings*, ed. Barry O’Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

children of their culture and educate them according to Western values. Captain Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, succinctly described the goal of these schools when he said, "All the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."¹⁵ Canada followed with amendments to the Indian Act of 1876 that mandated native children to attend Indian Residential Schools run by churches. Native peoples were the first to speak out against the abuses in these schools. In 1900-1902, Zitkala-Ša (Lakota) recounted in a series of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly* the shocking abuse she and other students experienced as a result of assimilationist policies at the Carlisle School. Their experiences are echoed in contemporary stories of survivors of Indian boarding schools. The CRC, through the Board of Heathen Mission, established Rehoboth, its Indian boarding school, in 1903.

The United States and Canada both adopted assimilationist policies targeting the Indigenous cultural practice of common ownership of land in favor of a Western model of private ownership of property. In 1867, the British North America Act (BNA, aka Constitution Act) put "Indians and Lands reserved for Indians" under the control of the federal government, effectively legislating what had been established in U.S. jurisprudence. The goal, as famously expressed by Prime Minister John A. MacDonal, was to "do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion." In the United States, the General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act) of 1887 was similarly motivated. Senator Henry Dawes, the legislation's principal promoter, argued that what Native Americans needed was "selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization. Till these people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress."¹⁶ The Dawes Act parceled out land to Native American individuals in a Western model of land ownership, with the remainder being made available for sale to non-Natives. The result was devastating: tribes lost two-thirds of their land and found themselves relegated to a largely non-arable remnant. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has labeled these actions *cultural genocide* because they threatened the very existence of Indigenous nations and caused immeasurable generational trauma.

While Canadian law makes no explicit reference to the DOCD, legislation and later court rulings echo the attitudes inherent in the doctrine. The lack of consistent codification of the DOCD into a legal framework based on interpretation of treaties has contributed to what has been described as "the most uncertain and contentious body of law in Canada."¹⁷ While Aboriginal treaties were sacred agreements, especially when solemnized with ceremonies, Europeans viewed the treaties as land transfers. The case of *St. Catharine's Milling v. The Queen*, 1888, established the nature of Aboriginal title

¹⁵ Richard Henry Pratt, director of the first U.S. Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892) 46. historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/ (accessed 21 July 2015).

¹⁶ Quoted in James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: The History of Native Americans* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998), 300.

¹⁷ Ken McNeil, "Aboriginal Title and Aboriginal Rights: What's the Connection?" *Alberta Law Review*, 36 (1) (1997), 117.

in Canada and the meaning of the treaties in settled areas of British North America. When the British government granted a lumber company license to harvest on reserve crown lands in Treaty No. 3 Territory, the Ontario government objected, arguing that the land belonged to the province. Aboriginal representatives were not present when the case was argued. The British Privy Council ruled that according to the Royal Proclamation, Aboriginal peoples had land rights akin to occupants and that their title existed only “at the pleasure of the crown.” The case narrowed Aboriginal title to exist only on reserve lands. This ran contrary to the spirit and intent of the treaties, which were covenants between sovereign nations, and many First Nations leaders continue to argue that land exchange was never part of the oral negotiations. Unreceptive courts, cultural barriers, and legislation under the Indian Act in Canada that made it illegal for an Aboriginal person to hire a lawyer to challenge the European law until 1951 meant that issues of title did not go before the court until the mid-twentieth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal title had found its place in European common-law jurisprudence. With the Royal Proclamation and decisions from the Marshall Court and *St. Catharine’s Milling*, Aboriginal title in North America was set. In Canada, the Eurocentric interpretations of the treaties marginalized Indigenous peoples. U.S. westward expansion continued apace, forcibly and violently removing Native Americans from their land and marginalizing them geographically, culturally, and economically. Globally, the norms established in the colonization of the Americas assumed that Indigenous peoples had lesser title and that Euro-American “advancement” took priority.

E. Impact of discovery in twentieth-century law

In the latter half of the twentieth century, as Indigenous peoples increasingly litigated for their rights, Canadian and U.S. courts diverged on significant issues concerning Indigenous land rights. Case law both overturned the logic of discovery set out in the Marshall Court and in *St. Catharine’s Milling* and reinforced the attitudes that supported the DOCD. In *Tee-Hit-Ton Indians v. United States* (1955), the Tee-Hit-Ton (Tlingit) sued the United States for unlawful harvesting of lumber on traditional lands. The government argued that they had rights to the land based on their treaty with the Emperor of Russia, which stated that “uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulation that the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes of that country.”¹⁸ However, no treaty existed between the Tlingit and either Russia or the United States, and in the U.S.-Russian treaty the submission of Indigenous peoples was assumed rather than granted. In justifying the seizure of Tlingit resources, the Supreme Court explained:

Every American schoolboy knows that the savage tribes of this continent were deprived of their ancestral ranges by force and that, even when the Indians ceded millions of acres by treaty in return for blankets, food and trinkets, it was not a sale but the conqueror’s will that deprived them of their land.¹⁹

¹⁸ Quoted in Walter Echo-Hawk, *In the Courts of the Conqueror* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 2012), 360.

¹⁹ *Tee-Hit-Ton v. United States*, 348 US 272 (1955).

Tee-Hit-Ton was decided a year after *Brown v. Board of Education*, suggesting that while the U.S. courts recognized and struck down the racist logic of “separate but equal,” the racist logic of discovery persisted.

The U.S. Supreme Court in 1978 heard several cases regarding Native American rights and employed nineteenth-century logic explicitly in decisions, especially discovery doctrine. *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* involved the arrest by tribal police officers of two non-Native men. The defendants argued that Native courts had no jurisdiction over non-Native persons. The Supreme Court, citing cases from 1810-1916, decided that according to the DOCD, Native nations do not have legal jurisdiction to try non-Natives because the rights of Natives existed only insofar as they did not interfere with the desires of the higher sovereign, in this case the U.S. government. This decision has been the target of harsh criticism by those who argue that the power to enforce Native law is essential to tribal sovereignty and that the current legal status has allowed non-Natives to break their laws with impunity. The decision has been mitigated by the passage of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which allows tribal prosecution of non-Natives for domestic violence.

In Canada, the first successful judicial challenge of the DOCD was the 1973 case of *Calder v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*, when, following a ninety-year struggle, the Supreme Court acknowledged Aboriginal title that existed prior to colonization.²⁰ Chief Frank Calder and the Nisga’a Nation argued not only that they had title to their lands but also that title was never extinguished. The court found that title existed at the time of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, but they split on the question of title. The first finding overturned *St. Catharine’s Milling* and opened the modern era of land claims. But while *Calder* affirmed that Aboriginal title existed, it assumed that for land rights to exist, patterns of land use had to remain constant from the time of initial contact (referred to as “frozen rights”). The 1990 case of *Regina v. Sparrow* overturned this concept and upheld that Aboriginal traditional practices could remain under treaty rights even under modern forms.

Another positive step for Aboriginal rights in Canada was the landmark case of *Guerin v. the Queen* (1984), which expanded on *Calder* by deciding that Aboriginal rights were legally enforceable against the Crown. This case involved the leasing of Musqueam land by the province for a golf course on Vancouver Island. When the Musqueam became aware of fraud in the lease terms, they sued the province for ignoring their rights based on *Calder*. The court used the case of *Johnson v. McIntosh* to argue that “Indians have a legal right to occupy and possess certain lands, the ultimate fee to which is in the Crown.”²¹ In a peculiar way, *Guerin* affirmed Aboriginal rights through the DOCD rather than by overturning the doctrine. Although the *Calder* case overturned the DOCD in the interior of British Columbia, the norms established in the DOCD persisted with regard to contested spaces for which treaties existed. More recently, a 2014 case at the Supreme Court of Canada, *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia*, affirmed that the Tsilhqot’in Nation had legal title to their traditional lands in the interior of British Columbia based on the principles established in the 1973 *Calder* decision.²² While many cases

²⁰ *Calder v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*, [1973] S.C.R. 313.

²¹ *Guerin v. the Queen*, [1984] 2 S.C.R. 335.

²² *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia*, [2014] S.C.C. 44.

had been dismissed on procedural grounds, this case represented the first successful defense of Aboriginal title.

The 1984 acknowledgment of Aboriginal title was reversed when the British Columbia Supreme Court decided in favor of the crown in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* in 1997.²³ The case was brought by First Nations (Gixsan and Wet'suwet'en) in the interior of British Columbia when developers began to intrude in their territory. What followed was one of the most lengthy and expensive legal cases in Canadian history. Ultimately the crown reaffirmed the intellectual concepts of discovery: that European patterns of social organization, land use, and property rights were superior to what existed before their arrival and that title exists only "at the pleasure of the crown." The decision was met with outrage and condemnation from both the Native community and legal scholars. The Canadian Supreme Court reversed the decision on the grounds that the oral testimony of the Gixsan and Wet'suwet'en was not given the weight it deserved. Because the Supreme Court could not hear new evidence, it could not resolve the questions before the court, so it ordered a retrial, which has not happened. The Supreme Court left Aboriginal land-rights issues in their previous tenuous position. The court did, however, affirm the value of oral testimony in legal decisions, which ultimately shaped the way that First Nation claims have developed since then.

F. *The Doctrine of Discovery today*

In the twenty-first century, the DOCD continues to influence legal, intellectual, and social realities across North America. Treaties and legal cases still rely on norms codified in nineteenth-century understandings of discovery. The DOCD is still cited in legal cases, especially concerning land use and title. Most recently, in the 2005 case of *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*, Justice Ginsberg used discovery doctrine to justify the sovereignty of the U.S. government in a case involving an Oneida Nation land purchase.²⁴ Though the cases tend to be less dramatic, Canadian common law is also based on the DOCD by reference to the Royal Proclamation, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, and the reams of litigation that have come from those decisions.

International activism at the United Nations has begun the important work of addressing the legacy of the DOCD and the imperialist practices it facilitated. Action at the international level, specifically the United Nations, is addressing some of the problematic legacies of discovery doctrine. In 2007, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was ratified despite opposition by Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The UNDRIP affirms,

all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust.²⁵

In 2001, Indigenous peoples globally gained a political voice through the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council on the Rights of

²³ *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010.

²⁴ *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*, 54 U.S. 197.

²⁵ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly*, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, 2.

Indigenous Peoples. In a June 2006 report to the Special Rapporteur, the Indian Law Resource Center argued that the United States was one of a shrinking number of nations that refused to recognize preexisting land rights—a legacy of the DOCD. In 2012, the special theme for the UN’s Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was the DOCD and its enduring impact. While the legacies of the DOCD have not been eliminated, the effects are being acknowledged, which is an important first step.

Protests by Indigenous peoples have led some states in the United States and Canada to acknowledge the legacy of the DOCD and issue apologies to Indigenous peoples for colonial practices. Such apologies can only be effective, however, if they include the opportunity for victims to address past wrongs and speak to their collective past.²⁶ An apology is meaningless if it does not fully delineate the offenses and include a call for action to change social and political structures.

In 2008, the Canadian government apologized to Aboriginal peoples for its role in running Residential Schools and for the abuses within that system. This apology was followed by the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to further investigate the experience and legacy of Residential Schools, including providing a safe space for survivors to tell their stories. The apology and the TRC have received mixed reviews, with some affirming their value and others saying that they do not go far enough.

The United States government has also apologized to Native Americans, though few Americans are aware of it. The apology was hidden in the 2010 Department of Defense Appropriations bills and lacks acknowledgment of any specific injustices against Native tribes. Further, the bill concludes with a disclaimer stating that “nothing in this section . . . authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.”²⁷ While the apologies of Canada and Australia have garnered considerable attention and commentary through their public expression as part of the TRCs that took place in both countries, the nature of the United States’ buried apology has merely highlighted the absence of reconciliation and demonstrates the need for genuine dialogue.

Finally, a number of churches have responded to the DOCD, affirming their own culpability in the creation and application of the doctrine itself and its legacy in North America. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has denounced the DOCD and calls on churches to examine their own national experiences with the doctrine. In response to this call, the Anglican Church, the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ have offered apologies for colonial oppression and have repudiated the DOCD as “fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent rights that individuals and peoples have received from God.”²⁸ The Roman Catholic Church has not responded to the call to address the legacy of the DOCD, although Pope Francis has offered a general apology for the exploitation of Native peoples. Addressing the DOCD is an important part of

²⁶ The mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reflects this fact.

²⁷ One Hundred Eleventh Congress of the United States of America, “Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010,” 45.

²⁸ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, A086 R1: Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery (carried) archive.anglican.ca/gs2010/resolutions/a086 (accessed 20 July 2015).

reconciliation in Canada and in the United States. We stand at the edge of a historic precipice, uniquely situated to address the legacy of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.

III. The Fall, Part 1: Theological dissonance

A. *The Doctrine of Christian Discovery and the family of God* (written by an Indigenous Christian)

“Thus, we come to the conclusion that felt right to us from the beginning:
truth is known through conversation.”

—Paul F. Knitter

It is our hope that our journey would be a seeking of our common history as children of the triune Creator. Of course, when anyone embarks on a journey, there are opportunities to explore various rabbit trails that can both enhance and detract from the original journey. In our study of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD) we realized we could not explore or study every thread of the biblical narrative, but our work has been centered on trying to enhance our understanding of our common story as found in Jesus Christ.

Throughout the biblical narrative we witness humankind on a cycle of walking away from God to being pursued by God and drawn back into a closer relationship and fuller understanding of God’s purpose for his created imagebearers. And then our human nature turns us away from God again, and the cycle continues. This has led to many historical moments of trusting our humanness rather than putting our trust in the Creator of heaven and earth. At this point in the story of humankind, God sends his only Son to intercede on our behalf because of the rift in our relationship with the triune Creator.

In Matthew 22:34-40 we are given this simple imperative of how our relationship is to work, not only on a human level but also with all of creation:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

1. Love one another—help one another

These words are the beginning of our common story as imagebearers of God. However, as we tried to create our history and our identities as individuals and nations, our focus became more individualistic rather than on loving our neighbors as ourselves. In the following sections, we have gathered some different thoughts and ideas about how we have come to internalize and live the Doctrine of Christian Discovery today.

The DOCD affected a theological understanding of the created world that the church sought to live out through the imperative found not only in the Gospel of Matthew (22:34-40) but also in how we dealt with all of creation. One area in which the DOCD went horribly wrong was in how the papal bulls assumed that any human being not in Christ Jesus could be seen as less than fully human. This false belief created a power imbalance in the relationship between European settlers and First Peoples of the

lands they sought to inhabit. Parry Stelter, in his book *A Word of Hope for My Aboriginal People*, makes this observation:

As Christians, our whole life and existence is supposed to reflect the grace and unconditional love that God has for us. Yet, when Europeans came, they were so caught up in having their own way, and turning my people into proper Christians, God's greatest commandments got thrown overboard when they landed here.²⁹

Our countries' histories show that we have rejected and ignored and isolated ourselves from the common story we find in the Christian Scriptures. We need to get back to a sense of belonging to a greater whole so that in all we do and say, the name of Jesus is lifted up.

2. How we read and understand a story

One of the fundamental errors of the papal bulls delineating the DOCD was their complete failure to recognize the diversity within creation. Clearly Scripture points to diversity as a gift from the triune Creator, who wants all humankind and the rest of creation to synergize into praise of their maker. Not only have we walked away from God time and time again, we have sought ways to justify our poor treatment of people groups and to abuse and hoard the goods the earth produces for our benefit. In both Canada and the United States of America, our study of the DOCD has shown a power struggle between the First Peoples of the land and the dominant culture enveloped in a greedy arrogance.

The focus of this part of our journey is to understand some possible reasons for this legacy in North America. Walter Brueggemann, in an article titled "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," provides a possible explanation for our moving away from a common story to a "me first" attitude. He writes,

The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God's generosity. It tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, "It is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good." It declares that God blesses—that is, endows with vitality—the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind. And it pictures the creator as saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." In an orgy of fruitfulness, everything in its kind is to multiply the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit. And as you know, the creation ends in Sabbath. God is so overrun with fruitfulness that God says, "I've got to take a break from all this."³⁰

When European settlers entered this new land of North America (Turtle Island), it was with the promise of great freedom and riches compared to a life they left behind. Upon entering the land, they were greeted in peace by the local inhabitants, and many settlers were taught how to live from the land and receive its bounty. The DOCD provided a mechanism by which the new arrivals began to see themselves as a superior culture and proceeded to articulate a white European gospel. The seeds of greed were growing, and the papal bulls justified action against their hosts thinly veiled in Christian motivations. As the population grew, a false sense of need and desire gathered momentum, and blessings from

²⁹ Parry Stelter, *A Word of Hope for My Aboriginal People* (Word of Hope Ministries, 2014).

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity" in *The Christian Century* 116, no. 10 (24 March 1999): 342-347.

God were attainable through hard work and missionary fervor. Again Walter Brueggeman sheds some light on how the church/Christians could make the choices they made in a new land:

Later in Genesis God blesses Abraham, Sarah and their family. God tells them to be a blessing, to bless the people of all nations. Blessing is the force of well-being active in the world, and faith is the awareness that creation is the gift that keeps on giving.³¹

Unfortunately, as we see throughout the book of Exodus, Israel doubted God's provision repeatedly—of food, of water, of protection against enemies (Ex. 16-17; Ps. 95:8-9). Even though God delivered them from their enemies faithfully and supplied them with abundance daily, their first reaction to trouble or scarcity was to grumble against God, failing to trust in his promises. The world's response in fear of such situations is to amass wealth to protect against scarcity and thereby gain power and control over others. Israel followed that pattern and moved away from trust in God's provision despite God's faithfulness over and over to provide for all their needs.

The Doctrine of Discovery comes out of the myth of scarcity and empowers the church and kings and queens to justify the pursuit of more wealth. This pursuit of more *stuff* created around the world a "false need," which was contrary to creation's abundance that is still here today, as God promised it would be. Since the fall, we have sought human ways to hedge our bets against creation's abundance. Our kinship in Jesus has been pushed aside for a more individualistic, self-serving model because we neglect to see the continual abundance that springs forth from creation.

3. Creation groans

In becoming nations of people under the myth of scarcity, part of our nature has led us to abuse the creation. One of the driving factors of our neglect of the relationship between creation and humankind is our greed. We have an insatiable appetite for more and more, and this has caused a deep wound to the land. The Euro-Western world and life view is in direct contrast to that of the Indigenous peoples of North America, where the land is treated in a familial manner. Our people call her mother earth because she provides for and nurtures us, and we can live abundantly. The land was not something we sought to own, but, rather, we understood that our role within creation was to take care of the earth so that all living creatures and plants could thrive. Having Christ's journey to the cross in mind, we as Reformed people believe that all of creation was redeemed by his work on the cross. Christ made himself the servant of all, and greed was not a part of his reconciling creation with his heavenly Father. As followers of Christ Jesus, we are called to reexamine ourselves and our relationship with the earth. In his book *Earthwise*, Calvin B. DeWitt, in chapter 3, titled "A Biblical Perspective on Creation Care," writes,

The Bible's serious treatment of environmental matters should not surprise us. Since God creates and sustains all creation, we should expect the Bible to call us to bring honor to God in creation. We should expect to support

³¹ Ibid., 342.

creation's care and keeping and to encourage us to maintain the integrity of the creation that God repeatedly calls "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Moreover, since the Bible professes Jesus Christ as the one through whom *all things* are reconciled to God (Col.1:20), we should expect it to decry creation's destruction, to call for creation's restoration, and to look forward to the whole of creation's being made right again. And so it does!³²

As DeWitt develops his chapter, he proposes eight biblical principles that help disclose the Bible's powerful environmental message:

1. Earthkeeping: "As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so we must keep and sustain our Lord's creation."
2. Fruitfulness: "We should enjoy but not destroy creation's fruitfulness."
3. Sabbath: "We must provide for creation's sabbath rests."
4. Discipleship: "We must be disciples of Jesus Christ—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things."
5. Kingdom priority: "We must seek first the kingdom of God."
6. Contentment: "We must seek true contentment."
7. Praxis: "We must practice what we believe."
8. Con-servancy: "We must return creation's service to us with service of our own."

Our journey to find our collective narrative cannot be outside of creation, since we are woven together from the same dirt that God breathed life into. The story must begin and end in Jesus, and that cannot be limited to a European, Babylonian, Roman, Catholic, or single cultural lens.

4. Hearing different voices

In an attempt to understand our Euro-Western worldview and its effect on North American culture and history, we must listen to different voices that will remind us of the diversity of peoples from an Indigenous perspective. In her chapter in the book *Native and Christian*, Marie Therese Archambault writes these words about how we were evangelized as various Indigenous peoples here on Turtle Island:

Ours is not only a history of oppression. No, it is the history of peoples who lived at least 13,000 years on this continent, by modest estimates, before Columbus arrived. Our People created cultures based upon spiritual beliefs which bound them together in a life of simplicity and balance with each other and with the earth. These cultures were never static; they adapted and changed according to the needs of survival and spirit.

Theirs was not a life of perfection. We do not mean to remember our ancestors as though they were all saints or "noble savages" living in Paradise. They were human beings prone to error as all humans, yet they, like many indigenous people of the earth, founded and lived a balanced way of life. Many of them became persons of great character and dignity.³³

As the church of Christ, we must in all of our diversity seek a way to embrace the diversity of how we know and worship the triune God. Archambault continues:

³² Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), 71-72.

³³ Marie Therese Archambault, "Remember the Sabbath Day," in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 134.

When we read the gospel, we must read it as Native people, for this is who we are. We can no longer try to be what we think the dominant society wants us to be. As Native Catholic people, we must set out with open minds and hearts; then we will encounter Jesus Christ. We must learn to subtract the chauvinism and cultural superiority with which this gospel was often presented to our people. We must, as one author says, “de-colonize” this gospel, which said we must become European in order to become Christian. We have to go beyond the white gospel in order to perceive its truth.³⁴

This has been a struggle for the Indigenous church because of the legacy of the DOCD. One simple question facing the North American church is “Where does the power lie?” We have always assumed Christianity was dominant because it was seen to be true. On the contrary, Christianity was more dominant because it was more powerful than its rivals. Theology was a tool used by the church through instruments like papal bulls to buttress the power claims of those in authority in the name of an all-powerful God. This leads to a question for the church to consider: How can Christians claim to hold the truth when truth itself is seen as an oppressive assertion of power? In contrast to this view, I, Harold Roscher, a Cree from Saddle Lake First Nation in Alberta, Canada, offer this reflection on a Cree theology of reconciliation as an Indigenous answer to the above questions.

I have a creator who loves me and continually seeks me out. He has placed me within the circle of creation along with the animate and inanimate. When I am being the best I can be as an image bearer of the Creator, my role in the circle focuses on Creator first, the human relationship second, and the rest of creation, third. I understand myself to have four components from which I derive a healthy self: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The seven sacred teachings lead and guide me in my relationships with Creator, humankind, the winged ones, four leggeds, flyers, and the swimmers.

5. Prescription lenses for the journey

The theology of the cross is one way to move our understanding of the DOCD into a journey of reconciliation between European settlers and the First Peoples of North America. The apostle Paul in First and Second Corinthians has to deal with a new church that was struggling with its newfound freedom and power in Christ. We know the Corinthians were coming through a great time of change in their common history of a Greek/Hellenistic worldview into that of a Christian Roman world and life view. Paul argues in his letters to the church that the community of believers must turn its focus to Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. Paul was trying to show the Corinthian church that no matter what the past or the present, Christ’s example remains the same for the believer. Christ’s example is anything but a display of power or superiority; conversely, it is about submission to his Father’s plans for this world. Graham Tomlin offers up these thoughts on the apostle Paul and his work with the Corinthian church to redirect our thought patterns from a them-and-us approach to the study of the DOCD.

Paul’s response centres upon the cross of Christ, as the place where God has revealed his ‘wisdom’, or his ‘characteristic way of working’. As he begins a carefully argued reply in 1:18, he shows that their unity, so easily fractured, is found in the fact that Christ has died for them. Paul was not crucified for them, Christ was. They were baptized not into Paul’s or Apollos’s death,

³⁴ Ibid., 35.

but into Christ's. Their dispute over who baptized whom would 'empty the cross of its power' because it denied the reality of the unity which the cross achieved. The cross stands as the bedrock of the teaching, which gave the church its original identity and unity (15:3).³⁵

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV, 1984), Paul drives home the unity of the body of Christ through the analogy of the human body. Verse 12 states, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." The verse ends with, "So it is with Christ." Paul was teaching a struggling church about how it ought to use its gifts, recognizing that none is superior or lesser but that the cross is the unifying means for us to be reconciled with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. The cross helps us to deconstruct both our competitiveness and arrogance toward each other as different people groups.

Throughout First and Second Corinthians, Paul asks the church to imitate him in his role as servant (1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1). Paul portrayed the apostolic life as one filled with shame, suffering, and degradation. Paul is trying to teach the church that he is willing to make himself socially weaker so that he might win the weak. The relationship of the church and First Peoples has not worked out according to Paul's imagery of the "whole body, many parts" working in harmony and unity. Instead it has been a power struggle of a dominant culture to lord it over a perceived lesser/weaker, subhuman people.

Graham Tomlin notes that the theology of the cross counters the cultural thirst for power:

The true content of Christian wisdom is not 'knowledge' but 'love': in other words, self-giving towards one's fellow-believers, and especially the poor. It is this pattern of life he recommends to these Christians, namely the way of servanthood, the way of the cross. A theology which begins at the cross is, for Paul, the radical antidote to any religion which is only a thinly veiled copy of a power-seeking culture.³⁶

The DOCD has led us on several rabbit trails over hundreds of years, but just maybe this is a moment when our triune Creator is gathering us together to show the unity and diversity displayed in our common story of Jesus' triumph on the cross. When we have chosen to walk away from the story of the cross and Christ's redeeming work, we have tried to rely on human efforts. Our fallen thinking has led us down the rabbit trails of racial superiority, theological dominance, and the myth of scarcity (God/creation is not supplying my needs, so I had better ensure that I get what I need at all costs) to a place where earthkeeping skills have been found wanting.

The apostle Paul took the theme of mutual care a step further. Our hope should be that we would grow so closely bound together that we actually share the same feelings. When one member suffers, the whole body hurts. If we accept that our common story must conclude with the conviction that we are truly family, it would change many of our attitudes

³⁵ Graham Tomlin, "Theology of the Cross: Subversive Theology for a Postmodern World," Theology Network, www.theologynetwork.org/christian-beliefs/the-cross/theology-of-the-cross--subversive-theology-for-a.htm (accessed 20 July 2015).

³⁶ Ibid.

about ourselves and others in the body of Christ. As Jesus put it, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

B. *Drinking downstream, turning from fallen thinking* (written by a Euro-Canadian Christian settler to Canada)

“Okay, let me try to lay this out straight for you,” Dan said. “I’m not saying any of this is your fault or even that your grandparents did any of it. I’m saying it happened, and it happened on your people’s watch. You’re the one who benefited from it. It doesn’t matter that you’re way downstream from the actual events. You’re still drinking the water.

“I don’t care if you feel guilty. I just care that you take some responsibility. Responsibility’s about what you do now, not about feeling bad about what happened in the past. You can’t erase the footprints that have already been made. What you’ve got to do is take a close look at those footprints and make sure you’re more careful where you walk in the future.”

—Lakota Elder Dan to settler author Kent Nerburn in *The Wolf at Twilight*³⁷

As Reformed Christians in a circle of conversation about the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, it is important to reflect on the nature of sin and reconciliation. The DOCD, as we have seen, sprang from a worldview that assumed the superiority of European rulers, laws, and ways of worshiping God. As such, it was Eurocentric fallen thinking. The CRCNA and the entire body of Christ in North America *drinks downstream* from that historical reality and its contemporary effects. The distance of years, or a lack of immediate responsibility, does not change the reality that “Dan” points to above: that the corporate sin of the DOCD has lingering effects, and that the church needs to take responsibility for the footprints of brokenness and be more careful where it walks in the future. This exercise of responsibility is a challenging and hopeful journey of reconciliation, of renewing God’s family.

A caveat before we continue: Tracing the sins of colonialism and the DOCD can easily degenerate into smug *hindsight wisdom*. The uncovering of truth in human society is limited by human finitude and sinfulness (fallen thinking). The echoes of dehumanization in the DOCD are coming to light today in the stories of Indigenous peoples. However, even as the church comes to grips with the historical and contemporary reality of these corporate sins, we recognize that sin clouds contemporary perspectives too, and that being *careful where we walk* demands constant vigilance and discernment. Therefore, in our reading and reflecting on some theological issues here, we walk tentatively and in a humble spirit of *semper reformanda*.

1. Common memory

The DOCD is a foundation of the power structures of colonialism and assimilation. As we have just heard in the previous section, the cross of Christ calls us to unity, grace, and hope as imagebearers of our Creator. Indigenous church leaders regularly remind us that *reconciliation is a verb*—that is, it describes an action.³⁸ And Scripture calls us to a ministry

³⁷ Kent Nerburn, *The Wolf at Twilight* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2009), 116-17.

³⁸ Wendy Beauchemin Peterson. www.facebook.com/IndigenousPathways/photos/a.407821749387426.1073741829.404671949702406/471256816377252/?type=1 (accessed 21 July 2015).

of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Reconciliation is built on knowing our common story in all its terrible and beautiful complexity.

George Erasmus, cochair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada), has said, "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."³⁹ The church's unity and community at the foot of the cross include efforts to learn the buried histories from which we *drink downstream*. This is what the Blanket Exercise helps us to do.⁴⁰ This is also why it is important to grapple with the *responsibility of what we do now* that "Dan" talks about.

Historical amnesia is a condition of contemporary Western culture and its idolatry of progress. A society fixated on growth, the future, and the idolatry of progress does not take the time necessary to reflect on lessons from the past. For reconciliation to be real and meaningful we need to know the common stories of our past. A common reaction heard from settler-Canadians who experience Indigenous perspectives on history in the Blanket Exercise is "I just didn't know." Another reaction is summed up in the common statement "It's in the past; get over it." Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, responds:

To those of you who would say, 'It's in the past. Why don't they just get over it?', I would say this: we—and you—are not out of the past yet. Our families were broken apart, and must be rebuilt. Our relationships have been damaged and must be restored. Our spirits have been stolen and must be returned. Our love for life was turned into fear and we must work together now to learn to trust once again.⁴¹

The broken past of North America is visible in the intergenerational effects of colonialism, which are echoes of the DOCD ethics of dehumanization. These lingering effects of corporate sin can span generations. Neal Plantinga explains,

We know that when we sin, we pollute, adulterate and destroy good things. We create matrices and atmospheres of moral evil and bequeath them to our descendants. By habitual practice we let loose a great rolling momentum of moral and spiritual evil across generations. By doing such things, we involve ourselves deeply in what theologians call corruption.⁴²

The DOCD's denial of the humanity of Indigenous peoples in North America most certainly perpetrated profound corruption and injustice. But sinful malaise over the course of generations can become subtle and even unconscious. As Ted Peters observes, "Racial prejudice is an important example of how a curse can be so built into a cultural milieu that its

³⁹ As cited in *The Blanket Exercise* (script), KAIROS, Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (2011), 2. This is a paraphrase of H. Richard Niebuhr in *The Meaning of Revelation* (1967), 115.

⁴⁰ The Blanket Exercise is an interactive educational tool developed by KAIROS, a Canadian ecumenical ministry, and used by the CRCNA to walk participants through the history of relationships between Indigenous peoples and European settlers, with the goal of moving toward reconciliation. See http://www2.crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue_blankets.cfm.

⁴¹ Remarks at the Witnessing the Future Ceremony, Rideau Hall (15 October 2009). See www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/TRC_Chair_Murray_Sinclair_speech.pdf (accessed 21 July 2015).

⁴² Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 26.

purveyors are nearly blind to their own patterns of self-justification and scapegoating."⁴³ DOCD assumptions of European superiority were a likely root of the belief that *solving the Indian problem* and *saving the backward pagan* would make for a benevolent mission. Because of grace, there was goodwill by many purveyors of that mission, and there were proximate fruits of that mission. But the foundation, Eurocentric fallen thinking, is at the root of the mission's profound brokenness. The Rev. Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, has said that residential schools were an "example of systemic, institutional evil . . . that swamped the goodness of the individual people involved."⁴⁴ Bishop MacDonald has also referred to the DOCD as a "moral wound."⁴⁵ Systemic sins of societies and worldviews may be unrecognized but "exert their pressure regularly and powerfully enough so as to make certain subsequent behaviours predictable."⁴⁶ Colonialism is one such sin, and its moral wounds of dehumanization and racism, from the blatant to the subtle, are often buried, shared experiences that must be uncovered and addressed by both the oppressed and the oppressor. In particular, the church must wrestle with a dark irony: that considering others less than human has become an internalized and generational moral wound that diminishes our ability to reflect the image of God. Colonialism and the DOCD have left a mark on both Indigenous and settler communities. Therefore, the church must certainly avoid the predictable temptation to absolve itself of responsibility and the need to turn from fallen thinking even as it *drinks downstream*.

We are presented with an extraordinary challenge and beauty in probing God's call to reconciliation alongside our Indigenous neighbors. Hearing and knowing their voices and perspectives in authentic relationship certainly clarifies truth. For example, Danielle Rowaan, a CRC justice and reconciliation staff worker, asked her friend Violet, an Elder of the Carrier people (Northern British Columbia), what she should tell church people about Indigenous peoples. Violet replied, "Sometimes Native people want to be white. Tell them that they're made in God's image."⁴⁷ Here Violet is naming the internalized effects of the DOCD on Indigenous peoples over generations, and is challenging its arrogance. This is profound theology from the margins. In Violet's expression of truth, we can see the footprints of the DOCD that consider a people and a culture to be inferior. *Imago Dei* is a rich foundation of the dignity of all people. It is a contrast to the assumptions of superiority in the DOCD. As imagebearers of their Creator, humans share in the responsibilities and privileges of

⁴³ Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 169.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Joanne Stassen, "Churches face challenge in TRC call to value aboriginal spirituality," CBC News (24 June 2015). www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/ (accessed 21 July 2015).

⁴⁵ Mark MacDonald, *Decoding the Doctrine of Discovery*, Panel presentation, Ottawa, Ontario (1 June 2015).

⁴⁶ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 63.

⁴⁷ Danielle Rowaan, #LivetheApology. dojustice.crcna.org/article/livetheapology (accessed 29 June 2015).

being stewards and collaborators with Christ. As J. Richard Middleton has put it, “Human imaging of God’s power on earth . . . need[s] to take into account the fact that in the biblical account no human being is granted dominion over another at creation; all equally participate in the image of God.”⁴⁸ Given that all people participate equally in *Imago Dei*, Violet’s truth reveals a need for repentance and a conscious turning away from the fallen worldview of the DOCD.

Turning away from generations of a broken history is by no means simple. It is more than a statement of apology or the repudiation of a historic doctrine. Building common memory means that statements and apologies are not the last word but a catalyst for a prayerful, deep, difficult, *long*, and ultimately liberating journey of reconciliation. This journey “starts with remembering truthfully, condemning wrong deeds, healing inner wounds, releasing wrongdoers from punishment and guilt, repentance and transformation of wrongdoers, and reconciliation between the wronged and the wrongdoers.”⁴⁹ Given the deep implications of DOCD-related brokenness, there are no shortcuts on the journey of reconciliation. The past of the DOCD has not remained in the past; its brutal effects linger. However, for the body of Christ, this challenging journey is one of hope because through mutual respect and unity in Christ, the unified church of Indigenous peoples and settlers can live more fully as a body.

2. Taking responsibility for what we do now

To live more fully as a body, settlers in the church need to follow “Dan’s” advice and *take responsibility for what we do now*. That starts with remembering truthfully that we drink downstream from the DOCD and its dehumanizing effects for oppressed *and* oppressor, and then taking “Violet’s” advice, honoring our Indigenous neighbors as imagebearers of God. Honoring includes discerning what the church has missed and lost in considering Indigenous peoples and cultures to be subhuman and backward, and then working with Indigenous peoples to recover as much of the good as possible. This process of discernment and celebration of Indigenous gifts is critical for the fullness of the body of Christ and the integrity of the gospel in North America. Bishop MacDonald notes, “Theologically, the Doctrine of Discovery has been the handmaid to the idolatrous assumption that God’s presence has been confined to Western Civilization—an idea that has all but destroyed the capacity of the major denominations to grow in Indigenous communities.”⁵⁰ A Euro-superior syncretism has, then, been a stumbling block to the message of the gospel to Indigenous peoples. Therefore, in humility, the church needs common-grace-inspired discernment that honors the fact that God was present in this place before the arrival of Europeans.

The church also needs, with open and learning hearts, to work with Indigenous peoples to reacquire their gifts to church and nation. Indigenous theologian Rev. Dr. Terry LeBlanc explains the hope and possibility

⁴⁸ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 50-51.

⁴⁹ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 151.

⁵⁰ Mark MacDonald, “The Gospel Comes to North America,” *First Peoples Theology Journal*, 28, no. 1 (2006): 96.

in reflections on the Prime Minister’s Apology to Survivors of Residential Schools (June 11, 2008):

The PM and leaders of the opposition admitted that we were wrong—this raises a counterpoint: Native communities can legitimately say we were right to struggle for our culture and our language. Parliamentary leaders also acknowledged that they robbed the nation of the contribution that Aboriginal people might make—the counterpoint is, again, that Aboriginal people have a contribution to make to this place and nation—we need to do things to ensure that this contribution can be re-acquired. If there was a wrong, there is a right. This needs to move from personal change to collective responsibility at multiple levels.⁵¹

Rejecting the fallen thinking of Euro-superiority includes uncovering, supporting, and celebrating the contribution that Indigenous peoples make to this place and nation *and* the church. This does not mean an altruistic attempt to make space at the church table for Indigenous peoples. It means a new table characterized by Christ’s prayer and call for unity in John 17.

Stepping into a journey of reconciliation most certainly includes building relationships and friendships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. The exchange between Danielle and Violet described earlier shows that the learning of truth happens in relationships—in kitchens, cultural interpretive centers, Urban Aboriginal Ministries, on the land, and so on. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada included countless stories of healing, resilience, and forgiveness that are a profound testimony to the church about the nature of reconciliation. Knowing the stories of our Indigenous neighbors is a way to overcome the barriers and suspicions between us.

Relationships will also help set a foundation for new openhearted learning about the gifts of Indigenous peoples for the church. The gospel, as the Word of God, is not confined to one culture’s interpretation of it (as Galatians 2:11-21 demonstrates).⁵² There is, therefore, extraordinary opportunity available to the church of Christ, in mutually respectful relationships and circles of dialogue between Indigenous peoples and settlers about contextualization of the gospel, intercultural mission, and creational theology. Together, as imagebearers of Creator God, we can celebrate that the gospel mission flourishes and grows in the creational gift of culture and that it discerns and challenges the brokenness of cultures and relationships. Because we are all imagebearers of God, no one is superior to another. We need each other and the Spirit’s guidance to *take responsibility for what we do now* and to live God’s call to reconcile all things. May we receive the grace, energy, and persistence to become the unified family of God.

⁵¹ Terry LeBlanc, speech to the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee and Committee for Contact with Government in Joint Session, November 27, 2008. Rev. Dr. LeBlanc is the director of the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies.

⁵² In insisting that the Gentile church is not bound by the law, as Jewish Christians claimed they were, Paul can be understood as saying that no one cultural group has status over another in the church. Also, as Mark MacDonald puts it, “A similar respect is seen in the submission of the Spirit’s animation of the proclamation of the Word in the various languages of the peoples on the day of Pentecost” (discussion with Mike Hogeterp, 9 July 2015).

IV. The Fall, Part 2: A mirror—U.S. CRC history in the Southwest

To assess the role of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD) on the policies and practices of the CRCNA, the task force conducted interviews and research on missions among Indigenous peoples in the U.S. Southwest, specifically the Navajo and Zuni. Following are the findings of archival research and an Indigenous perspective on that history, specifically the work at Rehoboth.

A. Archival research

The archival research focused on the ways that the church viewed both the land and the people of the land and how those perspectives shaped mission work.⁵³ The CRC's archival record shows that, consistent with DOCD belief in the superiority of European Christians, the church adopted the fallen thinking that the land and the people of the land were theirs to "take." The DOCD distorted the gospel in that it rejected the belief that Christ was sovereign among the Navajo and Zuni before the *bilagáana* (Diné/Navajo word meaning "white man") arrived. The CRC's policies and actions concerning Indigenous peoples of the Southwest were directly shaped by the norms, values, and assumptions common to the DOCD and colonialism, to the detriment of both the people of the land and the *bilagáana* who worked there.

1. CRC mission policy evolution

The nature of CRC mission work was defined by two driving forces: the policies emanating from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the attitudes and priorities of missionaries on the ground in Navajo and Zuni territory. Both of these were inextricably tied to the DOCD worldview of Euro-superiority. The church made policies based on an understanding that they had an inalienable right to expand their church to Navajo and Zuni territory and that until they came there to save the local Indigenous population, the Navajo and Zuni were firmly in the grip of the devil. Therefore, they pursued policies characterized by the goal of assimilation and "civilization" of Indigenous peoples. The missionaries on the ground echoed these attitudes as they responded to immediate concerns and limitations in an effort to pursue these policies. However, to discern the impact of the DOCD on the CRC regarding the mission to the Navajo and Zuni, it is important first to outline how the guiding frameworks developed both at the board level and on the ground.



⁵³ This research was undertaken by Seth Adema at the Christian Reformed Church Archives at Calvin College on 24-29 August 2014.

The CRC mission to the Indigenous peoples of the United States originated in 1888 when the Board of Heathen Missions was founded to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, specifically to the Indigenous peoples of North America. Article 7 of the Board of Heathen Missions' constitution reads, "The Synod has decided that the Mission work be begun among the Indians and other colored peoples in our land, and preferably in those areas where no other churches nor organizations have labored before."⁵⁴ After a failed attempt to establish a mission in South Dakota—due to the missionary's abrasive personality and the political situation regarding the Sioux peoples during and after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee—the CRC reevaluated its mission and began a short period of reflection and preparation for a new mission. During this period of reflection, the church remained committed to mission work within the continental United States, although there were voices of protest arguing that mission work to Indigenous peoples could "not be carried out" and would "kill all missionary desire" within the CRC.⁵⁵

This period of reflection ended in 1896 when Reverends Andrew Vander Wagen and Herman Fryling departed to establish a mission in Navajo and Zuni territory. With the purchase of land to establish a mission in Navajo territory, and shortly thereafter to Zuni lands, the church began its first continuously operated mission field. In 1903, the Board of Heathen Missions decided to build a school for Navajo and Zuni children, which they named Rehoboth ("Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land"—Gen. 26:22). A 1950 report explains the reason for pursuing education as a policy was because "it seemed easier to reach the natives through their children than simply to present the gospel to adults, so . . . the children of heathen parents were gathered under Christian teachers and were given . . . an education."⁵⁶ Six children entered the school in 1903. As was common practice in both the United States and Canada, school officials cut the students' hair, replaced their native clothes with Western dress, and replaced their Navajo names with "English" names (because "they did not have good names.")⁵⁷ While the project included a hospital, opened in 1908, this school came to define the mission for the church and for the Indigenous peoples who lived in the territory.

One of the earliest and most persistent problems encountered by the *bilagáana* missionaries was the inability to secure significant attendance at the boarding school. And once students were enrolled in the school, they frequently ran away. Missionaries would travel in "the bush" for days in an effort to recruit students. These hardships were frequently cited in *The Banner* as areas in need of prayer and support. Securing pupils for the school apparently involved coercion: in 1910, when the Indian Agent from Gallup required parental consent for children to attend the school, Rev. Brink complained that this "entirely overthrew our plans, as such

⁵⁴ *Acts of Synod 1888*, 44.

⁵⁵ Protest by T. Keppel, *Acts of Synod 1892*, 22.

⁵⁶ World Missions – Indigenous Mission Policy Report – 1950 (RG 4.9.1, box 1702, folder 7, pp. 40-41.)

⁵⁷ *Acts of Synod 1904*, 74.

has never been required of us before.”⁵⁸ Rev. Bosscher, who served at Rehoboth from 1909 to 1950, was especially troubled by the problem of runaways and absenteeism. In 1921 he complained that retrieving runaways had forced him to cover 500 miles. When contemplating the reason for the chronic problem, he wrote, “I presume they feel like young horses not accustomed to the stable.”⁵⁹ But perhaps the children were simply trying to run home to their families.

Because constructing a school and hospital was a capital-intensive method of mission work, and because of the lack of clear success in converting Navajo and Zuni peoples, CRC members at home and abroad were critical of the mission field. In 1949, Harry Boer criticized the mission in the U.S. Southwest in a pamphlet titled *Our Mission Budget and the Indian Field*. In it Boer lamented that the focus for mission work had shifted from preaching the gospel to providing education and medical services. Himself a missionary to Nigeria, he believed that the success of the mission to secure converts did not justify the capital expense. The following year, a policy report on Indigenous missions also noted that the nature of mission work led to a “Santa Claus policy” by which the church was tolerated only for the financial investment that came with missions.⁶⁰

Most notable about Boer’s pamphlet was that he traced financial problems with the mission to a deeper ill: he saw that the church had not developed Indigenous leadership because of an assumption of cultural superiority, an attitude that finds its most clear expression in the DOCD. In an undated response to Harry Boer titled *Our Indian Missions: Pietistic or Reformed?* and corporately authored by the General Conference of Christian Reformed Missionaries on the Indian Field, CRC missionaries argued that measuring the success of the mission by the number of converts was inappropriate.⁶¹ This document demonstrates an awareness concerning the cultural implications of mission work and the reasons the Navajo and Zuni did not trust missionaries. The authors wrote that the Navajo and Zuni had every reason to be suspicious of the *bilagáana* because of the many different people who have a particular aim for engaging with local Indigenous populations. They wrote, “Exploited, robbed, slaughtered in the past century, once belittled as ‘stupid, dirty, hardhearted’ by those who did not know them . . . is it any wonder that they view with suspicion every white approach?”⁶² While the report maintained the end goal of assimilating the People of the Land into the Christian Reformed Church, it also recognized the cultural reasons that the church had failed in its mission up to that point. In 1950, in response to criticisms of the “Indian Mission Field,” a study commissioned by the Board of Missions was roundly critical of the approach of the New Mexico missions and proposed “the Indigenous Church” as a superior model. This model, which

⁵⁸ Letter to Rev. Beets, 1-23-1910, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Correspondence and Reports of L.P. Brink, Rehoboth School, 1908-1909” (D 4.8.2, box 224, file 4).

⁵⁹ Jacob J. Bosscher, “Missionary Correspondence, 1925, Rehoboth, NM, Superintendent” (D 4.9.2, box 7, folder 6).

⁶⁰ “World Missions – Indigenous Mission Policy Report – 1950” (RG 4.9.1, box 1702, folder 7).

⁶¹ *Our Indian Missions: Pietistic or Reformed?* (undated), 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 20.

called for increased use of Indigenous catechists, was adopted in 1953, but over the next several years, synod slowly but steadily moved away from the Native Church model.⁶³ Those within the CRC demonstrated a remarkable awareness regarding the mission field, yet they remained unapologetic in the assimilationist bent to the mission, which they saw as a necessary manifestation of Christianity.

2. CRC views of the land and the people of the land

While missionaries were uniformly motivated by their commitment to the Great Commission, they carried with them a particular view of both the land and the people who lived in the land. Two central themes dominated the ways missionaries discussed the people and the land: cultural superiority and ownership. These cultural narratives show that the Christian Reformed Church viewed their mission through the lens of the DOCD. Therefore, the mission to “spread the Word” became synonymous with the spread of European culture. Put simply, Indigenous cultures were explicitly defined as contrary to the gospel that the church aspired to spread.



One of the most obvious ways that the DOCD shaped the work of the CRC is in the language used to define native peoples. By defining Navajo and Zuni as “pagans,” missionaries used a technical term to define a cultural failure to accept the gospel. The Navajo and Zuni were seen by the *bilagáana* as culturally incapable of accepting the gospel, which is why the goal of assimilation, or “civilizing” the native, was central to the work of the church. This belief is clearly illustrated in the image from the May 22, 1931, issue of *The Banner* under the headline “What Christianity Accomplishes,” showing a “before” photograph of a Navajo man in his traditional clothing and labeled “A PAGAN

INDIAN,” and an “after” photograph of a Navajo family in Western clothing. Individuals were seen as capable of reform, but their culture was not.

The discourse in the writing of missionaries and board members hardened back to that of the DOCD. The use of the term “pagan” was common. For example, Gerrit Vander Meulen reported that the Zuni mission

⁶³ *Acts of Synod 1953*, p. 88. Article 96 of Synod 1954 reversed the policy of the Native Church for New Mexico, and by 1958 an overture by Classis Rocky Mountain moved further away from the Native Church model (*Acts of Synod 1954*, p. 45; *Acts of Synod 1958*, p. 33).

school was “compromising with heathenism” by allowing students to attend “pagan dances.”⁶⁴ A promotional brochure for Rehoboth School referred to “pagan superstition which holds these primitive people in its grasp.”⁶⁵ A piece written for the thirtieth anniversary of the mission described the Zuni as encumbered by a “pagan system of religious worship and tribal customs, which they can readily use as a whip to keep all members of the tribe in line for their own ceremonies.”⁶⁶ Ironically, the inclusivity of the Zuni religion led one anonymous author to write that the term “Calvinistic Pagan” fit the Zuni because the Zuni religion saw all of life under the dominion of God.⁶⁷ These comments came from diverse sources but maintained the same tone and cultural attitudes.

Similarly, the land itself was often referenced as a battlefield, connecting the mission of the church to convert people to the colonial ambition to subdue and claim the land. Missionary I. Van Dellen, in a letter to the Board of Missions, wrote that the church “should storm the strongholds of Satan in this village and surrounding territories.”⁶⁸ One schoolteacher asked for prayer for “this citadel of Satan,”⁶⁹ and another, on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone at the Zuni church, spoke of the landscape as central to the spiritual battle, saying, “What our God begins He finishes. We had come, as I said to stay and, if possible, to conquer, the Lord willing. I say to conquer; and what did we find before us at Zuni to conquer? A citadel of Satan.”⁷⁰ The land was envisioned as a spiritual battleground where the forces of Christ and Satan fought in a sacred war. The church explicitly used warfare terminology, especially during the war years of the 1940s; the church’s “territory” at mission posts and Rehoboth School were beachheads, whereas Navajo spaces, such as the hogan, constituted a stronghold of the devil. In 1949, Gerritt Vander Meulen used this analogy to critique the practice of allowing students to return to their home communities for special events, writing, “The battle of the ages is Christ against Satan. Then may we, during the time that they are entrusted to us, permit them to go to Satan’s side and battle against Christ?”⁷¹ A 1948 edition of *The Banner* explicitly compared the mission field to the battlegrounds of WWII.⁷² The cultural divide between the Navajo and Zuni and the *bilagáana* was described in numerous documents as a

⁶⁴ Gerrit Vander Meulen, Letter to the Board, May 31, 1949, “Missionary Correspondence, Papers 1935-50, Zuni, N.Mex. - Maintenance” (D4.9.2, box 93, file 7).

⁶⁵ “The Story of Christine,” Undated, Promotional Material, 1955-1991 (RG 4.9.1, box 1718, folder 4).

⁶⁶ “Thirty Years Among the Zunis,” p. 76, Oct. 11, 1897 to Oct. 11, 1927, Classis of Muskegon, CRC Memorial Edition.

⁶⁷ *Zuni Speaks*, 1953, Promotional Material, 1955-1991 (RG 4.9.1, box 1718, folder 4).

⁶⁸ I. Van Dellen, letter to the Board of Missions, December 9, 1944, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Subject File 692 – Organization of Native Churches, 1940s” (D 4.8.2, box 1316, file 9).

⁶⁹ Rena Vander Woude, Letter to Rev. Evenhouse, March 9, 1954, “Missionary Correspondence, 1950-1964, Zuni Teacher” (RG 4.9.2, box 96, folder 12).

⁷⁰ “Home Missions – Native Americans – Speech by Rev. A. Vander Wagen and B. Sprink - Zuni” (D 4.8.2, box 244, file 3”).

⁷¹ Gerrit Vander Meulen, Letter to the Board, May 31, 1949, “Missionary Correspondence, Papers 1935-50, Zuni, N.Mex. - Maintenance” (D4.9.2, box 93, file 7).

⁷² *The Banner*, September 24, 1948, “Indian and Foreign Missions,” 1133.

spiritual battle between the forces of darkness and light.⁷³ This imagery was used to embolden the church and maintain support for the mission in New Mexico. Within the context of Indigenous-settler relations in North America, the distinction between “spiritual warfare” and “cultural conquest” were muddy and oftentimes indistinguishable.

Parents were viewed as enemies in this spiritual battle because they were considered incapable of assimilation, an attitude with direct parallels across the United States and Canada. For example, in a public lecture in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the problem was explained by contrasting the mission school to the Navajo hogan. Children were kept in school only to a certain age, after which they returned home. The mission agency therefore despaired: “The religious instruction which we have labored to give them is soon lost. In the Hogan it is the old pagan life enforced by deference which the Navajo always shows his elders which crowds out their good principle. . . . Our work thus resolves itself into pouring water into a sieve!”⁷⁴ Thirty years later, a policy statement echoed the same theme, expressing concern that the influence parents held on their children counteracted the educational goals of the church.

Because the church viewed Indigenous culture itself as sinful, assimilation of the People of the Land was seen as the final victory of Christ over Satan. Success was measured in terms of the adoption of Western cultural practices. In celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the mission in New Mexico, Herman Fryling gave the following as evidence of their success as missionaries: “Their natural life has in many respects been so wonderfully changed these past fifty years that you would hardly know the present Indian being a descendant from the Indian fifty years ago.”⁷⁵ Another missionary pointed to changes in funeral rites as evidence of the progress many Navajos were making. Others measured progress by the ability of students to read, write, and speak English. And, as noted above, success was measured in physical appearance: the relinquishing of Indigenous clothing and adoption of Western dress and habits.

U.S. governmental reforms regarding the treatment of Native Americans was met with resistance by the CRC. The Wheeler-Howard Bill (1934), also known as “the Indian Reorganization Act” and colloquially as “the Indian New Deal,” was a modest attempt by John Collier, Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to reverse the policy of assimilation and to rectify some of the historic injustices done to Native Americans by assigning greater financial and political sovereignty to Indigenous nations within the United States. In response, in an open letter to Collier titled “Is Our Government Promoting Paganism?” the General Conference of Missionaries of the Christian Reformed Church critiqued the bill on the grounds that all Indigenous practices are spiritual, and therefore the U.S.

⁷³ See “Dear Board Member,” Nov. 8, 1943; see also *The Banner*, July 20, 1906, “The Rehoboth School”; *Sheboygan [Wis.] Press*, Saturday, July 12, 1952, “Navajo Indians Sing in own Tongue at Church on Friday” – “Home Missions – Native Americans – Clippings, 1925, 1952” (D 4-8-2, Box 225, file 3); Applications for mission posts (RG 4.9.2, box 78, folder 2).

⁷⁴ Home Missions, Heathen Missions Executive Committee and Board Minutes, 1920-1921 (RG 4.8.1, box 208, file 4, Lecture – Our Training Schools).

⁷⁵ Speech for Semi-Centennial of Indian Missions, H. Fryling “Home Missions – Native Americans – Semi-Centennial of Indian Missions, 1946” (D 4-8-2, Box 242, file 4).

government would be promoting a “pagan” faith.⁷⁶ The letter ended by imploring Collier to “leave them alone, and they will gradually go where the religion of our forefathers went, where all primitive things go, when replaced by something better.”⁷⁷ This comment echoes the popular belief, with roots in the DOCD, that Indigenous peoples and cultures would inevitably disappear.⁷⁸

Simultaneously, missionaries also viewed the land as a “promised land” for mission work, which lent itself to biblical metaphors of the *bilagáana* as Israelites and the Navajo and Zuni as Canaanites.⁷⁹ Missionaries marveled at the foreign landscape, all the while claiming ownership over it. A tract celebrating thirty years of missions to the Zuni read, “You can hardly believe you are still in your own USA. You feel you are in a region where heathenism is still strong.”⁸⁰ The authors connected the foreign quality of the land to the culturally foreign nature of the people; but in pointing out that the land was “in your own USA,” the tract bespoke a sense of ownership of the land that characterized the mission. This sense of ownership is an echo of the American notion of manifest destiny, an outgrowth of the DOCD in the United States.

These attitudes created conflict between both the church and the People of the Land, and between the church and the U.S. government. This played out during an incident at Black Rock in Zuni territory where the CRC aspired to construct a church within the territory of the Zuni people against the wishes of the Zuni tribal council.⁸¹ In October 1937 the Zuni Pueblo government requested the Indian Agent to deny the CRC and the Roman Catholic Church necessary permits to conduct mission work in the territory. Both the CRC and the Catholic Church continued working at the chapel on the territory, against the wishes of the Zuni authorities, so the Zuni took the case to the federal government in protest.⁸² This issue came to a head in November 1941 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs became involved. John Collier, as mediator of the dispute, initially took a position in favor of the Zuni, ruling that the CRC was illegitimately operating in

⁷⁶ An Open Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, “Is Our Government Promoting Paganism?” *The Calvin Forum* (July 1936), 269.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁷⁸ Similarly, the Mission Principles Study Committee believed there was no reason to learn the Navajo language because “all Indian languages, including Navajo and Zuni, will in the course of time die out and our language emphasis must be determined in the light of this development, although we do not anticipate this development until the passing of this generation.” (“Home Missions – Native Americans – Summary of the Reactions of Indian General Conference to the Report of the Mission Principles Study Committee,” D 4.8.2, box 243, file 1).

⁷⁹ See: Robert Allen Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States*, edited by James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93-104.

⁸⁰ “Home Missions – Native Americans – Mission Related Booklets, 1909-1934,” (D 4.8.2, box 243, file 4), “Thirty Years Among the Zunis, Oct. 11, 1897 to Oct. 11, 1927,” *Classis of Muskegon, CRC Memorial Edition*, 71.

⁸¹ See “Home Missions – Native Americans – Subject File 645, Correspondence Re: Zuni Land Problem, 1941” (D 4.8.2, box 1315, file 7).

⁸² See letter from Governor of the Zuni Pueblo to John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 22, 1941, in the aforementioned file.

Zuni territory; that is, the government defended Indigenous land rights against the will of the church. A year-long dispute began, and a last minute meeting reversed the decision to favor the CRC.⁸³ Thus, against the wishes of the Zuni peoples, and seemingly against the better judgment of John Collier, the CRC played an integral role in the refusal of Indigenous rights to their land.

Finally, in spite of the assumptions of cultural superiority that typified the history of CRC missions and the frequent conflicts between *bilagáana* and the People of the Land, individual missionaries relied heavily on the work of Indigenous catechists to work as translators and evangelists. *Navajo and Zuni for Christ* noted that thirty individuals worked as interpreters, and while some missionaries who learned the Navajo language served in this capacity, the majority of translators were Indigenous.⁸⁴ L.P. Brink noted the necessity of Indigenous catechists at Synod 1920.⁸⁵ Even though the People of the Land were vital to the success of the mission, Native missionaries were limited in the upward mobility they could achieve, as they were relegated to supporting roles. Churches questioned how much Indigenous students could learn and, by extension, how much responsibility they could handle. Churches doubted the abilities of Indigenous peoples to communicate the gospel. While the reasons for this failure to promote Indigenous peoples to top leadership positions, even after adopting the mission policy of the Indigenous church,⁸⁶ remain difficult to document, an implicit belief in European cultural superiority clearly proliferated within the CRC.

A specific example of the tendency to deny leadership positions to Indigenous peoples can be seen in the case of J.C. Morgan, a translator, missionary, and tribal leader in the Navajo community in the first half of the twentieth century. Morgan was in every way the ideal Navajo in the eyes of the CRC. The 1931 cover of *The Banner* used a photograph of the Morgan family as the illustration of “what Christianity accomplishes.” Morgan converted to Christianity during his boarding school years in Colorado and became a translator for missionary L.P. Brink and worked with him as an “assistant missionary” for thirteen years. While he was already a Christian when Brink met him, CRC publications credited him as being their first convert.

By all accounts, Morgan’s relationship with Brink was fruitful and characterized by mutual respect.⁸⁷ Working at Farmington, Morgan played a central role in spreading the Christian Reformed mission outside the confines of Rehoboth and Zuni territory, often taking the lead as catechist.⁸⁸ When Rev. Brink died, the denomination decided Morgan was not qualified to fill Brink’s position, writing in a letter of explanation, “It

⁸³ John De Korne Letter to George Yff, January 21, 1942, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Subject File 645, correspondence re Zuni Land Problem, 1941 (D 4.8.2., box 1315, file 7).

⁸⁴ John De Korne (ed.). *Navajo and Zuni for Christ: Fifty Years of Indian Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Board of Missions, 1947), 31-44.

⁸⁵ *Acts of Synod 1920*, 24.

⁸⁶ See text pertaining to note 63.

⁸⁷ *Acts of Synod 1934*, 228.

⁸⁸ *Acts of Synod 1936*, 201.

is not a question of race. It is not a question of color. Instead, it is a question of fitness or qualification.”⁸⁹ Although this letter noted that a Navajo would have advantages in spreading the gospel, the church inspector nevertheless noted, “In my opinion the Indian is not fit for any work where it requires a little responsibility.”⁹⁰ Mrs. Ridders (wife of the Rev. Ridders) was especially critical of Morgan’s response to the situation when she wrote, “Morgan may hold it [this situation] against us eternally, because that is the nature of the Indian, even the Christian Indian, so called.”⁹¹

Morgan eventually left the church and developed an independent congregation, much to the chagrin of the CRC missionaries who hoped to maintain a mission in Farmington.⁹² He later wrote in an editorial for the *Farmington Times Hustler*, “The Navajos contend that the true Christians among the whites and other people will approach heartily and encourage the Indians in accepting this great responsibility of religious work among their own people. Some white missionaries have said that there is no room for an Indian and a white man on a mission field. We wonder if there will be room for both in the kingdom.”⁹³

* * * * *

The experience of the CRC in the U.S. Southwest demonstrates that the cultural ethos fostered by the DOCD was determinative in the life and mission of the church. The impetus of mission work, while inspired by the Great Commission, tied the gospel to culture as much as to faith. Put in other words, *bilagáana* understood that the role of the missionary was to spread their culture, and success was defined in the degree to which Navajo and Zuni peoples appeared Westernized. This then shaped the ways that the church viewed the geography of the Southwest as a promised land and battleground between the forces of light and darkness. The church then defined the combatants in this battle in cultural terms, firmly establishing themselves as the forces of light, and the Navajo and Zuni as working for the forces of darkness. While the *bilagáana* believed that they could convert the Navajo and Zuni and in so doing shift them from enemies to allies, the deeply entrenched attitudes of cultural superiority persisted. These attitudes were foundational to the work and mission of the church and persisted through the history of the mission. These ideas were rarely confronted in the first several decades of the mission work, and when they were (as in the

⁸⁹ “Home Missions – Native Americans – Correspondence and Reports, J.C. Morgan, 1932-43” (D 4-8-2, Box 226, file 8, file 9).

⁹⁰ Report of the Inspection Trip to Mission Field, August 12, 1919, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Inspection Reports and Related Correspondence, 1919” (D 4.8.2, box 225, file 2). Ironically, J.C. Morgan went on to prove his leadership skills as chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council and as a political activist.

⁹¹ Mrs. Ridders to Dr. Beets, Sept. 22, 1937, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Correspondence re Rev. H. Ridders’ work in Shiprock, N.Mex., 1935-1938” (D 4.8.2, box 1309, file 3).

⁹² “Home Missions – Native Americans – Correspondence re Rev. H. Ridders’ work in Shiprock, N.Mex., 1935-1938” (D 4.8.2, box 1309, file 3).

⁹³ *Farmington Times Hustler*, Friday, Feb. 23, 1940, Public Forum, “Home Missions – Native Americans – Jacob C. Morgan Correspondence, 1919-1925” (D 4.8.2, box 1306, file 9).

cases of Harry Boer and J.C. Morgan), the overwhelming response of the CRC was dismissive. The result is that the church continued and continues to be shaped by the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.

B. Historical and settler trauma resulting from the CRC missions in the Southwest (an Indigenous perspective)

The term *historical trauma* articulates the multigenerational emotional, psychological, and interpersonal stressors experienced by members of oppressed and victimized communities. It is commonly used to refer to the problems, challenges, and dissatisfaction prevalent in many Indigenous communities throughout North America. It is trauma that is primarily due to the relocation and cultural genocide resulting from Indian boarding schools run by governments and churches throughout the United States and Canada.

Indian boarding schools, or Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada, were established to remove Indigenous children from their communities as part of official policies of aggressive assimilation into the Western European culture of North America. Many of these schools were run by governments, but a large number of them were also run by churches and denominations, including Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, and the Christian Reformed Church. Our Indian boarding school, established in New Mexico, was called Rehoboth.

In the Southwest, one does not need to speak to Navajo and Zuni people for very long before meeting someone who is struggling with historical trauma as a result of attending a boarding school. There are many manifestations of this trauma. Here are a few:

1. Deficiency in parenting skills

When children are taken from their families and raised in a military style boarding school, they miss seeing and experiencing what healthy parental nurturing looks like. Culturally appropriate discipline and guidance from people who know and love you is replaced by strict discipline and rules from people of a foreign culture whose job is to forcibly assimilate you. Our personal experience of being raised is one of the biggest influences in our own ability to parent.

2. Depression and self-hatred

When young children are taken from their homes, placed in a foreign environment, and punished for speaking the only language they know and for practicing the only culture they have been taught, they feel like something is innately wrong with them—something they cannot control or change. Over time, this develops into low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and even self-hatred. The fruit of this can be depression, addictions (such as drugs, alcohol, and gambling), violent behavior, and even suicide.

3. Lack of opportunity to contextualize worship

Christian worship in North America has been highly contextualized for the dominant culture. (If we truly worshiped like Jesus did, we would attend synagogues on Saturday with services in Hebrew.) Most Euro-American church services are on Sunday and feature three-point sermons, organ music, and strict starting and ending times. This makes sense for Euro-American culture. It is not bad. In fact, it is even necessary, as the goal of the early church and the model of Paul and Jesus were not to make

everyone Jewish (Gal. 2) but rather to bring the gospel to the whole world. Unfortunately, the freedom to contextualize worship, so freely enjoyed by people of European descent, has not been passed on to Native American converts to Christianity. Rather, the boarding school experience included praise sung to the music of the piano and organ. When tribal languages were used, they kept the English tunes (as seen in Navajo hymnals). This is problematic because Navajo is a tonal language, and the pronunciation of the words normally sets the tune and dictates the notes. In English, the musical notes can set the tune, and the intonation of the words can adapt accordingly; but in Navajo, changing the intonation of the words can either alter their meaning or render the sounds unintelligible.⁹⁴

When children are punished for speaking their language, the strong ones don't stop using it. They just quit getting caught. So speaking your language becomes something rebellious that you do after the missionary has left the room and the dorm matron has turned off the lights. Practicing your culture becomes something you hide from God rather than something you recognize as a gift. Christianity becomes the "white man's religion," and going to church becomes something you do to please the missionary rather than an act of intimate communion with your Daddy in heaven.

Today a vast majority of the Indian boarding schools throughout North America are closed and even torn down. But Rehoboth is still open. It is still educating Native American children. And it is still financially and spiritually supported by many Christian Reformed churches.

Rehoboth is no longer operating as a boarding school. The jail⁹⁵ has been torn down. The dormitories have been repurposed. The Navajo and Zuni languages are no longer forbidden. And the cultures of both of these tribes is ever so slowly beginning to be respected and even taught in the school.

Over a decade ago, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the establishing of Rehoboth, there was a process of healing and reconciliation that took place. Former students were invited; representatives from the denomination attended, and teachers and staff from both the past and the present participated. Stories were shared. Tears were shed. And apologies were given. People who were present report that it was a powerful and beautiful event. And I am incredibly grateful that at long last the history of the Christian Reformed Church's boarding school was formally and publicly addressed. But as truth and reconciliation projects have taught us, confessions, apologies, and reconciliation must flow out of a sincere and rigorous search for truth. Hearings have not been conducted, and the search for truth has not been completed because not all people have felt safe to share their stories. The extent of the trespasses and their effects have not been fully revealed, acknowledged, or confessed.

The public apologies by leaders of the CRC and the Rehoboth administration were followed by an apology from a Native Christian leader.⁹⁶ While each of these apologies was no doubt sincere, this event was not conclusive;

⁹⁴ This is why, in many Navajo churches, it is not uncommon to read the words out loud as a congregation before singing them. Otherwise, fluent speakers will have no idea what they are singing.

⁹⁵ There was a jail and a range of other government services on the Rehoboth campus.

⁹⁶ <http://www.rcsnm.org/confession.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2015).

nor was it comprehensive.⁹⁷ Apologies for misguided policies and individual mistakes cannot adequately address the trauma characteristic of these boarding schools, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada goes so far as to label a form of cultural genocide. We are only now learning the extent of the trauma experienced by students, the long-term effects on families, communities, and the church. Many students who suffered abuse at Indian boarding schools are just now gaining the courage and strength to share their stories. They need safe spaces outside of traditional power relationships to come forward and share.

Another layer of trauma is also involved. It is not a new manifestation of the historical trauma experienced by the Native American community but a buried trauma experienced by the perpetrators of injustices. Some have referred to it as “settler’s trauma.” It is a trauma of well-intentioned people who thought they were following God, but in fact were actively participating in an unjust and racist system that was committing cultural genocide against a group of people believed to be inferior and even subhuman.

Settler’s trauma often manifests itself in an inability to honestly look back, a hesitancy to take ownership, and a panicked need to mitigate the guilt. It is a trauma that gives justification and seeks to explain context rather than owning the full burden of the actions. We see this trauma in Adam when confronted by God for eating the forbidden fruit in the garden. We see it in Aaron when confronted by Moses for casting a golden calf for the people of Israel. And we see it in Judas when trying to return the thirty pieces of silver paid to him for his betrayal of Christ. It is a trauma over actions with such devastating and far-reaching consequences that it feels as if the guilt might literally destroy you.

It is a trauma that demands weeping. It is a trauma that takes days, weeks, months, even years to begin to comprehend. It is a trauma over transgressions whose victims are so numerous that it requires almost daily repentance and a continual seeking of forgiveness. It is a trauma that cannot be covered with quick apologies and cheap grace. It is a trauma that requires lament.

In talking with many non-Native CRC people about Rehoboth, I commonly hear acknowledgment followed by the word “but” . . . “it wasn’t all bad.”

- Yes, Rehoboth was a boarding school, *but* . . .
- Yes, students were punished for speaking their languages, *but* . . .
- Yes, children were taken from their homes, *but* . . .
- Yes, the CRC Board of Heathen Missions initiated a lot of pain, *but* . . .

We must understand that “but” represents trauma. And as long as it persists, healing and even forgiveness will elude us. There cannot be a “but.” We cannot spread the guilt. And we cannot seek to justify our actions.

- The CRC was wrong to establish and run a boarding school named Rehoboth; the land the missionaries sought to conquer was not theirs to flourish in.
- It was wrong to punish students for speaking their language.

⁹⁷ Apologies from abused parties seem, at the least, unconventional and questionable. The apology by former students reveals, foremost, their desire to forgive and reconcile. It also reveals their understanding that open hearts are required by both sides in this journey and that “confession alone is not the end.”

- Our denomination was wrong to take children from their homes.
- The CRC Board of Heathen Missions initiated a lot of pain through its dehumanizing view of Native Americans.

The CRC played a part in the historic trauma of Indigenous peoples in the Southwest and, as a result, is itself traumatized. Our path forward toward reconciliation is difficult. We will not reconcile these relationships overnight, for reconciliation is not a one-time event. It has a definite starting point but no definitive ending. Reconciliation begins with a conversation and ends in the living out of the restored relationship. And the doorway to this healing, the entrance to this journey, begins with lament: sorrow for our brokenness and a hope that God has healing in store.

V. The Fall, Part 3: CRC history and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery in Canada

“Verily, the white man’s ways were the best.”
—Duncan Campbell Scott⁹⁸

As section II of this report (“A North American History”) points out, the DOCD legal legacy in Canada is vested in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The assumption of Crown as “protector” of Indigenous peoples has force of law in Canada. Subsequent legal decisions and legislation denied the sovereign nation status of Indigenous groups and turned Indigenous people into wards of the state (via the Indian Act of 1876). The DOCD-related presumptions of the superiority of Christian Europeans over pagan, heathen, and savage Indigenous peoples have characterized much of the history of Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. Rather than addressing the full scope of this impact (in law, public policy, and land rights), we will consider the disturbing example of Indian Residential Schools (IRS).

Indian Residential Schools, Truth and Reconciliation

“In order to educate the children properly we must separate them from their families. Some people may say that this is hard but if we want to civilize them we must do that.”
—Hector Langevan, Minister of Public Works, 1883⁹⁹

Detailed histories of the IRS system reveal the schools as an attempt to assimilate, civilize, and Christianize Indigenous populations in Canada. As the nation state of Canada was being formed in the last half of the nineteenth century, there is evidence of a prevailing assumption among Euro-Canadian leaders that Indigenous cultures were inferior, uncivilized, and in danger of dying. Therefore attempts to force assimilation were understood to be benevolent. “This was the underlying theory of the residential school system.”¹⁰⁰ The Rt. Hon. John A. MacDonald (first Prime Minister of Canada)

⁹⁸ Duncan Campbell Scott, “Charcoal” in *The Circle of Affection* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1947), 213.

⁹⁹ As quoted in Sinclair, et. al., *They Came for the Children*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Interim Report (2012), 5.

¹⁰⁰ John Raulston Saul, *A Fair Country* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008), p. 23.

reflected assumptions of the inferiority of Indigenous peoples and cultures in his arguments for a residential school system in the House of Commons (c. 1868):

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write.¹⁰¹

Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs 1913-1931, reflected a prevailing assumption that the survival of remaining Indigenous peoples depended on their civilization and assimilation. Therefore, as a lead administrator for Indian Affairs, Campbell Scott advocated intermarriage,¹⁰² education, agricultural pursuits, and prohibition of the practice of Indigenous culture and ceremonies. These efforts, he said, would “continue until there is not a single Indian left in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian Department.”¹⁰³

So we see that, in Euro-Canadian cultural assumptions and public policy, Indigenous peoples were considered a problem to be solved by assimilation and the erasing of distinct Indigenous cultural and linguistic identities. Campbell Scott’s maxim, “Verily, the white man’s ways were the best,” certainly reflected a prevailing worldview of Euro-superiority. That worldview was a key foundation to colonialism and European land acquisition in Canada. Residential schools were a key part of Canada’s efforts to address the presumed “Indian problem.”

In the course of our work and learning, the synodical Doctrine of Discovery Task Force was privileged to attend the Edmonton, Alberta, National Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).¹⁰⁴ Beginning in 2010, the TRC convened events across Canada to gather and honour the testimony of IRS survivors and their families. Stories of the denigration of Indigenous culture and language, of horrific abuse, of great anger, of courageous resilience, and of extraordinary acts of grace and forgiveness were a regular and powerful part of TRC hearings.

¹⁰¹ Duncan Campbell Scott, Speech from 1868. Library and Archives Canada, Harold Daly fonds, C-006513.

¹⁰² Lisa Salem Wiseman, “Verily, The White Man’s Ways Were The Best”: Duncan Campbell Scott, Native Culture and Assimilation. journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/download/8253/9309 (1996, accessed 6 March 2015). “Scott shared the common belief that Native peoples possessed an innate savagery which was transmitted through blood; miscegenation, then, would dilute any undesirable qualities and render the Native peoples more receptive to the ways of civilization,” 121.

¹⁰³ As cited in Sinclair, et. al., 12.

¹⁰⁴ In the course of our time in Edmonton, the task force was blessed to hear Indian Residential Schools survivors’ testimonies and to meet with the TRC’s research director, Paulette Regan. Ms. Regan is author of *Unsettling the Settler Within* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2011), a profound perspective on the need for reconciliation in Canada. Ms. Regan gave Task Force members a thorough sense of the history of the TRC. Regan reflected with us on the role of *providence* in bringing leaders like Phil Fontaine (former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations) into the process in a way that built a profound momentum to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and the founding of TRC. This underscores that reconciliation is a providential and deeply spiritual process.

In 1879, the Government of Canada undertook a hasty study of Indian boarding schools in the United States. The result, “Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds,” written by Nicolas Flood Davin, recommended the establishment of residential schools for Indigenous children in a partnership between churches and the government. Davin expected that churches, imbued with missionary fervor, could run schools cheaply. He also expected the schools would undermine Indigenous culture and spirituality, “and it would be wrong . . . to destroy their faith ‘without supplying a better’ one, namely Christianity.”¹⁰⁵

As the IRS system developed, churches took on tasks of assimilation by separating children from their families and communities, forbidding the use of Indigenous languages and culture in school, and advocating the prohibition of traditional cultural practices (“the heathen savage life”).¹⁰⁶ The dehumanizing assumptions and language that were brought to this enterprise created a shadow side to Christian missionary fervour. Patterns of neglect and physical and sexual abuse caused great trauma among students of the schools and were compounded by the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families, communities, and cultures. The result is that generations of Indigenous children suffered trauma and insecure attachments to their families, communities, and cultures. The ensuing patterns of addiction, poverty, family breakdown, and intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities are tragic and unsurprising.

In the days immediately preceding the closing events of the TRC (May 31 – June 3, 2015), Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin of the Supreme Court of Canada described the IRS system as “cultural genocide.” The TRC commissioners used the same descriptor in their public statements in the powerful closing events. Genocide, the deliberate extermination of an ethnic group, connotes a systemic evil. Presumptions of European superiority in the DOCD dehumanized Indigenous peoples and made the systemic evil of the IRS system possible.

The body of Christ, as represented by the churches involved in residential schools, has been in the process of coming to grips with the IRS legacy. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey of each of these churches’ actions, we will consider the example of our sister church, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC).

Beginning in the mid-1980s the PCC became aware of the painful legacy of the residential schools it ran¹⁰⁷ and began a process “to ‘hear and respond’ more sensitively to the agendas of First Nations people.”¹⁰⁸ This led to a deep grappling with the legacy and ultimately to a confession adopted by the PCC General Assembly on June 9, 1994. This statement clearly recognizes the sins of European superiority, colonialism, and “the assumption that what was

¹⁰⁵ As cited in Sinclair, et al., 10.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁷ The PCC ran residential schools for ninety years. Before 1925, the PCC was involved in eleven schools. From 1925-1969 the PCC was responsible for two schools in Birtle, Manitoba, and Kenora, Ontario. Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives, *Brief Administrative History of Residential Schools and the Presbyterian Church in Canada’s Healing and Reconciliation Efforts* (Presbyterian Church in Canada: Toronto, 2010), 2. presbyterian.ca/?wpdmdl=94 (accessed 21 July 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited.”¹⁰⁹ This demonstrates that the foundational assumptions of the DOCD had an impact on the practice of Christian mission in the residential schools in Canada.

The Presbyterian confession is one example of statements that have been made by churches and religious orders that ran residential schools. On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in the House of Commons, offered an apology to survivors of the residential schools. From that place in the highest representative assembly in Canada, the Prime Minister’s words were the words of all Canadians. These confessions and apologies are important seeds of reconciliation that need persistent tending; in other words, they are not the final words. They should signal the beginning of a new relationship and a new direction toward healing and reconciliation. The difficulty is that, in Canadian society, there is ongoing ignorance of the reality of this broken history and deep reluctance to step in the direction of reconciliation. “It’s in the past” or “I didn’t do any of this” are common reactions. We may write off the “Indian problem” as intractable, fail to acknowledge that there is a clear *Settler Problem*, and then ignore the reality of broken relationships. Paulette Regan, the TRC’s research director, explains:

How is it that we know nothing about this history? What does the persistence of such invisibility in the face of the living presence of survivors tell us about our relationship with Indigenous Peoples? What does our historical amnesia reveal about our continuing complicity in denying, erasing, and forgetting this part of our own history as colonizers while pathologizing the colonized? How will Canadians who have so selectively forgotten this “sad chapter in our history” now undertake to remember it? Will such remembering be truly transformative or simply perpetuate colonial relations? Surely without confronting such difficult questions as part of our own truth telling there can be no reconciliation.¹¹⁰

From 2009-2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission pored over millions of archival documents and interviewed thousands of survivors and intergenerational survivors of the IRS system. The truths revealed have been profound and painful and have stimulated a path of healing for many survivors and their families. The process that led to the TRC—the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement—was the result of IRS survivors’ persistence over the course of decades. The early sharing of their stories was met with derision from churches and government and “a code of silence”¹¹¹ in Indigenous communities. The courageous persistence of survivors in sharing their stories and naming the wrongs made the healing path of the TRC possible. But reconciliation is a long story. A TRC report is not the final chapter. At the closing events of the TRC, it was regularly stated that “this

¹⁰⁹ Presbyterian Church in Canada, Confession of the *Presbyterian Church in Canada* as adopted by General Assembly, June 9, 1994. presbyterian.ca/?wpdmdl=1075 (accessed 21 July 2015).

¹¹⁰ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2011), 6. * “Sad chapter in our history” is a quote from Prime Minister Harper’s apology speech.

¹¹¹ Isabelle Knockwood refers to this code of silence in her memoir of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School titled *Out of the Depths*. Knockwood and other survivors of Shubenacadie, under the leadership of Nora Bernard, initiated the 1995 class action lawsuit that ultimately led to the IRS settlement agreement. The litigation of 1995 was the fruit of survivors’ courageous story sharing and organizing that began after IRS closures started in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

ending is a new beginning” and that reconciliation is a generational project. As the CRCNA reflects on the DOCD and its contemporary effects, it is important to note the long journey of the TRC as we consider response and appropriate action.

The TRC final report and calls to action include significant references to the DOCD. Specifically the TRC calls for the development of a “Royal Proclamation and Covenant of Reconciliation” (Call to Action 45). A reframed Royal Proclamation would renew the nation-to-nation principles that were the foundations of the covenants of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara 1764.¹¹² The nation-to-nation principles stand in direct contrast to DOCD presumptions of European superiority. The TRC calls for the Government of Canada to “repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.” In Call to Action 46, the TRC asks faith groups to take similar actions in the development of a Covenant of Reconciliation.

1. The CRC and the TRC

The Christian Reformed Church has followed the TRC closely through the work of our family of justice and reconciliation ministries.¹¹³ CRC follow-up and implementation of TRC recommendations is proceeding in collaboration with ecumenical and Indigenous partners and through regular Canadian ministries’ dialogue and reporting to the Board of Trustees.

Paulette Regan encourages communities of settlers to grapple with difficult questions for the sake of the integrity of the reconciliation journey. With a history of pathologizing the colonized, surely settlers have problems to confront. And surely the settler problem is rooted in the DOCD-related assumption that “the white man’s ways were the best.” The IRS legacy makes clear that there are questions about churches’ interactions with Indigenous peoples that need to be discussed among the whole body of Christ in Canada: Have we assumed that our ways—rooted in Western European Christianity—are superior to Indigenous ways of knowing and being? Have we, in reflections and actions on “the Indian problem,” been conscious of a settler problem and of fallen thinking in ourselves?

The Christian Reformed churches in Canada grew in the post-World War II era and did not participate in the operation of residential schools with the Canadian government. Nevertheless, we have been reflecting on our settler problem: on June 23, 2012, the director of Canadian ministries, Bruce Adema, said the following in an “Expression of Reconciliation” at the Truth and Reconciliation National Event in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: “As members of the body of Christ in Canada, we confess that the sins of assimilation and paternalism in Indian Residential Schools, and in wider government policy, are ours as the Christian Reformed Church.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² The TRC is polite and clever in its subtlety here. A new Royal Proclamation would, presumably, be a de facto questioning of the presumptions of Crown sovereignty that evolved in the implementation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

¹¹³ Centre for Public Dialogue, Canadian Aboriginal Ministries, the Office of Race Relations, and the Office of Social Justice. Staff and committee members from these offices have participated in, and organized congregational engagement in, TRC-related events.

¹¹⁴ “CRC Offers Expression of Reconciliation,” Christian Reformed Church, 23 June 2012. www.reformingrelationships.ca/?q=content/crc-offers-expression-reconciliation (accessed 22 July 2015).

In addition, on June 1, 2015, Canadian ministries director Darren Roorda and Board of Trustees of the CRCNA chair Kathy Vandergrift presented a Commitment to Action for Reconciliation at the closing ceremonies of the TRC. Following is an excerpt from that Commitment to Action:

In the stories, the tears, and the resilience of survivors, we have learned that all people in Canada “drink downstream” from the hurt of residential schools and the wider sins of colonialism. This history affects the health of the stream that all drink from today. We have been honoured to witness the expressions of truth in the TRC, and in them have seen a sacred momentum of reconciliation and hope. Because of this hope, and with the help of our Indigenous neighbours and Creator God, we are committed to turning from the systemic evils behind colonialism and living into a sacred call of unity and reconciliation.¹¹⁵



Figure 2 Shannon Perez, Darren Roorda, and Kathy Vandergrift present Action for Reconciliation at Ottawa TRC

These CRC commitments to a journey of justice and reconciliation follow long-term ecumenical work on Indigenous justice and participation in the dialogue and signing of the *New Covenant* declarations (1987, 2007), which call for a renewed commitment to action on Canada’s covenant with Indigenous peoples. Members of CRC congregations in Canada have recognized a need for a journey of healing, justice, and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbors. We, the church, are asking questions of ourselves—as settlers. Living into those questions and into the commitments we have made requires discernment of our history of mission with Indigenous peoples.

It must be noted that the time and context of the development of the CRC within Canada (largely post-World War II) is distinct from the founding of the CRC within the United States and its mission to Navajo and Zuni people in the Southwest. The founding of those U.S. missions occurred around the same time as the development of residential schools

¹¹⁵ “Action for Reconciliation,” Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, June 1, 2012. www2.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/cpd/Action_for_Reconciliation_Ottawa2015.pdf (accessed 22 July 2015).

in Canada, so it is not particularly surprising to see the use of language like *pagan* and the marks of colonial mission in the CRC from the late 1800s to the middle of the twentieth century. Canadian CRC ministries to Indigenous peoples grew up at least seventy years after the Southwest missions and therefore had a different character and approach. Our discussion of the Canadian ministry context should not, therefore, be read as an equal historical comparison.

2. Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centres

At its inaugural meeting in 1968, the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (CCRCC) began deliberations on “Indian Missions.” The grounds listed in an overture requesting study of the feasibility of “mission work among the Indians of Canada” included “our responsibility toward the original inhabitants of Canada.”¹¹⁶ This sentiment echoes the sense of responsibility expressed by early CRC missionaries to the southwestern United States.¹¹⁷

In response to the 1968 overture, the CCRCC formed a committee on the topic of Indian Missions that rendered a detailed report in 1973.¹¹⁸ That report’s orientation section begins by stating a fact: “Indians are people—creatures and image bearers of God.”¹¹⁹ This is certainly a marked contrast to the dehumanizing motifs common to the DOCD and the derogatory language (“pagan,” “savage”) common to the founding of the residential schools. The 1973 report does not address missiological issues in any great detail, but its two “facts to keep in mind” are worth noting:

- “Their (Indigenous people’s) philosophy of life and religious expression will be different.”¹²⁰ This statement indicates openness to diverse, and perhaps non-European, religious expression. This attitude would be tested later (mid-1990s) in debates about syncretism.
- “They have a long history of defeat and discrimination and segregation. They are presently living in poverty under an atmosphere of fear and despair and even hatred toward white people.”¹²¹ This was a contemporary expression of “the Indian problem,” and certainly a common pathologizing of *the colonized*.

The process of the 1973 report included consultation with CRC representatives from the Navajo Nation and Gallup, New Mexico. It is striking that both Jackson Yazzie (Navajo community minister in Denver) and Alfred Mulder (Euro-American pastor in Gallup) encouraged the Canadians to see to it that Indigenous leaders develop the ministry rather than fitting into a Euro-designed structure. Later, as the recruitment process

¹¹⁶ CCRCC, *Acts of Council 1968*, 30-31.

¹¹⁷ In his reflections on the founding of the CRC Navajo Mission, Rev. Herman Fryling stated, “Quite a number of people felt we owed it to the natives of our country to carry the light of the gospel to them.” Christian Reformed Board of Missions, *Navaho and Zuni for Christ*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1947). 16.

¹¹⁸ Report: Ministry Among Indians in Canada. CCRCC, *Acts of Council 1973*, supplement 7, Article 34, 37ff.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

for an Indigenous leader floundered, recommendations for Indigenous leadership and theological training were made.¹²²

In early 1974, Henk DeBruyn began establishing a ministry in the urban core of Winnipeg, Manitoba, that was intended “to proclaim Christ in Word and Deed to the Indians and Métis in Canada. It shall be the aim of this ministry under the lead of the Holy Spirit to encourage the development of a working and worshipping community.”¹²³ Similar efforts followed later in Regina, Saskatchewan (beginning in 1978 with Harry Kuperus), and in Edmonton, Alberta (beginning in 1991 with John Stellingwerf). George Fernhout, one of the original leaders of the National Committee on Indian Ministry, explained that the choice for an urban concentration was made based on a needs assessment: that urbanization was one of the most significant issues facing Indigenous people in those days.¹²⁴

These three Urban Aboriginal Ministries (UAMs) have each evolved in a unique way as working and worshipping communities. Diverse programming includes or has included social and cultural support, employment services, health-fitness-nutrition, addictions services, pastoral care, drop-in centers, food banks, John schools, worship and prayer, Christian Indigenous ceremonies, microenterprise development, anti-violence, and encouragement of Indigenous artistic expression. These unique ministries have done remarkable work that is noticed and appreciated by Indigenous and community leaders.¹²⁵

It is important to note, however, that the UAMs sometimes struggle with maintaining connections with mainstream CRC congregations. Early in the history of the Winnipeg ministry, it was noted that “there has not been very much input . . . from the (CRC) churches in the ministry. This was intentionally not encouraged. It is our aim to establish an Indian Community without much white input.”¹²⁶ This ministry choice reflected advice given to the feasibility committee that reported in 1973. Rev. Alfred Mulder of Bethany CRC in Gallup, New Mexico, said of Indigenous Christians, “They need a place where they can escape from the white man’s world and a place where they can put things together. The Christian Reformed community has taken the view of the dominant society, into which the Indian does not fit.”¹²⁷ While these intentions were charitable—designed to shield Indigenous people from the potential for domination by the mainstream denomination—it is fair to say that it had the negative impact of creating a distance between the UAMs and

¹²² *Ibid.*, 50, 52.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²⁴ George Fernhout, interview with the task force.

¹²⁵ In a Parliamentary dialogue with the CRC’s Committee for Contact with the Government, former Winnipeg Member of Parliament Bill Blaikie made appreciative note of the work of Henk De Bruyn and Kildonan CRC (Winnipeg) Pastor Arie VanEek to establish the Indian Family Center (February 17, 2005 – CCG Archives).

¹²⁶ CCRCC, *Acts of Council 1976*, 67.

¹²⁷ CCRCC, *Acts of Council 1973*, 41. Harry Kuperus, the first staff person of Indian Métis Christian Fellowship in Regina, noted the same dynamic: “We decided that it would be a community not dependent on the white CRC” (interview with Harry and Jan Kuperus, December 2014).

local churches. Distance can certainly lead to misunderstanding and suspicion. It is possible that the obscurity of the UAMs in the CRC led to controversy. Syncretism questions are a case in point.

3. The syncretism question

The CRC's Urban Aboriginal Ministries are spaces of welcome and healing for Indigenous peoples. This work includes programming that is culturally sensitive, incorporating elements of Indigenous ceremonial practices, celebrations, and artistic expression. Visitors to these ministries today may well experience smudging prayers¹²⁸ and drumming that celebrates Creator and the Jesus Way. These ministries have striven to articulate and live a gospel that is contextualized to their communities.¹²⁹

The integration of gospel and culture is a concept that has challenged missiologists and missionaries throughout church history. This is certainly a question that requires great discernment and humility. The conflation of one cultural expression of the gospel with ultimate truth is certainly a danger to be avoided.

UAM efforts to live a gospel that is contextualized have been a matter of some controversy in the CRC congregations in Canada. For instance, in the 1990s, churches in Classis Alberta North raised concerns about the use of "traditional and cultural elements with religious overtones, symbolism, or significance" in the UAMs.¹³⁰ Church communications with the CCRCC and Classis Alberta North converged in Overture 5 to Synod 1999, which notes "sufficient concern among the churches with regard to these practices to warrant an investigation of the compatibility of these practices with the Christian faith," and a lack of satisfactory answers from the CCRCC system on "questions about the issue of syncretism."¹³¹ This overture led to a significant CRCNA Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum in June 2000 in Edmonton.

The report of the 2000 Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum chronicles sessions that were full of tension. For example,

- Dale Missyabit, an Indigenous participant, reported that "he felt his heart had been 'taken out and stamped on' as others questioned how his Native heritage fit with Christianity."¹³² Dale also led a public

¹²⁸ "The Smudge is a purification ritual, where we burn sweet grass or sage or another sacred medicine. As the smoke rises we waft the smoke over our bodies symbolically cleansing ourselves. We do this to prepare our hearts, minds, and bodies to come before our Creator." As described by Harold Roscher, director of Edmonton Native Healing Centre.

¹²⁹ A beautiful example of these Christian Indigenous expressions of faith has come to the CRC in the remarkable artwork of Ovide Bighetty. Indian Metis Christian Fellowship in Regina commissioned Bighetty to develop four series of paintings that integrate Christian and Indigenous themes in a beautiful Woodland Cree style. The series *Kisemanito Pakatinasuwin* (*The Creator's Sacrifice*) has toured Canada (2010-15) in an effort to draw churches into relationship with Indigenous peoples. This tour (known as reForming Relationships) has stopped in communities across the country, including Synod 2012 (Ancaster, Ontario), and has coincided with TRC National Events in three cities. Ovide's beautiful work in *Kisemanito Pakatinasuwin* has been a testimony to the Creator's truth and beauty in Indigenous culture and has been a blessing to the communities in which it has been displayed.

¹³⁰ CRCNA, *Agenda for Synod 1999*, 394.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² CRCNA, *Hearts Exchanged: A report to the Churches reflecting on the Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum*. (Edmonton: June, 2000), 7.

- gesture of reconciliation by inviting Phil Stel, a pastor with whom he had deep disagreements, to stand with him and share Scripture.
- “Speakers from Minority Cultures lamented the fear they felt in the room, while their questioners called for ‘a return to scripture’ and for ‘tough love.’”¹³³
 - In the course of a circle that included a smudge, “fear and disapproval were present in the room, especially during the smudging ceremony, when a few participants walked out.”¹³⁴

In this context of tension, participants were encouraged to approach cross-cultural mission as an “exchange of hearts.” Indigenous church leader Ray Aldred spoke of the lessons his own denomination had learned regarding Indigenous ministry and encouraged the conference attendees to “go to other cultures with the attitude of a learner, not the attitude of superiority.”¹³⁵ This exchange of hearts, in contrast to an attitude of superiority, is a celebration of the gifts of many cultures in the life of the church. Stephanie Baker-Collins, an appointed observer of the conference, encouraged “accountability to the circle, through the process of dialogue, and accountability to a hierarchical structure,” saying, “It is in this area of freedom/trust that I think we will need to work further to understand each other.”¹³⁶ Trust and freedom allow for an exchange of hearts and the transformation of the church into a diverse and unified body. Henk DeBruyn, the founding director of the Winnipeg Indian Family Centre, reflected on his hopes for that transformational journey:

In Scripture, I found that if I want to see the power of God, I must be among people who don’t have power. I saw that the renewal of the church—even the New Testament church—always came from the outside, always came through a conflict situation. So with a disillusioned heart and hurt, it was my hope that participants of this Native ministry would be instruments of healing in the CRC. Dale’s approach to Phil said it for me.* That was the fulfillment of my vision—of God’s vision. To see people who have been criticized reach out to those who criticize and say, “Teach me,” to me that is the work of the Spirit, that is the work of healing, that is the model for healing for the church.¹³⁷

This conference report most certainly chronicles deep tensions and suspicions around cultural contextualization of the gospel related to the work of the UAMs in Canada. The sources of such tension and suspicion are complex, but it is plausible that the deeply rooted presumptions of European superiority in the DOCD reach into the religious experience of postcolonial contemporary Canada, including that of the CRC. This settler problem, left unaddressed, hinders an exchange of hearts and unity in the body of Christ. Confronting assumptions of superiority that weaken the body is at the core a heart issue for confession, repentance, and transformation.

¹³³ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7. *See text pertaining to note 132.

VI. The journey from the Fall toward reconciliation: Building common memory by sharing stories

“We tell stories to remember who we are.”
—Elder Rev. Stan McKay, Cree¹³⁸

As has been stated, reconciliation is contingent on “knowing our common story in all its terrible and beautiful complexity.” The Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its heritage of systemic racism has buried important stories and diminished the voice and humanity of Indigenous peoples for generations. *Shalom* is incomplete when the voices of our Indigenous neighbors are missing or faint and when injustice persists. Reconciliation can only be realized if we know the extent of the trespasses against the oppressed and marginalized—that is, the *truth* of the effects of the DOCD. Therefore, we believe it is important to share stories, beautiful ones and hard ones, to know more fully who we are as a family and to work for the unity of the body of Christ.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided survivors of Indian Residential Schools the opportunity to share their stories. Video archives of much of this testimony are available.¹³⁹ In the United States the BlueSkies Foundation and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition have likewise provided forums for former boarding school students to tell their stories, which have been recorded and archived. The extraordinary courage of these former students has communicated to other survivors that they are not alone and that they, too, can seek healing.

Hearing the stories of Indigenous people and honoring their lived experience is a key part of the reconciliation journey. It is also important for non-Indigenous settler people to reflect on their stories of living and *drinking downstream* from the DOCD and its heritage. In honestly sharing about our common and broken past, we build “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and come to know each other more deeply as God’s family.

A. *Voices missing from official narratives*

Over the course of our work, we reached out to many whose voices we felt were missing from official narratives. Some people were reluctant to tell their stories, but we hope and pray that one day they will feel safe enough to speak. We know their stories are essential for our journey of reconciliation. Others graciously agreed to share their stories publicly for the first time. We are humbled and honored.

Editor’s note: The introductory letter that precedes this report explains a decision by the Board of Trustees to remove a story from this section of the report. For pastoral reasons, a story from a former dormitory resident and student at Rehoboth Christian School is being followed up through other means at this time; consistent with synodical procedures, it will be shared with the advisory committee that reviews this report at Synod 2016 to

¹³⁸ Stan McKay, in the lecture “Cree Perspectives on Covenants of Peace and Justice,” Canadian School of Peacebuilding, June 2011. Rev. McKay was the first Indigenous Moderator of the United Church of Canada.

¹³⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=513 (accessed 26 July 2015).

contribute to understanding how the troubling history of boarding schools relates to the Doctrine of Discovery and the CRCNA.

1. SUSIE SILVERSMITH

Susie Silversmith, Diné (Navajo), lives in Denver, Colorado, where she and her family are long-term members and leaders of the Denver Christian Indian Center, a CRC ministry. Her boarding school experience shares many characteristics with those documented by the TRC, the BlueSkies Foundation, and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. The prelude to her story includes the reminder: "In 1879, the Indian Boarding School system was founded and the taking away of our identities began. The only good Indian is a dead one, they said. Kill the Indian in him and save the man. Strip children of their culture and remove them from the influence of their families and nations."

From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

—Isaiah 45:6, NIV

Pay attention, my child, to what I say. Listen carefully. Don't lose sight of my words. Let them penetrate deep within your heart, for they bring life and radiant health to anyone who discovers their meaning.

—Proverbs 4:20-22, NLT

When I was born, my parents buried my umbilical cord in the ground in the sheep corral. They believed that wherever I traveled in life, I would come home someday.

My name is Susie Silversmith. I was born at Sage Memorial Hospital on May 7, 1955. I am a member of the Navajo Nation. My first clan, coming from my mother, is Tsinaajinii (Black Streak Wood), and my father's clan is Honaghaahnii (One who walks around). My *cheis* (maternal grandparents) are Totsohnii (Big Water). My *nalis* (paternal grandparents) are Todichiinii (Bitter Water). My mother is from Klagetoh, Arizona, and my father is from Cross Canyon, Arizona. I am married to Richard who is Toaheedliinii (Water flows together), born into the Kinyaa'aanii (Tower-ing House) from Mariano Lake, New Mexico. His mother is from Mariano Lake, and his father is from Pinedale, New Mexico.

I had seven sisters and four brothers. I remember bits and pieces of being with my parents at a young age. I learned the Navajo language and prayed in the early mornings. Many of my parents' teachings stayed with me, even though I was taught to get rid of them. I remembered my parents telling me, "Never forget who you are as a Navajo/Diné person. Know your clan, so you don't marry someone of the same clan." As young as I was, I heard stories, chanting, singing, and teachings of my parents. They taught me about balance and harmony, taking care of Mother Earth, and to understand the importance of the nature around me. Chant songs, drumming, and rattles are music to my ears. Navajo is my heart language.

The *bilagáana* (white people) gave my family English names and told them to abandon their Navajo names. We received the last name "Clark," but my last name was later changed twice. I was named "Susie" after the nurse at the hospital. I, along with my parents and grandparents, was given a census number by the U.S. government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). I call it my prisoner number. I was put on the Navajo

reservation—my prison. In 1961, when I was six years old, my parents were ordered by the U.S. government and the BIA to put me in Kinlichee Boarding School. My father took me there and left me crying after him. I remember crying all the time. I was in Kinlichee for six years, Toyei Boarding School for two years, and Fort Wingate Boarding School for one year.

When we arrived at boarding school, we were assigned a number, were given baths, and were dressed in identical clothes and shoes. I was stripped of my Navajo clothes and moccasins, which had been sewn for me by my mother, and they were thrown away. Our hair was cut above our ears with bangs. I looked terrible. It was my first haircut. I cried when I saw my long hair on the floor. Tears still well up in my eyes when I remember the way it lay on the floor. School officials used our newly cut hair as a handle to jerk us around and put us where they wanted, like standing at attention or in line for chow or school. Sometimes they would make us stand in line for no other reason but to control us.

In Navajo culture, caring for my hair was very important. My mother always told me not to cut my hair because I would lose a part of me. It was critical to a person's mind and thoughts. The Navajo bun, or *tsiyeel*, represents us as Diné people. In our culture, we believe that wisdom is tied up in our *tsiyeel* with our knowledge, memory, and thoughts. I remember my mother lovingly washing my long hair with yucca root and combing my hair out with a bundle of stiff grass called a *be'ezo* as she shared stories of our culture.



Figure 3 Susie visits her old boarding school with a young friend

In school, we were forbidden to speak Navajo, and horrific measures were taken to punish us when we failed to speak English. I had a hard time learning English. Without my Navajo language, I was broken and unable to celebrate my heritage. Taking my identity from me made me feel powerless. I lost some of my native language, but I remembered much of it and worked for a long time to become fluent again.

We were punished in many ways by school officials. I was forced to stand in the corner for speaking Navajo. They washed my mouth out with

soap many times until I gagged and vomited. I was forced to clean toilet bowls and floors over and over again even when they were sparkling clean. I was forced to kneel on a cement floor for hours. Sometimes the dorm aides forgot about me, and I was still there at night. I was not allowed to participate in some fun activities, like going to the movies, with the “good kids” who did what they were told. I remember crying myself to sleep in a dark room many times.

We were trained like soldiers and forced to follow rules so closely that I became brainwashed. We were taught how to make our beds, how to clean, and how to behave at the table. Every morning we would stand in line as they checked our beds. When it was not right, they tore off the bedding and ordered us to make it again. This could go on for hours because they always found something wrong. Even now, I make my bed with all the corners tucked in and the top sheet folded back over a blanket. My husband doesn’t like it this way, but I continue to do it because it is ingrained in me. They taught us to clean floors on our hands and knees. Even now I clean this way; I have a mop and a broom at home, but I don’t use them. They taught us strict table manners: how to use silverware, how to sit and eat correctly, either family style or dinner style, how to pick up a slice of bread and break it in four pieces. I break my bread this way even now, decades later.

We were fed USDA commodity foods, mostly processed canned food, and much of it tasted terrible. We were told to eat everything on our plate, and someone stood at the exit door to make sure we did. I used to stuff food in my milk carton to hide it, but they would open it and put it back on my plate. Sometimes I would just cry and fall asleep sitting at the table with my food. I know what hunger feels like, too, that sharp pain at the bottom of my stomach. I was allowed to eat only what was given to me when it was time to eat. I was a very skinny child.

The school teachers were mean. The BIA hired our own people for certain job positions to control us, but I remember mostly *bilaq’iana* as teachers. All the teachers were very mean and abusive. I frequently got in trouble for being slow to respond to orders. We were often hit with wooden paddles, hands, or rulers with sharp edges, whether on our hands, rear ends, or other parts of our bodies.

Bullies were a problem at boarding school. The boys would often wait after school to pick on us and call us names. I could not figure out why they did this, but now I think they felt bad about themselves or were also physically abused and were reacting to what was done to them. If they caught us, they would hit and kick us anywhere on our bodies. I especially remember two incidents when we were very small, in first or second grade: an older boy, who often pulled my hair and hit me, once caught me and hit me in the face and then kicked me in the stomach until I fell unconscious. I don’t know how I came to. From that moment on I started to defend myself and fight back, so I got into more trouble. Another time a boy came at me with a sharp pencil in his hands. I put my hand up and he stabbed my pinkie finger. I hit him in the forehead with my fist and saw a big bump form on his forehead. I started to cry. Blood was all over, and the teacher punished me for it. I don’t remember if he was punished.

The frequent beatings and abuse created cycles of abuse—physical, emotional, spiritual—and so much heartache. This harsh upbringing in boarding school had sad results. I did not show affection or speak and feel love for my children as they were growing up. I punished them, told them to eat everything on their plate, verbally abused them, spanked them, and made them work and clean. I treated them the way I was brought up in the boarding school, with strict discipline.

I was always lonely. Every chance I got, I would go to the laundry room. It had a big window, and if I sat in a certain place, I could see the road at the top of the canyon or mesa. I would watch the road to see if my parents were coming to get me. Kinlichee Boarding School was built near a wash and was surrounded by a fence. I tried many times to run away as I got older, but I was always caught. One time at Toyei Boarding School, I crawled through the sagebrush, dirt, trees, and cactus for miles, but they found me and brought me back for more punishment.

Loneliness is a familiar feeling that has hung over me since the early age of six. Loneliness is serious—it gnaws at my sense of reality and draws me toward emptiness, sadness, and hopelessness. I was lonely most of the time in boarding school. I needed to interact with people to enjoy life and stay sane, but I was kept away from my friends. We were routinely separated and punished, especially when we spoke Navajo. Loneliness is painful, deadening, and daunting. By denying us friendship, they denied us one of our most basic needs. The sense of loneliness, rejection, and worthlessness made communication very hard for me. People thought that I was shy or a loner, especially in Christian high school.

The religious instruction I experienced was quite inconsistent and confusing. I was baptized many times by the Catholic, Presbyterian, Mormon, and other religious groups that came to the boarding school on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings to teach us. I think of my parents' ways of praying for us in their own ceremonial and traditional Navajo ways, and I am thankful for that because a lot of bad things happened to us by people who claimed to be Christians.

One Saturday when I was seven or eight years old, Mormons came in a large bus and invited us on a field trip. They took us to the Mormon church in St. Michaels, Arizona. They lined us up to get baptized, and when some of the children at the start of the line started crying, I got scared and started to cry. They put me under the water twice because they said my hair came back up. After that I was afraid of water for many years. One summer, on a Native youth group outing, we had to race across the lake in canoes. My canoe tipped, and I almost drowned.

I finally left boarding school in 1970 when my oldest sister, Louise, brought me to Denver, Colorado, to go to Denver Christian High School. I went through culture shock coming into this urban setting and adjusting to the speed of everything. Sadly, I don't remember having any friends in the church or the Christian school.

My siblings, nephews, and nieces also came to Denver so they could attend better schools than the boarding schools. In the summertime, my sister Louise sent us home to our parents so we could help them on the reservation. She came for us at the end of summer and took us back to school in Denver. At the start of my senior year, I missed my ride back to Denver,

so I ended up in a boarding school at Fort Wingate, New Mexico. This boarding school wasn't as bad as Kinlichee, perhaps because I was older and didn't try to run away, but the academic level was so low that I sat out most of my school year. I was able to make some friends, though.

It was at Fort Wingate Boarding School that I was introduced to the Bible and Christianity in a nicer way. During my early years in boarding school, Christianity was always taught to me in a harsh and scary way. I was told that I was going to burn in hell because of who I am, and it stayed with me for a long time. I was always afraid of God and wondered when he would throw me in the fire. In boarding school, we were promised prizes, like pretty pencils, for memorizing Bible verses. I memorized John 3:16, but I never received the prized pencils. This Bible verse stayed with me, though, and is still in my heart today. Even though I never really knew what it meant, I would say it over and over again when I was punished.

At Fort Wingate, a Navajo science teacher shared with me about Jesus, God our Father, and the Holy Spirit. He gave me short verses to read, and at the end of the school year he asked me if I was ready to let Jesus come into my heart. I replied "yes" because it had not been beaten into me, like in my earlier years. I wasn't scared anymore. I found out that despite my hurt and fear, I always have hope in Christ. I know the comfort of God, as his Spirit comforts me and stays close to me. I invited God to help me make sense of my emotions and to define how I felt about the person I had lost, myself. He understands my situation, the complexities of my past experiences, and all of my thoughts. He can help mend the hole that I felt inside at boarding school. I am so thankful to God for that teacher because my life changed and is still healing. I am grateful to my Creator God, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit my helper.

Four of my older sisters have now passed away, as well as two of my older brothers. They were all put in boarding schools, some as far away as Utah and Oregon. They survived the schools, but they never had a chance to tell or share their stories. I know other survivors of boarding schools who tell me they admire my courage in sharing my story, but they are not yet ready or able to share their stories.

In 1978, I married Richard Silversmith and had two sons. I loved my family, but the generational trauma we experienced resulted in alcoholism and abuse. Both my father and my husband abused alcohol, and I soon learned how alcoholism affects the whole family. In living with alcoholism, I've been through mistrust, anger, resentment, criticism, uncertainty, anxiety, and the list goes on. My husband put himself in an alcoholic treatment center, and I received counseling and support also. Through extensive counseling, I recognized the abuse I put my family through as a result of my childhood experiences. I did to my children what was done to me: spanking them, never telling them I love them, being overly strict.

But I praise the Lord, for he has performed miracles in my life! Jesus helped me, restored me, and redeemed me, and our family got a second chance at life. Through counseling and the work of the Holy Spirit, I was given a healthy understanding of love, both for others and for myself. Our recovery involves the healing of the emotional illness of all members of the family. I give Jesus all my praise and gratitude. All things are possible

in Christ Jesus. “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:9).

My Creator Diyin made me Navajo. I was supposed to be stripped of my identity—my Navajo name, language, ceremonies, culture, kinship, heritage, and life—but I remembered what my parents always told me: “Never forget who you are as a Navajo/Diné person.” In boarding school, I was denied the love of my parents. I knew they loved me, but I didn’t spend time with them to say “I love you” or give hugs. Some people tell me today, “You are a better person because you went through the abuse of boarding school.” No, abuse is abuse. The historical trauma that I have experienced still lives in me today. I am sixty years old and have lived most of my life with the trauma that was inflicted on me as a little girl. My horrific history of abuse is a part of me.

I had a dream about a year ago at the time I was writing my story. I had been overcome with emotions and felt broken in spirit. At times, recording my story was too much to handle. My tears came uncontrollably, and I felt I could fill a big barrel with them. I wanted to be alone even though my family was around. In my dream, a Navajo medicine man came to my Hogan. I recognized that Jesus was the Navajo medicine man visiting me. He came in and went to the west, middle part of the Hogan, where the medicine man sits when he is performing a ceremony. I welcomed him in and was right there beside him. I sat by him, and he took my hand and put his arms around me and comforted me with a hug. With tears running down my face, I asked him, “Why? Why am I broken in spirit and feel this pain of abandonment from what happened to me as a child?” I told him that my life has been painful. I suffered many things at a young age, and it is still with me. I try to forget and forgive. It is hard to do. I remembered him saying, “It’s okay. You will be okay.” Then I woke up. I wanted to stay in that dream. I felt the comfort, peace, love, and security that only Jesus can give me. It was a good dream. Jesus was physically present—he was there talking to me in my heart language, Diné/Navajo. I hold on to that dream today, as I tell my story. I know that Jesus will heal me from the historical trauma in my life.

After being in boarding school for nine years, I went back to the reservation and had many conversations with my parents about my life there. I had many questions and received only a few answers. I was very angry at the time. Before my father passed away, he built me a hogan and told me, “I want you to come home to this.” Although the Navajo Housing Authority calls it substandard, whenever I leave urban life to go home, I go there. It is six miles from a paved highway in a remote area of the Navajo reservation. It doesn’t have electricity or running water. It has an earth floor and a wood stove in the middle. I haul my own water and wood. The clay dirt roads get very bad in the winter and when it rains. It is a third-world existence, but it’s very peaceful. I hear the animals around me and nature presents its beauty. I like going there, away from the noise and busyness of the city. Both my parents are gone now, but I will retire to the place I call home, my hogan on the Navajo reservation.

And as I continue my journey, I walk in beauty with Jesus, my Savior and my Lord. May this verse bring blessings to all of you who read my

story: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, NKJV).

2. TONISHA BEGAY, BENJAMIN CHEE, AND CHANTELLE YAZZIE

Echoes of the effects of the DOCD can also be heard in younger generations of Indigenous peoples. Chimes, the Calvin College newspaper, published the stories of three Native American students—Tonisha Begay, Benjamin Chee, and Chantelle Yazzie—in February 2015. The introduction to the stories notes, "The CRC, and Calvin in particular, has had a long history of involvement with the Native American people. But according to these students, all of Navajo descent, the relationship has not necessarily been a good one."¹⁴⁰

Tonisha Begay speaks candidly of the missionaries who descended among the Navajo, "armed with bad theology and the belief that they 'meant well,'" and the trauma that resulted from the boarding schools. A graduate of Rehoboth and Calvin College, she speaks of the difficulty of being between two worlds: "When I go back home, I have to justify going to two schools that are affiliated with an institution that viciously oppressed my elders." She describes the reluctance to describe that past: "People think that establishing Rehoboth was sufficient, and because of its violent and culturally oppressive past, they avoid bringing it up altogether. A strong association with Rehoboth does not excuse ignorance about Rehoboth, Navajos or other Native Americans."

Benjamin Chee's story suggests that many of the cultural prejudices characteristic of the DOCD are still with us: "I felt a distance between me and the other people on my floor because we had little in common. When I did get a chance to tell my story, no one could engage me because they could not relate to my experiences. I felt that they wanted to, but did not have enough cross-cultural experience to interact with someone who was different than them."

Chantelle Yazzie describes her greatest difficulty at a Christian college to be "a lack of interest from the majority culture to learn from a culture different than theirs." Both Ben and Chantelle describe the hurt that results from the ignorance of their classmates—the use of degrading and offensive stereotypes, the reluctance to educate themselves about Indigenous cultures and history, the lack of sensitivity to their minority experience. Ben speaks of the need for majority students to get outside their comfort zones: "It might be hard," he says, "but Native Americans experience discomfort every day and we have no escape from it." Chantelle offers solid advice: "Talk to me directly. But most importantly, acknowledge the fact that you might not know all the answers, be open to learning. . . ." She also implores us to "recognize the rich yet tumultuous history of the peoples indigenous to this land." Ben concludes, "It will take effort from both sides and a great deal of grace." Amen.

Tonisha, Ben, and Chantelle each acknowledge their appreciation for the quality of their education at Calvin College even though much of it came from their struggles to educate others and forge relationships built on truth, trust, and grace. They each express the sentiments of Tonisha's

¹⁴⁰ "The Native American Perspective," *Chimes*. February 13, 2015. www.calvin.edu/chimes/2015/02/13/ (accessed 26 July 2015).

conclusion: “Despite all of the confusion about my identity and pain that I’ve experienced at Calvin, I still love this place. . . . I became passionate and hopeful about justice, Kingdom-building and racial reconciliation.”

3. BRUCE ADEMA

Bruce Adema is Dutch-Canadian and lives in Burlington, Ontario. Bruce is a pastor at Waterdown Christian Reformed Church, has served in the Philippines with Christian Reformed World Missions, and served a term as director of Canadian ministries of the CRCNA.

A few years ago I was in South Africa. One of the Reformed denominations invited the Christian Reformed Church to send a fraternal delegate to their synod, and I was the one who went. My white hosts were very open about their lives, ministries, joys, and frustrations. One man told me that his family had lived in South Africa for more than 400 years, yet to their chagrin, people still would not recognize them as Africans. “My family and I are Afrikaans; we are ethnically Dutch, but we are Africans too!” he declared with pride and with passion.

At the time, my thought was, of course you are African. You were born on African soil. Your roots grow deeply into this land. And I thought, “If you can’t be African, then I can’t be North American.” Indeed, even though my family arrived on these shores only 65 years ago, I identify myself as a Canadian, from the North American continent. Most everyone else would agree. But am I? Do I have the right or the privilege to identify myself that way, and to be seen that way by others? My South African friend was denied the epithet “African” because his white Europe-originating community failed to acquire numerical dominance. My Europe-originating community, on the other hand, came in such numbers, and was able to decimate the Indigenous population so ruthlessly, that we have become the majority. And thus we claim the title that likely should not be ours, and we establish in our laws our own privilege.

The Doctrine of Discovery is the source of our undeserved power. By claiming that “Christian” European culture trumps Indigenous culture, by saying that we are masters of the land by virtue of our race or technology or power while it remains the ancestral home and birthright of others, we show ourselves to be very poor Christians and very rude guests.

We don’t talk much about this. An uncommon topic of conversation is the morality of building our homes and schools and churches on the traditional territories of the First Nations. Seldom do we discuss the predicament of those people whose land we occupy. We might cluck our tongues about the treatment of Palestinians in refugee camps, or the sad story of apartheid and discrimination in South Africa, but we don’t want to turn the mirror around and look at ourselves.

I am a Canadian, and the congregation I serve is a Canadian church. “Canadian,” after all, is a name assigned by the Europeans who only partially understood what the Indigenous people were saying. Better for me, and for the church, to see ourselves as guests, and to establish respectful and mutually beneficial understandings of conduct with our hosts, the Indigenous peoples.

It is a good thing for the Christian Reformed Church to be learning about the Doctrine of Discovery. An even better thing will be for us to come to see what can be done to overcome its racist legacy, and then actually do it.

4. CURTIS KORVER

Curtis Korver is Dutch-Canadian and lives in Port Alberni, British Columbia. Curtis is a pastor at Alberni Valley CRC and has served as chair of the CRC's Committee for Contact with the Government.

I live in the Alberni Valley on Vancouver Island, traditional Nuuchalnat land. The church I pastor is at the mouth of the Somass River. Just upriver is a rock that marks the boundary between the Hupacasath and Tseshaht tribal land; the rock, they say, has always been there, just where the Creator put it.

I write this in response to a request to describe contemporary impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery (DOD). Straight lines are hard to draw, but the DOD, and the fallen thinking that gave rise to it, lurk in the shadows of each statement I just made about my life and current home.

The Alberni Valley is the city of Port Alberni, the surrounding land ringed by high mountains and bordered by the Alberni Inlet, a narrow body of ocean water that stretches about 65 km to the open Pacific. The name goes back to Captain Pedro D'Alberni of the fleet of Spain that explored the area in the late eighteenth century and established a fort up-island in Nootka Sound. Alberni himself spent only a few years on this coast, but his name remains. In the world that was shaped by and gave shape to the Doctrine of Discovery, no one among the Europeans could imagine using names that Nuuchalnat people already had for the area. The names, the language, and the knowledge of the people already here were not considered valuable enough to learn.

One name that survived is the name of the river that empties into the Alberni Inlet just a few hundred meters from our church building. The river is called Somass, and though the precise translation is elusive, the name carries an image of fresh water welling up. Just a few years ago, our congregation, Port Alberni Christian Reformed Church, asked if our sixty-year-old name radiated a welcoming and relevant word. Among the many names suggested, one that never found much traction was *Somass CRC*. A name that speaks of fresh water welling up didn't garner much attention from church people who would surely know about John 7:38, where Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." I wasn't here for the discussions; I don't know how decisions were made, so I tread carefully. But I can't help but wonder if, quite unconsciously, the same fallen thinking that gave rise to the Doctrine of Discovery was invisibly and silently present when we never thought that through the Nuuchalnat people God might be giving us a name rich in historical, geographical, and scriptural imagery. Please understand that I do not believe anyone in this congregation holds to the racist claims of the Doctrine of Discovery; most of us have never heard of the thing. But that is what makes the DOD so powerful and dangerous—without even knowing it exists, we are influenced by it.

And that rock in the Somass River—oral history says the rock was placed there by the Creator in the beginning, and the two tribes, with some push and shove and give and take, have accepted that division from the beginning. Widely accepted anthropology argues that the tribes were not here from the beginning but migrated over the Bering land bridge thousands of years ago. Oral history and a few anthropologists claim that the Creator created Nuuchah Nulth people in this area. They have always been here. What if this is true? How could we say with the Doctrine of Discovery that this was *terra nullius*—empty land—when God himself placed people here? That would also wreak havoc with Genesis 1-3, but those chapters already leave significant anthropological questions unanswered. Widely accepted anthropology is not yet turned on its ear, but in the interest of science and truth, maybe we should ask if the DOD has placed a guard on our thinking.

I live in the Alberni Valley on Vancouver Island. That sentence might be quite different without the fallen thinking that gave rise to and was further shaped by the Doctrine of Discovery.

B. *Additional perspectives*

1. Other settlers' voices

The preceding stories and reflections represent diverse perspectives on how the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and its historical sequelae have affected their lives. We received anonymous comments similar to those of Bruce Adema and Curtis Korver that reflect an acute awareness of the stories of the People of the Land that we now occupy. One Canadian woman writes,

I live in the Ottawa Valley on unceded, unsundered Algonquin territory. This means there are no treaties or agreements with the original peoples about sharing the land. It was the Doctrine of Discovery that enabled me to buy the land on which I live. Canada's laws flow from that doctrine and work in my favor as a settler by putting the onus on Indigenous peoples to prove title to land and not the other way around. . . . When I walk in the forest behind my house, I think about who has walked there before me. An elder told me that we cannot reconcile our relationship with the land until we reconcile our relationship with the original people of that land. The Doctrine of Discovery is a large barrier standing in the way of that reconciliation.

Another describes similar feelings and issues a challenge:

Whether you meet in a home, classroom, theatre, or domed cathedral, find out about the land that it sits on. Work together in your church groups, your families, your friends to research that land and who lived there before. Find out who took it, when, why, and how. Where are those people groups now? No matter if you legally purchased a building, or hailed from another country and feel no responsibility toward this land's past, or have never been close to someone who is aboriginal, or belong to a denomination that was not directly involved . . . this is still your history. You are still a part of this system. We all are.

An additional voice reflects on the undeserved privilege she experiences:

Though I was not part of the treaty processes and land claims in the Kitchener-Waterloo region where I live, I still continue to reap the benefits of settler colonization. My non-Indigenous heritage gives me a privilege

that I am not even fully aware of. Over the years, I have become acutely aware of how our roots continue to shape the people we are. We are affected intergenerationally by experiences. The fact that I do not have the trauma of residential schools in my family's past is an incredible privilege in and of itself. I continue to be free of many other injustices excused by the Doctrine of Discovery that disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples in my community.

She resolves to "use the privilege that I have received, though not by choice but by circumstance of my birth, to be aware of the ramifications of the Doctrine of Discovery."

This responsibility is multiplied in light of our identity as Christians, as a contributor reminds us:

Millions of Aboriginal lives were lost because of orders that used God's name to justify their death. Thousands more were impacted by sexual assault, enslavement, disease, land confiscation, cultural genocide, and the list goes on. These horrors took place in the name of Jesus Christ. Christians of all denominations must not deny their role in this. Though they may not have been the perpetrators, their beliefs link them to this behaviour and warrant the intense work and responsibility of reconciliation.

2. Our African American brothers and sisters

Finally, in seeking diverse perspectives on the effects of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, we are reminded by our African American brothers and sisters how deeply the legacy of the DOCD has affected them historically. As noted above, the papal bulls articulating the concept of *discovery* also extended the papal mandate to enslavement of all non-Christians. Euro-Christians refused to recognize that "God was here [in Africa]" before the white man came.¹⁴¹ The effects of this aspect of the DOCD are immeasurably egregious. And while race-based slavery has been overturned in North American jurisprudence, systemic racism tenaciously persists. We cannot underestimate the dehumanizing effects of the DOCD on all ethnic minorities, and we must listen carefully to the stories and insights of our brothers and sisters of color. We must recognize and seek out their expertise in the work of dismantling systemic racism and effecting racial reconciliation, and we must fully commit ourselves to those efforts. Reconciliation must involve all those groups that have experienced the ripple effects of the DOCD.

VII. Reconciling all things

We return full circle to the affirmation of our Preface, that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to reconcile *all things* to himself, to reestablish *shalom*, "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight."¹⁴² As Reformed Christians, we know that *shalom* has been broken by collective and individual sin and that we have been called to discern that sin, repent, and then pray and work for the coming of God's kingdom. God's plumbline revealing unrighteousness and injustice (Amos 7)

¹⁴¹ As related to Steve Kabetu by his great-grandfather about the missionaries who arrived in the early 1900s. He added, "What we didn't know was that he had a Son." www.thebanner.org/together/2014/12/god-is-not-white (accessed 3 Aug. 2015).

¹⁴² Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 26.

exposes the brokenness of the DOCD. Its effects throughout history connote a crookedness in the structure of Western culture that, in turn, has affected societal structures and relationships built on this faulty foundation. As a task force, we have been overwhelmed by what we have learned: the ripple effects of the DOCD seem immeasurable. To truly know, confront, and confess collective and systemic sin, to lament over that brokenness, and then to repent of it are not within our power. This work can only be done by the Holy Spirit moving in us through grace. We ask the Spirit to open our hearts to the work of God's grace that will surely come to heal us—both settlers and Indigenous peoples—and one day, put all things right.

As we pray and rely on the Holy Spirit to do this work, we are also aware of our responsibility to act on what we have learned as a task force. We confess a sense of inadequacy in developing effective recommendations in response to our findings. We are acutely aware that our findings are incomplete and that many stories of the effects of the DOCD have not yet been told. While our task force encountered interest among CRC members and Indigenous people to probe this history, others expressed a great reluctance to do so, possibly resulting from feelings of guilt, denial, pain, fear, and/or a sense of vulnerability. Additionally, generational trauma is almost impossible to measure, particularly as many people are just coming forward with their stories as safe spaces are provided for that opportunity. Nevertheless, it is clear that the DOCD has had devastating effects on Indigenous peoples, settlers, and the church. This systemic sin and its moral wounds must be acknowledged and addressed for the journey of reconciliation to begin. Thus we offer recommendations that follow the biblical pattern of identifying sin and acknowledging it (through education and investigation), lamenting the brokenness, repenting, and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation through relationship. We submit these recommendations in hope-filled faith, believing that the One who began this good work will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6).

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Mike Hogeterp, chair, and to designated task force members when the report of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force is addressed.

B. That synod's discussions and deliberation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DOCD) utilize a sharing circle format whenever practical and include Indigenous representatives in leading such exercises.

Grounds:

1. Sharing circles are a time-honored practice in many Indigenous cultures that facilitate inclusive and open dialogue on challenging topics.
2. Sharing circles are particularly helpful in bringing out the reflective elements of a conversation and in refining consensus.
3. Indigenous voices and leadership are critical to dialogue on this issue and to the effectiveness of sharing circles.

C. That synod acknowledge the need for great sensitivity, discernment, and long-term commitment in addressing the legacy of the DOCD, particularly in addressing CRCNA mission work among Indigenous peoples.

Grounds:

1. Antiracism and other reconciliation ministries teach us that the process of reconciliation requires open hearts, education, commitment, humility, hard work, and a safe environment in which to share stories; it cannot be rushed.
2. The resistance our task force encountered among many to probe this history evinces these needs.

D. That synod acknowledge the historical role of the DOCD, particularly its use as an instrument of power for land possession and colonialism that denied the image of God in Indigenous peoples; and its foundation of systemic sin and moral wounding across generations that have resulted in wrong relationships with God; wrong relationships with the land and God's good creation; wrong relationships with Indigenous peoples resulting in generational trauma, suffering, and injustice; wrong relationships in the body of Christ; and settler's trauma. CRC participation in the dehumanizing worldview of the DOCD distorted the image of God within settlers, diminished the CRC's expression of the fullness of the gospel to Indigenous peoples of North America, and deprived the CRC of living in the beautiful mosaic body "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9; cf. Acts 2).

Grounds:

1. Systemic sin rooted in greed and racial oppression has deprived the body of Christ of the full beauty of and right relationship with God and God's good creation and provision.
2. The denial of the image of God in others has caused dehumanization of and disastrous injustice against Indigenous peoples, resulting in intergenerational trauma, conflict, and brokenness among individuals and in the church.
3. This systemic sin has also caused "settler's trauma" among well-intentioned Christians who have participated in an unjust and racist system that has denied the image of God within each of us, obstructed the flourishing of the gospel in Indigenous communities, and hindered the development of our true identities in Christ.
4. The cross of Christ calls the church to turn from sin and to live in unity as imagebearers of God within the body of Christ, composed of people "from every nation, tribe, people and language."

E. That synod, in recognition of God's call to the journey of reconciliation, (1) repudiate the DOCD as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and (2) commit to a long-term process of education, confession, lamentation, and repentance, with the ultimate goal of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Grounds:

1. As Christians, we are called to examine our hearts, confess and lament our sins, repent, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation (Job 13:23; Ps. 32:3; 51:3; 139:23-24; Prov. 28:13; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; 7:9-10; 13:5; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

2. Fulfilling this recommendation is consistent with the CRC's mission, would allow us to stand in unity with those denominations doing similar work, and would serve as a testimony of God's faithful working in the universal church.
3. Reconciliation is a long-term *process* that requires a full understanding of trespasses and their consequences, confession of trespasses (both collective/historical and individual), lamentation, and repentance. Only then can forgiveness be sought and reconciliation be fully realized.

F. 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,”¹⁴³ as expressed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada.
- follow-up initiatives on the calls to action of the TRC.

Grounds:

1. Canadian Ministries, in consultation with the CRCNA-Canada Corporation, have built on a long-term commitment to Indigenous justice and reconciliation, in TRC-related congregational education, advocacy, and public commitments to reconciliation.
2. The TRC follows the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in affirming the significance of the church’s role in Indigenous justice and reconciliation. A committed and active response to this is critical for the integrity of mission in Canada.

G. That synod acknowledge the continuing need for a denominationwide process of education about the DOCD and its historic and contemporary effects, and that, specifically, synod instruct the Board of Trustees to direct the CRC offices with mandates concerning justice, inclusion, mercy, and advocacy (i.e., the JIMA working group) to consult with Indigenous and ecumenical colleagues for the development and/or animation of congregational learning and action resources on the legacy of the DOCD.

Grounds:

1. A full understanding of the legacy of the DOCD and its effects on Indigenous peoples and those who “drink downstream” from it is required for the ministry of reconciliation, the unity of the body of Christ, and the work of justice to which we are called.
2. Multiple experiences with the Blanket Exercise denominationwide demonstrate congregational eagerness to know more about the history of Indigenous/settler relations.

¹⁴³ “Action for Reconciliation,” Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, June 1, 2012. www2.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/cpd/Action_for_Reconciliation_Ottawa2015.pdf (accessed 22 July 2015).

3. Existing resources, such as the *Living the 8th Fire Curriculum* (Centre for Public Dialogue and Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee), and ecumenical resources are available to assist in this learning/animation task.
4. This report and its appendices are a source of detailed historical information that will translate well into accessible learning resources.
5. The expertise of Indigenous and racial reconciliation ministries (denominational and ecumenical) is needed for comprehensive education on this issue. Our African American and ethnic minority brothers and sisters are indispensable to this dialogue.
6. Fulfilling this recommendation would be a good faith response to Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #59.

H. That synod acknowledge the CRCNA's historical appropriation of a Euro-superior worldview and resulting trespasses against Indigenous peoples generally and, specifically, against the Navajo and Zuni peoples of the U.S. Southwest; and that synod instruct the BOT to commit to continued investigation of the archives and examination of the effects of these trespasses.

Grounds:

1. Archival evidence, particularly in the Board of Heathen Mission practices, and current testimony document this fallen thinking and its effects. Our task force's archival investigations were initial, and we expect that further probing is warranted.
2. The Rehoboth confessions of 2003 were a step in the right direction, but a more comprehensive consultation and examination—with the full input of former students—of specific trespasses and their effects is needed for the healing of those who have not yet told their stories or worked through the trauma resulting from those trespasses.

I. That synod call CRC agencies and ministries, congregations, and affiliated educational institutions to prayer and lamentation in response to the educational process on the effects of the DOCD, and direct the Board of Trustees to consult prayerfully with Indigenous peoples and church leaders to discern the Holy Spirit's timing for a *CRCNA Prayer and Worship Gathering of Lament* for our corporate sins and moral wounds related to the DOCD and, at the appropriate time, direct appropriate ministries to organize such a gathering under the leadership of Indigenous Christians.

Grounds:

1. Corporate sin calls for corporate lament. Prayer is essential to the work of the Holy Spirit in conviction of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
2. Lament is a biblical response to the brokenness and fallenness of the world (Lam. 3:39-40; Job 6:8-10; 42:6; Ps. 51:3; Matt. 5:4) and produces true repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10).
3. Our task force has noted with appreciation the *life of prayer* motif common in recent CRCNA prayer summits. It is reflective of common Indigenous Christian practice.

J. That synod encourage regular forums for humble discernment on issues of cross-cultural mission and syncretism by directing its mission agencies to engage in an ongoing assessment of mission practices to ensure that cultures are celebrated appropriately as partners in gospel mission and that the image of God is respected in all people.

Grounds:

1. Terms like “pagan” and “heathen,” as applied to Indigenous peoples in missions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Canada and in the United States, were common and related to a deep undercurrent of the DOCD.
2. We are called to discern (1 Cor. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:21), to hold on to what is good, and to reject evil. Ministry history in Canada and the United States shows that the CRC has fallen short in recognizing the “good” of Indigenous cultures and has likewise failed to recognize its own syncretism of Euro-superiority.
3. The *Hearts Exchanged* Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum (Edmonton, 2000) was a binational healing event that recommended regular reflection on such issues.
4. Regular dialogue on cross-cultural mission with Indigenous communities will enhance the volume of Indigenous voices in the church and deepen the unity and diversity of the body of Christ.

K. That synod encourage the development of a “common story” with our Indigenous neighbors by encouraging agencies, congregations, and affiliated educational institutions to celebrate with thankfulness to God that Indigenous cultures and languages have persisted despite grave oppression, work with Indigenous peoples and communities to build healthy and mutually supportive relationships, encourage the development of Indigenous leadership in CRC churches and institutions, enter into dialogue with Indigenous Christians/theologians/church leaders about contextualization of the gospel, intercultural mission, and creational theology; and by directing the Board of Trustees to (1) form and mandate a commission, chaired and led by a simple majority of Indigenous persons, to design and implement a five-year process whereby a true “common story” can unfold, specifically creating safe space for telling and listening to life stories of Indigenous brothers and sisters, including those arising in the context of our indigenous mission work in the United States and Canada; (2) provide sufficient resources for this process; and (3) build on previous and similar efforts, whenever possible.

Grounds:

1. God’s good creation includes diverse cultures, languages, and peoples, for which we are called to give thanks.
2. The historic and contemporary marginalization of Indigenous peoples in the church has diminished the unity and wholeness of the body of Christ, and building respectful mutually supportive relationships is an important step toward healing.
3. Colonialism and internalized assimilation have hindered the expression of unique Indigenous perspectives on Christian faith that are important for the unity and wholeness of the church.
4. The pastoral concerns associated with telling stories of trauma and abuse, specifically evidenced by the removal from this report of a

personal story documenting abuse suffered in a CRC ministry, underscores the need for a safe, long-term process for telling and listening to those stories.

5. The wisdom, knowledge, discernment, and faith of Indigenous leaders are critical to help guide the process of truth telling and reconciliation. This leadership is essential for designing and directing a common story commission that is culturally sensitive, contextual, and that can appropriately address pastoral concerns and facilitate healing.
6. The facilitation of a storytelling and listening process could revitalize the faith and witness of the denomination, CRC churches, and individuals, and could lead to a richer spiritual identity in Christ as we understand each other's stories and journeys.

Doctrine of Discovery Task Force

Seth Adema, Canadian of Dutch settler ancestry

Mark Charles, American of Dutch heritage and Navajo, of the clans Tsin bikéé' dine'é, Tó' aheedlínii, *cheis* Tsin bikéé' dine'é, and *nalis* Tódich'í'ni

Mike Hogeterp, Canadian of Dutch/Frisian settler ancestry

Carissa Johnson, Canadian of Chinese/Dutch settler ancestry

Steve Kabetu, Canadian of Kenyan settler ancestry

Linda Naranjo-Huebl, Mexican-American, of Scotch-Irish settler ancestry

Harold Roscher, Cree and adopted Dutch

Susie Silversmith, Navajo, of the clans Tsinaajinii, Honaghaahnii, *cheis* Totsohnii and *nalis* Todichiinii

Peter Vander Meulen, American of Frisian settler ancestry

Appendix A

Mandate for the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force

I. Mandate

Facilitate a discovery process—a learning process for leaders and members of the CRC—in an examination of the following questions in order to come to a shared understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery and its consequences. The task force will be expected to keep the church informed throughout its work, conclude its work with a summary report of its findings, and, if appropriate, make recommendations to the Board of Trustees for further action.

II. Associate members

The task force is encouraged to expand its associate membership as it deems necessary, either initially or as the process unfolds. It should pay particular attention to including diverse perceptions, voices, and expertise.

These associates should have an understanding of the CRC and its history/culture, but need not be members of the CRC.

III. Core questions

The discovery process should answer, but not necessarily be limited to, the following questions:

- How and why did the Doctrine of Discovery come to be, and what was the role of the church and European social/cultural attitudes in its creation and propagation?
- What were its principle effects on indigenous peoples during the age of conquest, particularly in what is now Canada and the United States?
- What are, if any, the continuing effects of the Doctrine of Discovery and its legacies (such as related legal instruments or cultural attitudes) on indigenous peoples, and do these effects vary in cause and manifestation in different locations in the United States and Canada?
- Has the Doctrine of Discovery and related instruments both expressed and shaped the dominant (European) culture in the United States and Canada and affected our ways of relating and ministering to each other in ways that may be not be well understood or acknowledged? If so, how?

IV. Process

The task force should consider the following participatory process and feel free to improve upon it:

- Plan and conduct a series of hearings to listen to testimony from native and aboriginal peoples in the United States and Canada regarding the questions posed in the mandate.
- Take into consideration the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada.
- Publicize the hearings through appropriate denominational channels as an educational opportunity for CRC members.
- Summarize the findings of the hearings in a report to the BOT by September 2014 and through the BOT to Synod 2015.
- Make specific recommendations to the BOT by September 2014 regarding further action the CRC should take on the Doctrine of Discovery and related issues.

Appendix B Timeline of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery

For a visual representation of the history of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, with signposts from general, United States, Canadian, and CRCNA history, see: <https://magic.piktochart.com/output/7335999-dctrine-of-christian-discovery-timeline>.

OVERTURES, COMMUNICATIONS, AND PERSONAL APPEAL

Overture 1: Move the Distribution Date of Synodical Study Committee Reports to Churches from November 1 to September 15

I. Introduction

Periodically synod establishes study committees or task forces to help the churches deliberate important issues in a positive and responsible manner. Problems develop, however, when the churches do not have sufficient time to engage the study committee or task force reports. Substantial reports require appropriate time for reading and deliberation at the council level. Sometimes it is necessary to establish a committee to formulate an appropriate overture—which often requires another council meeting or two to process. Deadlines for classes need to be kept in mind—not to mention synodical deadlines. Sometimes classes require more than one meeting to rightly engage synodical reports and process the appropriate overtures to synod.

In 2015 the executive director of the CRCNA forwarded *three* substantial study committee and task force reports to the churches on October 30. This is slightly ahead of the required date of November 1, according to the *Rules of Synodical Procedure*. This late date requires that the churches study and deliberate the relevant documents in the few remaining months of the fall and write overtures during the busy season of Christmas in order to submit them on time for the winter classis meeting, so that the overtures can be processed for the agenda deadline of March 15 for synod. We contend that this tight time frame does not do justice to synodical study committee reports. It seriously hinders the deliberative process.

II. Overture

Classis Hamilton overtures Synod 2016 to instruct the executive director to distribute synodical study committee and task force reports ordinarily by September 15 (and to revise the *Rules for Synodical Procedure* accordingly).

Ground: This provides more time for the churches to engage the study committee or task force reports and to process any overtures in a reasonable time-frame.

Classis Hamilton
Dick L. Kranendonk, stated clerk

Overture 2: Maintain Women Advisers to Synod

I. Background

In addition to ethnic advisers, women advisers were added to synodical meetings in 2000 as a way to hear and understand the perspectives of our sisters in Christ. Later, young adult representatives were also added. In 2008 women advisers were discontinued, as women were seated as synod delegates (see *Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 479). However, Synod 2015 reinstated the practice of including women advisers only when the number of women delegates is below 25 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 673).

II. Overture

Classis Holland overtures Synod 2016 to maintain women advisers—including those with a complementarian perspective as practicable—at all future synod meetings regardless of the number of women delegates.

Grounds:

1. Women provide another perspective as synod deliberates over matters affecting the entirety of the denomination.
2. Since complementarian women do not, by their own conscience and conviction, serve as officebearers in the church, they will not subsequently serve as delegates. However, the role of women advisers ensures that this unique perspective continues to be heard in our midst.
3. This lives out more fully the intentions and agreement of Synod 1995, which was reaffirmed by Synods 2000, 2005, and 2007, that the denomination “recognize that there are two different perspectives and convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures and the infallible Word of God, on the issue of whether women are allowed to serve in the offices of elder, minister, and [commissioned pastor]” (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 731).
4. As the denomination seeks to reflect the whole body of Christ and grow in diversity, a broad range of perspectives is needed at our synodical meetings.

Classis Holland

Calvin Hoogstra, acting stated clerk

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

I. Background

The CRCNA has been engaged in the question of how to relate to sexual minority persons in our denomination for many years. The 1973 study report, submitted by the Committee to Study Homosexuality (*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 609-33) was undertaken because the churches were seeking guidance in how to deal with changes in the law with respect to the decriminalization of homosexual acts, and seeking guidance in how to relate to gay people in our congregations. When Report 42 was written, its authors noted that they used male gender language to include both male and female persons (p. 612). Within this overture, the terms *gay* and *same-sex oriented* are used as the preferred synonyms for

homosexual, and the terms *sexual minority person* and *LGBT+ person* are used as broader terms that include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other persons who do not self-identify as heterosexual.

Report 42 has been the official position of the CRCNA for the past forty-two years and is significant in several ways. The recommendations of this report, which were adopted with a few alterations by Synod 1973 (see *Acts 1973*, pp. 50-53), are included below in full. (The wording adopted by synod in its alterations is underlined, with the original report's wording included in brackets. Both readings are in the *Acts of Synod 1973*, and are provided here to give a sense of the discussions that took place at Synod 1973.)

1. Homosexuality (male and female) is a condition of disordered sexuality which reflects the brokenness of our sinful world and for which the homosexual may himself bear only a minimal responsibility.
2. The homosexual may not, on the sole ground of his sexual disorder, be denied community acceptance, and if he is a Christian he is to be wholeheartedly received [embraced] by the church as a person for whom Christ died.
3. Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.
4. The church must exercise the same patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his sins as for all other sinners. The gospel of God's grace in Christ is to be proclaimed to him as the basis of his forgiveness, the power of his renewal, and the source of his strength to lead a sanctified life. As all Christians in their weaknesses, the homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself to be defeated by lapses in chastity, but rather, to repent and thereafter to depend in fervent prayer upon the means of grace for power to withstand temptation.
5. In order to live a life of chastity in obedience to God's will the homosexual needs the loving support and encouragement of the church. The church should therefore so include him in its fellowship that he is not tempted by rejection and loneliness to seek companionship in a "gay world" whose godless [immoral] lifestyle is alien to a Christian.
6. Homosexuals, especially in their earlier years, should be encouraged to seek such help as may effect their sexual reorientation and the church should do everything in its power to help the homosexual overcome his disorder. Members of the churches should understand that many homosexuals, who might otherwise seek therapeutic aid, are deterred from doing so by the fear of detection and consequent ostracism. Christian acceptance and support can in all such cases be a means toward healing and wholeness. On the other hand, to those who are not [cannot be] healed and who must accept the [permanent] limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as when it ministers to all who are not married [it ministers to widows, widowers, and the unmarried].
7. Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and to the employment of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. They should recognize that their sexuality is subordinate to their obligation to live in wholehearted surrender to Christ. By the same token, churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals. The homosexual member must not be supposed to have less the gift of self-control in the face of sexual temptation than does the heterosexual. The relationship of love and trust within the congregation should be such that in instances where a member's sexual propensity does create a problem, the problem can be dealt with in the same way as are problems caused by the limitations and disorders of any other member.
8. It is the duty of pastors to be informed about the condition of homosexuality and the particular problems of the homosexual in order that the pastor may minister to his need and to the need of others, such as parents, who may be

intimately involved in the problems of homosexuality. The pastor is also in a position to instruct his congregation in appropriate ways about homosexuality and to alert members and office holders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this sexual disorder [handicap], and dispel the prejudices under which they suffer.

9. The church should promote good marriages and healthy family life in which the relations between husband and wife and between parents and children are such that the psychological causes that may contribute to sexual inversion are reduced to a minimum. Parents should be encouraged to seek Christian counsel and help when they see signs of disordered sexual maturation in their children.
10. Institutions and agencies associated with the church that are in a position to contribute to the alleviation of the problem of homosexuality are encouraged to do so by assisting ministers to become better informed, by offering counseling services to the homosexual and his family, and by generally creating a Christian attitude in the churches as well as in society as a whole.
11. The church should speak the Word of God prophetically to a society and culture which glorifies sexuality and sexual gratification. It should foster a wholesome appreciation of sex and expose and condemn the idolatrous sexualism and the current celebration of homosexuality promoted in literature, the theater, films, television, advertisements, and the like.

Report 42, even more than its eleven recommendations, is a remarkably gracious, gentle, and generous approach to the issues the church faces in “wholeheartedly” embracing (Recommendation 2) same-sex oriented persons. It adopts the traditional position that homosexual acts are sinful, and that gay people must either seek sexual reorientation and heterosexual intimate relationships, or remain sexually abstinent in their lives (Recommendations 3, 4, 6, and 9). But it does so with a heavy burden of responsibility laid on the church and its leadership to accept, integrate, encourage, show compassion for, and fully use the spiritual gifts of gay Christians within the fellowship of believers (Recommendations 2, 5, 7, and 8). The report also, quite remarkably for this early study, declares unequivocally that gay people rarely have any “choice” in their orientation (Recommendation 1; see also *Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 613, last para.).

Within the CRCNA there was significant pushback toward Report 42 from some in the denomination who desired to extend the attribution of sinfulness to include homosexual orientation and desires, or the experience of being gay. They argued that to be welcomed and affirmed within the Christian community, one must have overcome and left behind one’s sinful homosexual identity, in order to take on a Christian one. The synod of the CRCNA on repeated occasions over several years has declined to accept that interpretation, and thus over the years Report 42 has been reinforced as the official position of the denomination. A major re-examination of pastoral care for sexual minority persons within the CRCNA, which was released for response by the churches in 1999 and finalized in 2002, added weight to the 1973 report, as it affirmed the worth of same-sex oriented people, their value to the church, and pastoral issues of deep importance to them, while working with and through the 1973 report’s biblical understanding of mandatory sexual abstinence (*Agenda for Synod 2002*, pp. 313-51).

In the years since Report 42 became the CRCNA stance, the church and the world have been deeply influenced by multiple developments involving both LGBT+ and straight people. The world has been devastated by, and continues to wrestle with, the AIDS epidemic. In North America AIDS is now thankfully rare, but HIV still has a huge impact upon individuals, and upon relationships between LGBT+ people and society at large. Beginning in the 1970s there has been

the rise and, as of 2013, the fall of the Exodus International “ex-gay” movement, especially among the evangelical churches. This is a paradigm now generally discredited in its initial purpose of supporting and guiding gay people who wished to become straight. There have been seismic social and legal changes as well, some of which are being addressed by the committee appointed by Synod 2013 to assist the church by providing “pastoral guidance re same-sex marriage.” Their report is now in the hands of the churches and will be taken up by Synod 2016.

Just a brief glance at how the issues have played out in the years between 1973 and today will reveal that the authors of Report 42 were both prescient in their breadth of understanding of the times, and thorough in addressing the questions that we still deal with today. The authors were also deeply but unwarrantedly hopeful about what were at the time very new therapeutic practices aimed at the sexual reorientation of gay people, and about the Christian Reformed Church’s ability to include and embrace gay people within our congregations. With respect to this first hopefulness, it has become clear that the scientific premises upon which these hopes were based were faulty, and that malleability of sexual orientation has been shown to be much less than was hoped for by evangelical Christians in 1973. The second great hopefulness, concerning the CRC’s ability or willingness to receive and embrace LGBT+ people, will be expanded upon later in this overture.

The official and predominant position at this time in the CRCNA asserts that Report 42 faithfully and adequately interprets the biblical text, and that its recommendations, especially concerning sexual abstinence, are as valid and timely today as they were in 1973. This position has been reaffirmed on numerous occasions by synods throughout the past forty-two years. Despite such reaffirmation, there is an increasing number of people within the CRCNA who hold to a theological position that affirms committed same-sex relationships.

It is a common concern that should the CRCNA engage in this deeply theological and deeply human struggle, the process could become devastatingly painful and searingly divisive. The discussion on the floor of Synod 2015 in response to an overture from Classis Minnkota was likely a mere foretaste of the passions and convictions percolating in the hearts and minds of earnest and thoughtful CRCNA members on various sides of the issue.

Classis Minnkota overtured Synod 2015 (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 423-30) to instruct and admonish two consistories for hosting a group that favored monogamous same-sex unions, and for their failure to exercise discipline with respect to members of their churches who attended this group. Following a lengthy and impassioned debate from the floor, synod decided, after twice revisiting and wrestling with the issue, to simply say that in CRC church governance, synod “cannot instruct a classis or a council to exercise discipline, except upon appeal.” Synod did not accede to the overture. Synod further took note of the struggles the churches and classes face in how best to care for same-sex oriented members (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 674).

We take note as well, seeing the hours and energies and anguish that synod used to reach that one simple conclusion and ask, How can we as the church listen eagerly and tenderly to one another as we continue forward in faith? How can we as the church engage this dilemma?

This overture is an attempt to encourage us as the CRCNA to set aside the polarizing struggle for this moment of time, and to move instead into the generous space prepared for us by Report 42 but never truly appropriated

or appreciated. It was earlier noted that the authors of the 1973 Report 42 were deeply but unwarrantedly hopeful about the Christian Reformed Church's ability to include and embrace gay people within our congregations. This conclusion is based not on any scientific study or survey but upon the seemingly incontrovertible observation that in 2015 many congregations of the CRC have zero self-identifying LGBT+ members within their fellowships—and certainly far less than the two to seven percent that Report 42 offered as a conservative estimate of the LGBT+ population (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 612). Our LGBT+ children and adults for the most part simply do not stay with us. They depart. They do not find a spiritual home in the CRCNA.

Report 42 imagined forty-two years ago that an LGBT+ person could, as a Christian in the CRC, “be wholeheartedly embraced by the church as a person for whom Christ died” (Recommendation 2). It imagined that in place of “the fear of detection and consequent ostracism, Christian acceptance and support” could be “a means toward healing and wholeness” (Recommendation 6). It advised that “Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and to the employment of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom” and that “churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals” (Recommendation 7). This is the vision of Report 42, that openly LGBT+ members of the CRC would be actively contributing to the building of the kingdom of Christ through the use of their gifts and talents, and would be receiving the open appreciation, admiration, and respect of their congregations for their contributions.

One way for this denomination to move into the vision of Report 42 is to shape the “offices and structures” of the CRCNA in ways that permit the church to hear the voices of its sexual minority members in regular and significant ways. The church ought to commit itself, as a matter of principle and as a matter of practice, not to enter into discussions about other Christian members without seeking to have those members present at the table, or at least by hearing from their representatives.

The CRCNA already has in place one methodology to achieve that commitment, which has been fruitful and beneficial for many years—namely, the practice of appointing advisers to assist the synod of the CRCNA in its deliberations. Faculty advisers (1880), ethnic advisers (1995), women advisers (2000 and 2015), young adult representatives (2010), and deacon advisers (2013) have all served well and to the blessing of the body. The genius of this practice is that these advisers are extended the privilege of the floor not only on matters that are deemed to pertain to their special areas of interest but on all matters that come up for deliberation. This most helpful policy has served to highlight the fact that each of these representative groups has valuable contributions to make for the whole life of the church, including those areas more specific to their own lives.

The concern that synod would end up with a multiplicity of advisers ought to be mitigated by the decision of Synod 2015 to change the representation at synod to include deacons, as well as elders and ministers, as delegates. That decision has eliminated the need for deacon advisers, and may quite possibly eliminate the need for women advisers as well, given the proportion of deacons in the CRCNA who are women and who may be delegated to synod.

Therefore, given the urgent need to shape our continuing discussions about the place of sexual minority persons within our congregations with wisdom and grace, and seeking the gentleness and generosity of spirit which characterized Report 42 in 1973, the following overture is offered.

II. Overture

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan overtures synod to

A. Adopt the practice of yearly appointing as advisers to synod up to seven confessing members of the CRCNA who are same-sex oriented, in the same manner that ethnic, women, and deacon advisers and young adult representatives have been, or are, appointed to serve, in accordance with the *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, pp. 3-7, Regulations for Advisers to Synod.

B. Advise the classes and congregations to seek, as much as possible, the presence and involvement of LGBT+ members and participants when dealing with matters that affect the lives of LGBT+ members of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. It is the stated goal of the CRCNA, and has been for forty-two years, that LGBT+ 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 action would be a concrete step in demonstrating that the CRCNA is sincere and intentional in its long-held position.

First Corinthians 12:26 says of Christ's body: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

Although we have recognized since 1973 that some believers in Christ are gay, we have not honored that part of the body, and in fact through our actions and attitudes have caused much suffering for many people. As a result the whole body has suffered, and the whole body has been diminished by their absence. This overture is a step toward healing for the body of Christ.

2. It is a matter of justice that when the lives and faith journeys of some of us in the church are under discussion, that discussion must include the participation of those of us whose journey it is.

This is such a universal principle that it is actually a challenge to find biblical materials to address this point directly. However, we cite the example of Rebekah in Genesis 24:54b-59, in which even in a highly patriarchal society the young woman was consulted directly concerning her imminent journey to meet her future husband, Isaac. In the New Testament we see the example of the Hellenistic Jews, whose concerns were listened to and acted upon when they voiced their distress over the unfair treatment of their widows (Acts 6:1-6). The voices of the believing community must be sought out and attended to.

3. Questions concerning how LGBT+ people fully contribute within the church are important ones that will be with us for years to come. We need to bring the best wisdom of the church to bear, which must include the voices of wise and prudent LGBT+ CRC members among us.

Proverbs 1:1-5, 8-9; 2:1-6, 9-11; 3:5-8, 21-22 is a series of verses that urge the pursuit of wisdom, the use of discretion, and fervor for God, the only source of all wisdom. "Indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5). We need so much wisdom! And among the wisest voices will be those who have lived the struggle faithfully under the instruction of God's Word, that is, our LGBT+ members.

4. The practice of appointing advisers is a tested and fruitful approach in the CRCNA and has the potential to be of great benefit in this area of the church's communal life.

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan
David Swinney, alternate stated clerk

Note: The above overture is signed by the alternate stated clerk in place of the stated clerk because of reasons of conscience.

Overture 4: Approve Transfer of East Bay Korean Presbyterian CRC from Classis Hanmi to Classis Central California

Classis Central California overtures synod to approve the transfer of East Bay Korean Presbyterian CRC in Fremont, California, from Classis Hanmi to Classis Central California. This transfer was requested by the council and was approved by both Classis Hanmi and Classis Central California.

Ground: The geographic location of this church has made participation in Classis Hanmi a difficulty. A transfer to Classis Central California will facilitate easier participation in the life of classis.

Classis Central California
Larry M. Fryling, stated clerk

Overture 5: Approve Transfer of East Bay Korean Presbyterian CRC to Classis Central California from Classis Hanmi

Classis Hanmi overtures synod to approve the transfer of East Bay Korean Presbyterian CRC in Fremont, California, from Classis Hanmi to Classis Central California. This transfer was requested by the council and was approved by both Classis Hanmi and Classis Central California.

Ground: The geographic location of this church has made participation in Classis Hanmi a difficulty. A transfer to Classis Central California will facilitate easier participation in the life of classis.

Classis Hanmi
Paul kc Im, stated clerk

Overture 6: Provide Financial Support for CRC Students Attending Calvin Theological Seminary and Revise Church Order Article 43

I. Introduction

Classis Hamilton has received questions and concerns from individual CRC members and from congregations regarding assistance that classis provides for students preparing for ordained ministry in the CRCNA. Most students assisted through Classis Hamilton have attended Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) or have enrolled in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) nonresidential program. A few students have attended other approved Canadian seminaries. The questions and concerns brought to the attention of Classis Hamilton can be categorized into two groups: quality of education and student financial support. To set the context for engaging these concerns, this overture begins with a summary background regarding classical involvement in ministry preparation and student financial assistance.

II. Background

Church Order Article 43-a requires that each classis “maintain a student fund and a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT).” The purpose of the fund and CMLT is “to provide support and encouragement for individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.” Synod 2010 added this statement to the Church Order as a way of deepening the formative experience, accountability, and support for students pursuing ordained ministry in the CRCNA. Prior to Synod 2010, many classes maintained active funds designed to assist seminary students. While the support levels, means of distributing funds, and accountability levels differed from classis to classis, the underlying principle that classes ought to help students prepare for ministry has been a long-standing practice throughout our denomination.

III. Quality of education

The expressed concerns about the quality of education have primarily focused on the depth of understanding that students from seminaries other than CTS have regarding the Reformed worldview, confessions, doctrines, and church polity. This concern is partially offset by synod’s requirement that such students also enroll in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC), through which they are guided into the CRC context via additional course work at CTS and mentoring by a current CRCNA minister and a mentoring team. While these EPMC initiatives assist in addressing some of the concerns regarding quality of education, our experience has been that graduates from seminaries other than CTS have generally missed out on the depth and breadth of Reformed theological education provided through CTS. While synod has affirmed the work of the denominational Candidacy Committee and the desire to make room for students trained at seminaries other than CTS, concerns persist that it is critical to the nature and character of the CRCNA that our leaders are equipped with a Reformed worldview and the necessary theological framework for ministry in the CRCNA, and that non-Reformed schools are not necessarily providing such equipping. We have come to believe that the probability of being equipped with such a worldview is much higher among CTS students, and we are concerned about non-CTS trained leaders. Partially in response to these concerns, Classis Hamilton adopted a policy shift in May 2014 that emphasized the importance of prospective

ministers to pursue their education at CTS. The policy includes a strong financial incentive for students to choose CTS, providing guidelines for up to the full amount of their tuition in U.S. funds that would be made available through a forgivable loan. For students enrolling at CTS (in residence), this commitment would be made for the full four years of their program. Students attending other seminaries would be funded only up to 50 percent of their tuition for that year and only after all CTS students had been funded on a year-by-year basis. The new policy has proven effective in that several students have noted how Classis Hamilton's assistance has made it financially possible for them to attend CTS.

IV. Student financial support

Since the new policy was adopted in 2014, there has been a drastic change in the exchange rate between the Canadian dollar and the U.S. dollar. When the policy was first being developed, the exchange rate hovered around 5 percent. In August 2015 the exchange rate shifted to about 30 percent. This financial situation has prompted concerns about the capacity of Classis Hamilton to sustain the desired support levels articulated in the policy adopted in May 2014.

The effort to encourage more students to attend CTS has now strained the Classis Hamilton financial resources, prompting a request in May 2015 for additional resources to meet the anticipated needs for the 2015-2016 academic year. While Classis Hamilton approved the requested increase for this year, a number of concerns have been expressed by individual pastors, and two councils sent an overture to Classis Hamilton addressing this subject. There appears to be general agreement that a more sustainable solution, particularly as it relates to students at CTS, needs to be pursued.

In addition, several other financial concerns have been expressed:

1. CTS need-based support for students: Any CTS need-based support is determined after other forms of support, including classis assistance, have been exhausted. The determination of need by CTS occurs after Canadian students are required to demonstrate to the U.S. government that they have funding arranged for the duration of their program.
2. U.S. student visa requirements: Current U.S. student visa applications require students to provide proof that they have enough money to fund the tuition costs for their entire program.
3. U.S. employment regulations: Without U.S. citizenship, students and their spouses coming from Canada are not eligible for general employment in the United States. This restriction limits Canadian students to a small selection of low paying, on-campus positions. Without independent wealth, Canadian students will therefore need to obtain assistance in the form of loans and gifts to pay for most of their seminary education.
4. Early classis financial assistance timetable: In order to present a request at the spring classis meetings regarding the proposed distribution of student support funds for the upcoming academic year because of the U.S. visa requirements, the Canadian CMLTs or student fund committees require prospective and returning students to submit their application materials each year by March 1. This early date often precedes award notices regarding scholarships and awards, whether from CTS or other institutions. As such, Canadian student support decisions are made on the front end of the award cycle, rather than as a supplement to other potential sources of assistance. The repercussions of this

timetable include the potential for incomplete and inaccurate determination of financial need by the Canadian fund committees and for reducing students' incentives to pursue other forms of financial assistance.

V. Ongoing dialogue and discernment

In response to the concerns noted above, Classis Hamilton further evaluated the impact of its current policy by considering alternative funding models and by encouraging dialogue among Canadian CRCs and denominational leaders with regard to these challenges.

The more urgent concern entails discerning how to determine support levels for students attending CTS. This issue involves not only fiscal capacity but also equity among classes and justice for Canadian students in the context of government restrictions affecting the binational relationship of our denomination. Two realities have become quite evident in this regard.

First, when more than one related organization provides need-based financial assistance, inequities are bound to arise, often dependent on which organization determines need first. As such, with Canadian classes determining financial need for students before CTS does, the result is that Canadian classes appear to have a higher percentage of required assistance than most non-Canadian classes.

Second, because of the timing for student visa requirements and for Canadian classis budget disbursement approvals, along with having to determine student need before CTS does—all complicated by the current depreciation of the exchange rate—Canadian classes are experiencing a significant level of anxiety and financial strain in providing assistance to students attending CTS. For classes with multiple students attending CTS, such as Classis Hamilton, this strain has reached a tipping point, with some classes encouraging students to consider alternatives to CTS for their seminary education.

Classis Hamilton believes that both of these realities are not healthy for the Canadian classes or for the CRCNA as a whole. Consequently, Classis Hamilton presents the following overture to Synod 2016 to address these issues.

It would not appear to be desirable to present an overture that affects only Canadian CRCNA students studying at CTS. Neither does there appear to be a compelling reason to restrict the proposals in this overture to Canadian CRC students. For that reason, the recommendations in this overture are written to address the binational denomination as a whole.

VI. Overture

Classis Hamilton overtures Synod 2016 to do the following:

A. Approve that all need-based financial support for all CRC students attending Calvin Theological Seminary be awarded by CTS, effective with enrollment for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Grounds:

1. Need-based financial assistance can be reasonably determined by only either CTS or classis, but not by both.
2. If CTS provides all CRC-sourced, need-based financial assistance to qualifying students, it will lead to greater equity for all CRC students—if not in reality, at least in perception.

3. The inability of students and their spouses from certain segments of the binational denomination to be gainfully employed near the CTS campus can be considered most effectively by CTS.
4. Should there be a serious need for additional student financial assistance, CTS is in a better position to engage in additional designated fundraising than are the classes.

B. Request that the Candidacy Committee and CTS collaborate in advising synod regarding any potential increase in CRCNA ministry-share allocation that would be required by CTS to provide the need-based financial assistance program to CRC students outlined in recommendation A.

Grounds:

1. The Candidacy Committee maintains data regarding current student financial support from the classes.
2. CTS is better positioned to know if and what kind of funding sources other than ministry shares exist for this type of initiative.
3. Because the number of students attending CTS varies from classis to classis, CRCNA ministry-share allocations provide a more equitable means of CRCNA congregations assisting students in financial need than do classis-based ministry shares, thereby reducing the possibility of any one classis being unduly burdened by the cost of financially supporting students who are being trained to serve the whole CRCNA.

C. Adopt the following proposed revision to Church Order Article 43:

Current Church Order Article 43

- a. Every classis shall maintain a student fund and a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) to provide support and encouragement for individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.
- b. The classis may grant the right to exhort within its bounds to persons who are gifted, well-informed, consecrated, and able to edify the churches. When the need for their services has been established, the classis shall examine such persons and license them as exhorters for a limited period of time.

Proposed Church Order Article 43

- a. Every classis shall maintain a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) to provide support and encouragement for individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.
- b. Every classis, either individually or in cooperation with other classes, shall maintain a student fund to provide financial assistance to individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church other than by means of the residential or distance education program offered by Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS).
- c. The classis may grant the right to exhort within its bounds to persons who are gifted, well-informed, consecrated, and able to edify the churches. When the need for their services has been established, the classis shall examine such persons and license them as exhorters for a limited period of time.

Grounds:

1. The above change to Church Order Article 43 supports the foregoing recommendations, since the classes will no longer be required to provide direct financial support for students enrolled in CTS.
2. The change will provide classes the authority to carry out the financial support ministry for individuals enrolled in seminaries other than CTS on their own, or to work together with another classis or classes, as is already the case in at least one instance.

Classis Hamilton

Dick L. Kranendonk, stated clerk

Overture 7: Form a Task Force to Address Classis-based Funding of Seminary Students

I. Background

During 2015 Classis Hamilton had numerous conversations regarding how best to support students from our classis who are preparing for ordained ministry in the CRCNA. These conversations have resulted in several overtures to Classis Hamilton from our member churches that have explored alternative funding structures and identified several challenges associated with preparing students for ordained ministry in the CRCNA.

In October 2015 these conversations resulted in an overture from Classis Hamilton to Synod 2016, requesting that synod address the funding challenges through the ministry-share system with adjustments to Church Order Article 43 (see Overture 6). At the time that overture was submitted, Classis Hamilton believed the recommendations proposed in that overture would provide synod with an opportunity to address some underlying issues related to equity in supporting students as they prepare for ordained ministry in the CRCNA.

Since submitting the initial overture, the Classis Hamilton Candidacy Committee has continued dialogue with representatives from Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) and the CRCNA Candidacy Committee regarding the issues identified in the overture, as well as the particular recommendations of that overture. In these conversations, the representatives from CTS and the Candidacy Committee affirmed Classis Hamilton's initial concerns and challenges encountered in the process of supporting students. They also provided additional information that identified (1) incorrect information within our initial background, (2) unintended consequences of the initial overture, and (3) further complexities related to funding students, of which we were unaware. These follow-up conversations have been beneficial.

Furthermore, these conversations have highlighted the need for a broader dialogue surrounding the involvement of CRC classes in providing financial support for students preparing for ordained ministry in the CRCNA. In its initial feedback regarding our October 2015 overture, Calvin Theological Seminary suggested an alternative approach to the overture: form a task force. This approach resonates with our classis and seems to be a fitting way to collaboratively address concerns raised in our initial overture and to include a broader array of representatives in this discernment.

II. Overture

Therefore, in light of our continued dialogue with representatives from Calvin Theological Seminary and the CRCNA Candidacy Committee, Classis Hamilton

submits the following supplemental overture to its initial overture (see Overture 6), requesting that Synod 2016 form a task force to address the following:

1. Issues of equity in classis-based student funding.
2. Financial challenges faced by students in Canadian contexts who desire to attend Calvin Theological Seminary.
3. 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, and the task force shall present its findings and any recommendations to Synod 2017.

Grounds:

1. In October 2015, Classis Hamilton submitted an overture to Synod 2016 regarding student funding and potential changes to Church Order Article 43, which has prompted further dialogue with stakeholders and revealed the need for broader discernment of the issues and potential responses.
2. Continued dialogue with Calvin Theological Seminary and the synodical Candidacy Committee has revealed that the issues are more complex than Classis Hamilton's original overture indicated.
3. There is wide discrepancy between classes with regard to student funding levels and criteria for determining support, fostering inequitable situations in training CRCNA students for ministry in the CRCNA.
4. CRCNA students from Canada face challenges if attending Calvin Theological Seminary that CRCNA students from the United States do not face, particularly in relationship to immigration paperwork and fluctuating exchange rates, which have been quite volatile over the past two years.
5. A task force involving the parties indicated above will be able to provide a more comprehensive response to the concerns raised through Classis Hamilton's original overture and additional concerns identified by Calvin Theological Seminary, the Candidacy Committee, and students themselves.
6. The matter of preparing students for ministry and the financial challenges being faced by CRC classes and students in that preparation process calls for timely attention from the CRCNA as a whole.

Classis Hamilton

Dick L. Kranendonk, stated clerk

Overture 8: Reaffirm the CRC's Commitment to Love All People

I. Background

Within recent years the cultural discussions surrounding race, religion, and gender have become increasingly polarizing, including language that is prejudicial and inflammatory. While our world is becoming more connected technologically, it also seems to be increasingly divided culturally. The church needs to declare the value and worth of all individuals. Polarizing language diminishes the love and care God has for all people and mocks the God who made all people in his image.

II. Overture

In light of the current cultural climate and discourse that contains extremely prejudicial and inflammatory language referencing Muslims, immigrants, and women, Classis B.C. South-East strongly urges Synod 2016 not to join with those who spread hate but instead to reaffirm our commitment to love all people by standing and reciting together Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 40.

Grounds:

1. Such prejudicial and inflammatory language contradicts the biblical message (1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 5:1-14; Matt. 4:15; Luke 4:25-27; 10:33; 17:16; John 3:16-17; 4:1-42; Gal. 3:26-29).
2. Such language is extremely harmful to every educational institution.
3. Such language greatly complicates the work of CRCNA agencies all over the world.
4. Such language seriously endangers the lives of CRCNA missionaries and complicates the lives of the millions of Christians living in other countries.
5. Such language significantly enhances the process of radicalization and the rise of race discrimination throughout the world.

Lord's Day 40

Q. and A. 105

Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—
not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture,
and certainly not by actual deeds—
and I am not to be party to this in others;
rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.

I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.
Prevention of murder is also why
government is armed with the sword.

Q. and A. 106

Q. Does this commandment refer only to murder?

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder:
envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness.
In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder.

Q. and A. 107

Q. Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in any such way?

A. No.
By condemning envy, hatred, and anger
God wants us
to love our neighbors as ourselves,
to be patient, peace-loving, gentle,
merciful, and friendly toward them,
to protect them from harm as much as we can,
and to do good even to our enemies.

Classis B.C. South-East
Lubbert van der Laan, stated clerk

Overture 9: Instruct Back to God Ministries International to Remove Articles That Advocate Same-sex Marriage from the *Think Christian* Website

I. Overture

The council of Family of Faith CRC, Monee, Illinois, overtures Synod 2016 to take the following actions to repudiate advocacy of same-sex marriage on the *Think Christian* website of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI):

1. Declare that the articles are contrary to God's Word and at odds with BTGMI's mandate to proclaim biblical truth through electronic media.
2. Instruct BTGMI to remove the articles from the *Think Christian* website.
3. Reprimand BTGMI leaders responsible for posting the articles and for keeping them on the Internet.
4. Declare that denominational agencies and their employees are not permitted to disseminate materials that endorse same-sex marriage.

Grounds:

1. BTGMI posted articles contradicting sound doctrine and godly living as taught in Scripture.
2. BTGMI exists to proclaim the biblical truth of the historic Christian faith, not to undermine Scripture and provide a platform for advocates of the sexual revolution.
3. BTGMI leaders have not heeded requests to remove advocacy of same-sex marriage from the *Think Christian* website, so synodical action is necessary.
4. Ministry leaders in CRCNA agencies must faithfully believe and teach the Word of God.

The following articles should be removed from *Think Christian*:

The Cost of Exclusion (Glenn Goodfellow)

<http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/the-cost-of-exclusion>

"As a gay man, I have the privilege and, I would argue, the *responsibility* to re-think many of the social norms that most people take for granted. . . . My partner of 10 years and I are in a loving, monogamous, faith-filled relationship. In less than a year, that bond will include a child."

Four Views on James Brownson's Bible Gender Sexuality

<http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/four-views-on-james-brownsons-bible-gender-sexuality>

Think Christian draws attention to a book that defends and promotes same-sex marriage. Four people are asked to comment on it. Two agree with Brownson; two disagree. Thus *Think Christian* gives the erroneous impression that this is a matter on which biblically faithful Christians disagree. While featuring Brownson's deviation from biblical and historic truth, *Think Christian* has not highlighted any book that states the clear, biblical teaching, such as Kevin DeYoung's *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*

Stephen Cone on church youth groups and Wise Kids

[http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/stephen-cone-on-church-youth-groups-and-wise-kids)

[stephen-cone-on-church-youth-groups-and-wise-kids](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/stephen-cone-on-church-youth-groups-and-wise-kids)

“So whether churches decide to chat about [homosexuality] or not, I just think the train is moving and 50 years from now we’ll be talking about it like we do any other issue that we’ve moved past. . . . I really don’t think it will be an issue.”

Uncomfortable baking a cake for a gay wedding? “Bake for them two” (Jessica Kantrowitz)

[http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/uncomfortable-baking-a-cake-for-a-gay-wedding-bake-for-them-two)

[uncomfortable-baking-a-cake-for-a-gay-wedding-bake-for-them-two](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/uncomfortable-baking-a-cake-for-a-gay-wedding-bake-for-them-two)

“If you believe gay marriage is immoral (**I don’t, myself**) and a gay couple comes into your shop and asks you to bake a cake for their wedding, what should you do?”

Questions I have after the Bruce Jenner interview

[http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/questions-i-have-after-the-bruce-jenner-interview)

[questions-i-have-after-the-bruce-jenner-interview](http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/questions-i-have-after-the-bruce-jenner-interview)

Though not directly about same-sex marriage, this article adds to the gender blender confusion of postmodern sexuality. In the comments section for this article, *Think Christian* editor Josh Larsen wonders, “Could embracing who he feels he is ‘inside’—perhaps even going so far as gender reassignment surgery—be considered a path toward flourishing, a work of restoration?” The article’s author, Kory Plockmeyer, claims in the comments section, “Gender expression is culturally constructed and depends upon our time and upon our place. . . . If, in fact, the experience of transgender has a biological and physical basis, then we may carefully and graciously wonder whether it should be viewed in a way similar to the way we consider other physical conditions.” This is backward: a man who identifies as transgender is biologically and physically male; his gender expression as female is constructed.

II. Observations

BTGMI used denominational resources to provide a platform for error. When BTGMI posted a series of articles on homosexuality and the church, not one of the articles quoted the Bible’s prohibitions against same-sex sexual intimacy. Nothing at all was said about the biblical position held by the CRCNA. After objections were raised, BTGMI added to the articles a link to a brief summary of the official denominational position but did not remove the articles by advocates of same-sex marriage. In further conversations, BTGMI leaders were again urged to remove the articles, but they refused.

It is wrong to use ministry share dollars to spread sin and error. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to proclaim gospel truth. Jesus did not tell the church at Pergamum to offer unrepentant Nicolaitans a church platform to spread their false ideas and sinful behavior.

It is foolish for BTGMI to keep these articles online while merely adding a link to a summary of the official CRCNA position. It is no less foolish than using ministry dollars to post articles about the nature of God by Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witness, and later tacking on a small link to an item containing the denomination’s position on the Trinity.

These articles contradict God’s Word and the position of the CRCNA. There is no sound defense for posting them or for keeping them online. If same-sex

marriage is sinful, why invite someone in a same-sex relationship to promote it? If an author is wrong to endorse same-sex marriage, why publicize his book and invite others to praise it? If God created humanity male and female, why suggest that a man's disordered feelings of femaleness may be grounds for destroying his obvious physical maleness? A mission agency of the church with a mandate for gospel missions must proclaim truth, not be a conduit of sin and error.

Council of Family of Faith CRC, Monee, Illinois
Brian Boss, clerk of council

Note: This overture was submitted to the March 1, 2016, meeting of Classis Illiana but was not adopted.

Overture 10: Redesign the Ministry-Share System for the Next Generation

I. Background

The Bible repeatedly calls us to good stewardship. We should seek to follow that biblical mandate for the most effective and efficient way to finance our shared ministries that currently are a positive contribution to God's kingdom. This overture presents a way we could do that together.

For some time, the ministry-share system has struggled. Many churches feel an undue burden from the cost of ministry shares, and this is reflected in the number of churches who have ceased paying the full amount billed for ministry shares. Many of our congregants struggle to understand why so many dollars leave our local church to go to a centralized denominational office, asking questions like, "What impact is this money having?" Many young people, in particular, with decreasing institutional and denominational loyalty, prefer to see money spent locally on causes with immediate impacts for their community. At their heart, ministry shares are designed to be a way of "together doing more," but the perception among congregants is that the ministry-share system is bloated, inefficient, and ineffective.

The impulse toward local ownership and congregational resourcing recognizes the unique contexts of the churches of the CRC. The tool kit *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper*, for example, put together by Faith Formation Ministries, is a curated collection of resources produced by local congregations. They represent the diverse ways that congregations are already responding to questions surrounding children at the Lord's table. The tool kit acts as a springboard for congregations to proceed in a direction best suited to their local needs. This model prioritizes local engagement, local ownership, and local resourcing. Faith Formation Ministries grew out of the Faith Formation Study Committee, which operated with a shepherding model, focused on listening to congregations and learning from what was actually happening "on the ground." This overture strives to embrace the shepherding model on a denominational level and to put greater numbers of decisions and resources at the congregational level.

At Synod 2015 the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (TFRSC) presented a report that urged the creation of a Council of Delegates. In its report, the TFRSC notes that the CRCNA is "congregation based":

In the use of its Church Order, the CRC has always been careful not to construct a hierarchical structure but, rather, to make the local congregation the foundation of the denomination. This principle should also affect the discussion regarding the

structure of denominational agencies and offices. They should all serve, expand, and enhance the ministries of the local congregations in their local and global community. The very purpose of this denominational structure must be to serve, network, lead, support, and learn from the local congregations.

(Agenda for Synod 2015, p. 352)

A comprehensive review of our ministry-share system and the allocation of costs demonstrates this commitment, but it also becomes apparent where we have wandered from this ground-up mindset. Recent years have seen the creation of more high-level director positions, such as the director of ministries and administration. Despite having its board dissolved in 2013, Faith Alive Christian Resources continues to receive \$1.7 million in ministry shares. The structure of Christian Reformed Home Missions includes thirty-three full-time employees (FTEs) even as they hope to plant only thirty churches per year in the United States and Canada combined. Many churches and campus ministries are started and funded separate from the efforts of Home Missions, thanks to the passion and commitment of local leadership. The amount of money that goes directly to support missions is not clearly communicated, but church planters indicate that their funding continues to decrease. One church planter reported that Home Missions funding for church plants is capped at \$12,500 per year. Global missionaries are now expected to raise 100 percent of their funding. Plans that propose sweeping change, such as that of the TFRSC, leave the essential framework intact, failing to address the financial model of the Christian Reformed Church that places an increasing burden on fewer churches.

While we are concerned about inefficiency, we believe that God calls us to partner together in ministry. We are more than just a network of loosely affiliated churches with a shared ethnic or theological heritage. Despite the breadth of viewpoints in the Christian Reformed Church, we can partner to accomplish work on behalf of the kingdom that we cannot do as individuals. Many of our congregations are doing unique things well-suited to their context—our congregations benefit from shared resourcing in a way that connects us to one another.

The history of the ministry-share system includes many significant accomplishments from little effort. The celebrations of significant anniversaries for Back to God Ministries International and Christian Reformed World Missions in recent years allowed these ministries to share stories of the important work made possible by ministry shares. CRC congregations, especially newer churches, are growing in effectiveness in evangelizing. In the past ten years, 29,700 persons were added, by God's grace, and the increase in the past twenty years is 56,000. New churches lead that growth. This work, connected with Christian Reformed Home Missions, is made possible by ministry shares.

The present system also demonstrates the ability for significant ministry to happen without the support of ministry shares. World Renew, a model organization with significant global impact and recognized for its efficient use of resources, receives no money in ministry shares.

At its best, the ministry-share system exists for three purposes: (1) to assist local congregations in living out the call of the gospel in their individual contexts, (2) to partner together for ministry in capacities beyond those of an individual congregation, and (3) to provide mutual accountability in our work together as churches.

In light of this present reality, churches have reached a point where they face one of three options:

1. Pay less than the full amount billed or not pay at all.
2. Pay the full amount at the expense of local ministry.
3. Attempt to change the system.

While many churches have opted for the first, there are many more who continue under the second option. Some churches are forced to make a decision whether to pay ministry shares or to find creative new ways to reach out into the community.

Presently, some congregations have sought alternative solutions, such as allocating a certain percentage of the individual church budget. For example, Classis Illiana adopted a motion at their March 3, 2015, meeting recommending that each church “set a goal of 5 to 16 percent of their ‘Local Operating Budget’ for denominational ministries. . . . Each church is responsible for setting an appropriate goal for their church that will serve to motivate and not discourage their members with regard to the financial support of denominational ministries without jeopardizing local church ministry needs.” While this may help address local need, it unfortunately leaves the structure of the system intact.

In the past, some have pursued the third option. Most recently, Classis Grand Rapids East presented an overture in 2007. A complete history of previous overtures and reports regarding the ministry-share system is available on pages 438-41 in the *Agenda for Synod 2007*.

In its 2007 overture, Classis Grand Rapids East asked synod to “Establish a Group to Study Ways in Which to Allocate Denominational Ministry Shares among Local Congregations” (*Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 438-43). The advisory committee recommendation to the floor of synod was that synod not accede to this overture on the grounds that “the present system raises significant funds at limited cost, promoting covenant obligations” and that “the percentage of actual receipts to projected receipts has stabilized” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 589). This motion was defeated, and in its stead the following motion was approved: “That synod instruct the BOT to establish a study committee or a task force to explore alternative methods by which denominational ministry-share contributions could be allocated each year among the local congregations” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 590).

Later in the week, that motion was rescinded, and the following motion was adopted in its place:

That synod instruct the BOT to form a study committee or task force to consider the denomination’s communal covenantal commitment to one another, especially as that relates to financially providing for our institutions, agencies, ministries, and churches, and that the BOT bring any findings and recommendations to Synod 2009. (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 623)

In 2009 synod adopted the recommendation of the Communal Covenantal Commitment Task Force to “affirm the ministry-share system as an effective means of carrying out ministry together as members of the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 577). The following grounds were given for this motion:

- a. Significant funds (over \$26 million) are raised each year to carry out these ministries.
- b. The ministry-share system provides a means for all members of the CRC to participate in extended ministry.

(*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 578)

Synod additionally asked the Office of Denominational Advancement “to encourage and educate the churches regarding participation in the ministry-share system and resulting ministry,” designating “initial funding, up to 1 percent of ministry-share receipts, to carry out” those responsibilities (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 578). The results of this effort included the “You add, God multiplies” advertising campaign of 2011 (cf. *Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 829).

Additionally, Synod 2009 gave clarity to the definition of *member* for ministry-share counts and established the use of a ministry-share participation form to annually assist in evaluation of the ministry-share system (*Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 579-80).

The result of the 2009 Communal Covenantal Commitment Task Force was a system that remained largely unchanged and a ministry-share request of \$307.53 per member for calendar year 2010. Such numbers continue to be the norm in the following years:

2010: \$307.53
 2011: \$316.76
 2012: \$316.76
 2013: \$326.26
 2014: \$332.79
 2015: \$336.12

Note: See also the Appendix.

While there is no astronomical annual increase, the system is based on and assumes that actual receipts will be well under half of the actual amount budgeted, increasing the proportional burden on those churches that continue to pay full support.

At Synod 2015, the advisory committee on financial matters recognized that many churches and congregation members have little information of the details of the ministry-share system. The advisory committee noted:

Each year at synod the advisory committee dealing with financial matters receives valuable information about ministry shares. However, often these clarifications, concerns, and challenges are not brought to the floor of synod; nor do the local churches hear them.

(*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 634)

The advisory committee’s report included the following chart:

Percent Contribution of Ministry Shares

Member-ship Size	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-99	100	100+
0-99	36.3%	20.4%	11.4%	10.5%	6.3%	4.2%	10.8%
100-199	8.9%	22.6%	13.6%	17.0%	14.0%	1.7%	22.1%
200-299	4.5%	16.2%	18.8%	20.8%	22.1%	13.0%	4.5%
300-399	4.1%	12.3%	11.0%	23.3%	16.4%	19.2%	13.7%
400-499	9.1%	13.6%	18.2%	31.8%	13.6%	13.6%	0.0%
500+	4.0%	8.0%	36.0%	20.0%	12.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Total	18.4%	19.0%	14.3%	16.2%	12.6%	7.1%	12.5%

The advisory committee further noted the financial efficiency of the ministry-share system: “in a typical year it only costs about \$50,000 to obtain the full ministry-share amount. By comparison, when about \$17 million of ministry shares is not received (as was the case in 2014) about \$4 million is spent to raise that amount” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 635). The challenge facing the ministry-share system, then, seems not to be the efficiency of collecting ministry shares but rather a lack of sufficient support. When 37.4 percent of our churches give less than 25 percent of the full ministry share, there is clearly a need for a change to the system.

Rather than changing the *manner* in which ministry shares are collected, this overture proposes a complete overhaul to the *designation* of ministry shares, resulting in a denominational structure that is focused on meeting the needs of local congregations and providing shared resourcing for missions, looking to the effective models already existing within our denominational structure. In doing so, we hope to accomplish three primary purposes:

1. To craft a denominational structure that is efficient, nimble, and ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.
2. To empower local congregations to develop the most effective ways of living out the gospel in their local contexts.
3. To increase participation in the ministry-share system so that we can truly live out the idea of “together doing more.”

II. Overture

Classis Iakota overtures synod to redesign the ministry-share system with an eye toward resourcing and equipping the local congregation to live out the mission of Christ’s church. To that end, we propose the following restructuring:

1. Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI)
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to BTGMI will reduce to \$0.
 - b. BTGMI will continue to be the flagship media outreach of the CRCNA while receiving no ministry shares in the same way that World Renew is the CRC’s flagship diaconal ministry despite receiving no ministry shares.
 - c. The Council of Delegates, in conjunction with the outgoing board of BTGMI and the executive leadership team, will determine the necessary steps to reduce costs or increase third-stream giving (i.e., donations not given directly through the churches) to accommodate the loss of ministry-share revenue.
2. Calvin College
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to Calvin College will reduce to \$300,000.
 - b. Individual classes are encouraged to have a classis-based tuition assistance program wherein students attending any of the five CRC institutions can apply for additional financial aid.
 - c. Individual classes can determine their own processes for raising and distributing financial assistance to students from their representative churches to attend one of the CRC-affiliated colleges.
 - d. The remaining \$300,000 will be used primarily in the maintenance of existing buildings.

- e. The board of Calvin College will determine the necessary steps to reduce costs or increase third-stream giving to accommodate the loss of ministry shares.
3. Calvin Theological Seminary
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to Calvin Theological Seminary will increase to \$3 million.
 - b. Additional income will be used to reduce tuition costs for prospective students entering ministry in the CRC, paid as a 0% interest loan with forgiveness for years of service in the CRC, modeled on the current Ministry Incentive Program.
 - c. Local classical ministry leadership teams will be encouraged to keep closer contact with students enrolled at Calvin Theological Seminary.
 4. Faith Alive Christian Resources
 - a. By 2021, ministry share allotments to Faith Alive Christian Resources will reduce to \$300,000.
 - b. *The Banner* will be under the purview of Communication ministries (see item 12 below).
 - c. Education staffing will be reduced to a minimum number of staff to allow production of materials that will be produced utilizing crowdsourcing and other development methods to gauge need and demand before production.
 - d. The Council of Delegates, in conjunction with the executive leadership team, will determine the necessary steps to reduce costs or increase third-stream giving to accommodate the loss of ministry shares.
 5. Home Missions
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to Home Missions will reduce to \$0.
 - b. The support of Church Planters and Campus Ministers will be funded through the unified Missions Agency (see item 13 below).
 6. Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund – Canada
No changes proposed.
 7. Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund – U.S.
No changes proposed.
 8. Congregational Services
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to Congregational Services will reduce to \$2.5 million.
 - b. All Congregational Services ministries will focus on resourcing local churches and raising up leaders on the classical level, looking to Safe Church Ministry and Disability Concerns as a model.
 - c. The Office of Race Relations and the Office of Social Justice will merge to form one Justice Concerns office with a minimum number of employees.
 - d. The Council of Delegates, in conjunction with the representative offices and the executive leadership team, will determine the necessary steps to reduce costs or increase third-stream giving to accommodate the loss of ministry shares.

9. Synodical Administrative Services
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to Synodical Administrative Services will reduce to \$750,000.
 - b. Executive management level positions will be reduced to the executive director and the Canadian ministries director.
 - c. The number of concurrent denominational study committees and task forces shall be limited to three (one per year).

In the event that more than one study committee is proposed and approved by synod, the delegates will determine the highest priority. All others will be included on the following year's agenda for reconsideration.
 - d. The Council of Delegates, in conjunction with the executive leadership team, will determine the necessary steps to reduce costs or increase third-stream giving to accommodate the loss of ministry shares.
10. World Missions
 - a. By 2021, ministry-share allotments to World Missions will reduce to \$0.
 - b. The support of missionaries will be funded through the unified Mission Agency (see item 13 below).
11. World Renew

No changes proposed.
12. Communications
 - a. A new unified communications agency will be created by 2021, receiving \$500,000 in ministry-share allotments.
 - b. *The Banner*, the Network, and *ReFrame Media* will be consolidated to one digital media presence with a focus on interdenominational conversation, support, and media outreach.
 - c. Printed versions of the digital media presence will be on an unsubsidized subscription basis.
 - d. The unified communications agency will be under the direct supervision of the Council of Delegates.
13. Missions
 - a. Continuing the process of unification, a unified Mission Agency will be created by 2021, receiving ministry-share allotments of \$5 million.
 - b. In consultation with the current boards of CRHM and CRWM, the Council of Delegates will determine a percentage for allocation of funds between global and domestic missions.
 - c. Executive and administrative leadership will be minimal.
 - d. At least 90 percent of income will be used to fund church plants and campus ministries in the United States and around the world.
 - e. Missionaries (foreign and domestic) will receive funding at 75-90 percent of total annual costs. The remaining 10-25 percent will be raised in partnership with local congregations.
 - f. Oversight of missionaries (both foreign and domestic) would be through the local classis.

Total Ministry-Share Allotments (000s)		
	Current (2013-14)	Proposed
BTGMI	\$3,346	\$0
Calvin College	2,451	300
CTS	2,701	3,000
Faith Alive	1,747	300
Home Missions	3,557	0
MPF/SAF-Canada	9	9
MPF/SAF-U.S.	18	18
Congregational Services	3,712	2,200
Synodical Services	2,668	750
World Missions	4,584	0
World Renew	0	0
Communications	0	500
Missions	0	5,000
Total:	\$24,793	\$12,077

Based on 2014 denominational statistics (249,227 total members), this results in a \$48.45 per-member ministry share, or \$4.03/member/month. By professing members (179,995), this comes out to \$67.10 per member, or less than \$5.60/member/month.

A. All funds given in excess of the allotted ministry shares will go toward the grant funding available through the missions fund.

B. Increases to ministry shares shall not exceed the annual rate of inflation without an overture from a classis.

C. The full ministry-share amount billed to a church shall not exceed 10 percent of the local church budget.

D. Emerging churches receiving funding through the Mission Agency shall include payment to ministry shares (subject to the 10% max above) by their third year of ministry. Exceptions and enforcement shall be determined on a classis-by-classis basis.

E. The executive director will provide a report to synod each year on the progress toward completing the five-year drawdown in each affected ministry area.

F. Decisions should be made with an eye toward bringing together pre-existing resources created at the congregational level (e.g., the *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper* tool kit published by Faith Formation Ministries), helping congregations connect to work that is already being done elsewhere.

Grounds:

1. The proposed changes shift the primary responsibility to the local classis and congregations, allowing each classis to develop the ministries necessary and vital to its own community.
2. The proposed changes place the emphasis on resourcing the denomination (determining demand prior to production and emphasizing cross-congregational communication) and prioritizing church development in the United States and abroad.
3. Lack of support for ministry shares seems due largely to (a) ever-increasing costs, (b) unclear benefits and impacts of ministry shares, and (c) perceived organizational bloat. By focusing ministry shares to

supporting the classis and providing funding for local ministry, the impact of ministry shares is more readily apparent.

4. Increasing funding to Calvin Theological Seminary focuses on the need for providing a new generation of pastoral leadership that is not burdened by excessive debt from attending the seminary.
5. The creation of a unified communications agency streamlines what currently exists as three separate spheres of communication with significant degrees of overlap.
6. A unified mission agency allows each classis to determine the most pressing financial needs and encourages local oversight. Each classis would also be able to determine the appropriate financial accountability as dictated by the local situation.
7. Capping the increase of ministry shares ensures that expansion to the overall size of the denomination happens only at the request of the churches, instead of administrative drive.
8. If the representative oversight boards and Council of Delegates make the necessary decisions regarding staffing cuts and funding reductions, then the agencies will be able to make the best decisions for the ministry.
9. Proposing a radical change by way of overture to synod places the weight of these decisions into the hands of the congregations, rather than the Board of Trustees, which has demonstrated repeated contentment with a flawed system because it brings in “enough” money as is.
10. A five-year drawdown of funding allows significant time for changes and transitions to happen while also moving with haste.

Classis Iakota

Eric B. Verhulst, stated clerk

Appendix

Historical Ministry-Share Amounts

2015: \$336.12
2014: \$332.79
2013: \$326.26
2012: \$316.76
2011: \$316.76
2010: \$307.53
2009: \$307.53
2008: \$298.58
2007: \$289.88
2006: \$270.08
2005: \$266.09
2004: \$262.16
2003: \$255.77
2002: \$250.65
2001: \$242.21
2000: \$237.46
1999: \$230.54
1998: \$227.43

1997: \$244.99 per member and \$567.29 per family*

1996: \$244.99 per member and \$567.29 per family*

*Prior to 1998, in accordance with action by Synod 1993, 40 percent of the ministry share is computed on the per family basis and 60 percent on the per professing member basis.

When adjusted for inflation, the 1998 ministry share (\$227.43/member) would be \$330.12 in 2015 dollars, or a 1.8 percent increase in real dollars. The *Acts of Synod 1995* (p. 583) includes a chart of inflation-adjusted ministry-share increases for 1970-1995. In that time period, the ministry share experienced an 11.2 percent increase when adjusted for inflation in that period.

Overture 11: Add Harvest USA to the List of CRCNA-Recommended Agencies

I. Introduction

The ministry of the church has always been countercultural. In an age of sexual licentiousness, the church stands as a beacon, shining the light of the gospel into the dark and providing hope of freedom from slavery to sin. The modern church finds itself at a time in history when the normalization of sexual sins of all kinds is leaving in its wake a steady stream of broken and hurting people in great need. The church will need to redouble its efforts to equip itself to speak prophetically and mercifully in this environment.

One ministry that can aid the CRCNA in that ministry goal is Harvest USA. The following is found on the Harvest USA website (harvestusa.org):

Harvest USA is a ministry committed to offering hope in Jesus to men and women struggling with sexual brokenness and sin. They started in 1983 as an outreach to the homosexual community, but now we have expanded into a ministry that focuses on equipping the Church to train people to step into the lives of men, women, and families who are affected by all kinds of sexual struggles (such as pornography, sexual addictions, etc.). Harvest USA is committed to the education and equipping of individuals and churches to proclaim the transformative power and hope found in Jesus Christ to our sexually broken world.

II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2016 to encourage the Board of Trustees to add Harvest USA to the list of nondenominational agencies recommended for offerings.

Grounds:

1. In recognizing, supporting, and using the services of Harvest USA, the CRCNA will further place itself in the position to welcome with open arms those who are struggling. The CRCNA must actively pursue a posture of mercy, love, and support for those struggling with sexual sin in a world filled with confusing and damning messages regarding sexuality.
2. CRCNA churches have asked for help as they minister to those who are struggling sexually.
3. The report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Regarding Same-sex Marriage reflects the need for ministry to those who are sexually struggling and broken, needing restoration in Christ.

4. Harvest USA does not duplicate a ministry that is being performed by a CRCNA agency or ministry.
5. While there are approved counseling organizations on the list, there are no ministries specifically for the sexually broken.
6. Harvest USA ministry equips the churches to minister to the sexually broken.
7. The mission and work of Harvest USA is closely related to the CRCNA's integral work (works of mercy, Christian education, and the distribution of the Word of God).
8. Forgoing the traditional application procedure for approval of Harvest USA will serve to expedite the process and give the churches a valuable resource to support and be equipped by.
9. Harvest USA is rooted in the Reformed tradition, having started as a ministry of the Presbyterian Church in America.
10. Harvest USA equips churches to minister to a sexually broken world.
11. Harvest USA provides awareness and educational opportunities for congregations to understand what the Scriptures say regarding sexuality and to explain how we can biblically address our sexual brokenness and sexual sin.
12. Harvest USA provides training for those who are, or desire to be, directly ministering to those struggling with sexual sin.
13. Harvest USA provides consulting services for churches who want to develop a plan for discipleship in sexual matters or who are confronting a crisis within the congregation because of sexual brokenness.
14. Harvest USA believes that the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms and is the source of all healing, and that personal healing is a process, not a one-time event.

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

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

I. Background

Almost 500 years ago, in 1517, a German Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther posted 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in order to create debate regarding certain doctrines and practices as found in the Roman Catholic Church of his day. God, in his providence, used that event to bring about an unfolding of events to become what we now refer to as the Protestant Reformation.

As members of the Christian Reformed Church, we are a result of that Reformation, being a part of the Calvinist stream, and our foundational documents (our forms of unity) hark back to this Reformational movement. Our identity as part of the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation is inextricably tied to what took place in Wittenberg in 1517.

A large part of what arose from the Protestant Reformation has become known as the *Five Solas*: *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"), *Sola Gratia* ("grace alone"), *Sola Fide* ("faith alone"), *Solo Christo* ("Christ alone"), *Soli Deo Gloria* ("glory to

God alone"). These *Five Solas* have served as an ongoing challenge and encouragement to each generation of Reformed Christians ever since the time of the Reformation, up to our present day and age.

In 2017 many churches and denominations throughout the world will be celebrating and remembering the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. This is a wonderful opportunity for churches, families, and individuals in the Christian Reformed Church to more intentionally remember (or learn for the very first time!) these *Five Solas* of the Reformation.

II. Overture

Therefore Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2016 to prepare a 500th-anniversary celebration of the start of the Protestant Reformation as follows:

A. Commission our denomination's seminary, Calvin Theological Seminary, to create a series of instructional, devotional, and interactive pieces for our churches, families, and individuals to be reminded of and taught afresh the following:

1. The *Five Solas* of the Reformation with their individual content.
2. The past historical value of these *Five Solas* throughout the generations in the life of the Reformed churches (even prior to the existence of the CRCNA).
3. The present value of these *Five Solas* in the life of the CRCNA.
4. The future value of these *Five Solas* in the life of the CRCNA.

B. Use *The Banner* as one of the principle channels by which the work of Calvin Theological Seminary on these *Five Solas* is distributed to the members of the CRCNA, with articles to be published periodically throughout the 2017 calendar year.

C. Commission our denomination's new joint missions agency (formerly Home Missions and World Missions) to encourage and provide resources for our missionaries to teach and preach on these *Five Solas* during the course of 2017.

D. Commission Back to God Ministries International to use all media resources at their disposal to instruct the broader Christian and non-Christian communities about these *Five Solas* of the Reformation.

E. Use the Reformation's *Five Solas* as the structure by which the times of worship at Synod 2017 are planned and coordinated.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

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

I. Background

In 2012 Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, New Jersey, studied and reflected on the Belhar Confession in response to the request of Synod 2009. God's command to love our neighbor deeply, to pursue justice, and to eliminate all barriers

within the church that are at odds with God's vision for his diverse church were rediscovered afresh as the council and congregation studied the Belhar. As a result of this study, Madison Avenue CRC prepared an overture to Classis Hackensack that was then sent to Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession of the CRC alongside the Three Forms of Unity. Synod did not adopt the Belhar as a confession. Instead, synod recognized it as an "Ecumenical Faith Declaration." This declaration is in a less authoritative role and intended to identify declarations and statements of faith that "speak to global realities and uniquely enable the CRCNA to formally state its commitment to and live out key biblical principles" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 766).

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), based on the 2014 consultation with ecumenical partners, brought their findings to Synod 2015, noting the "problematic nature of the category designated as Ecumenical Faith Declaration" (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 543). The EIRC further encouraged CRC congregations to study and incorporate "[the Belhar Confession's] themes into their discipling and liturgical ministries."

The racial polarization of our nation and world makes it more relevant and needed today to give the Belhar even more status as a confession. Here are a few examples:

- On June 15, 2015, at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, there was a 21-year-old white man named Dylan Roof in attendance along with all the regular attenders, who were all African American. As they began to conclude and close in prayer, he stood up, pulled out a gun, and began shooting those who were there, leaving one as a witness to tell the story. Nine people were killed that night. It was later learned that he hoped to start a race war. On the last day of Synod 2015, a service of lament was held to grieve, repent, and respond.
- This past year there have been many acts of racial violence involving police officers in Ferguson, Baltimore, Staten Island, and other places. In fact, so many African Americans have died in greater proportions at the hands of police officers that it has led to a movement called "Black Lives Matter."
- Jerry Falwell, Jr., president of Liberty University, recently speaking to the student body said, "I've always thought that if more good people had concealed-carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in." This rhetoric should not be permitted in any church, against any people.

II. Overture

Classis Hackensack overtures Synod 2016 to adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, equal to the historic three forms of unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, thereby bringing to a close the categorization of the Belhar Confession as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration. The EIRC reported to Synods 2014 and 2015 that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and church representatives from more than a dozen countries met to discuss the category of Ecumenical Faith Declaration in early 2014, and "the category of Ecumenical Faith Declaration did not find favor with the conferees, nor, by inference at least, with our ecumenical partners" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 292).

The Church Order Supplement, Article 5 will be amended such that office-bearers will sign onto the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God, and as such will help “define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.”

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession is a concise statement of what we believe biblically about justice, unity, and reconciliation. It addresses important biblical beliefs that are not addressed in the other confessions. All confessions provide a foundation of belief that then informs how we act. Since the Belhar is a confession and fits the traditional definition of a confession, we should accept it as a confession.
2. Now more than ever we are called to teach the world and the next generation what we believe as Christians about God’s biblical concern for justice, unity, and reconciliation among races and nations and peoples. This is especially relevant in teaching the coming generations who are concerned about justice, care for the poor, and racial reconciliation. Adopting the Belhar as a confession would proclaim the seriousness on which we place these issues. Matthew 23:23 states, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”
3. The Interchurch Relations Committee (now EIRC) recommended to Synod 2009 that Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of the CRC (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 281).
4. In Scripture, particularly the Pauline epistles, our reconciliation and justification in Christ are consistently followed by what the implications of our salvation are for social and structural barriers between people. Scripture does not speak only of spiritual reconciliation with God, but also of a physical outworking of that reconciliation and justice among people. The Belhar Confession is more relevant now than ever. It gives us a position to speak proactively to racial divisions and the need for racial reconciliation in our nation and world. This has become more evident in the past few years in the events of Charleston, Ferguson, Baltimore, and Staten Island, to name just a few. It speaks to the racism and injustice that leads to the necessity of saying that “Black Lives Matter.” Since the church is entrusted with the message of reconciliation and unity, adopting the Belhar would inform our actions from this day forward.
5. The gospel works out with spiritual and social implications; to divide these is to truncate the gospel.
 - a. Galatians 3:26-28: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ.”
 - b. Ephesians 2:8-18: esp. “For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”
 - c. If we merely keep the notion of justice and reconciliation between individuals and God rather than working out its implications for

- reconciled and just relationship between fellow humans, the societal divisions of race, ethnicity, culture, class, socioeconomic status, etc. present in our North American and global contexts will continue to remain untouched. We will be left unable to have the clear and strong witness against these structures needed to present Christ to the world.
6. Scripture is full of expressions and examples of God's concern about justice for the poor, widows, orphans, the suffering, and the downtrodden. The theme of God's choosing to use and work through the lowly, the poor, and the downtrodden is also repeated throughout Scripture. Jesus Christ is God incarnate and came in the form of a lowly servant, humbling himself (Phil. 2), such that God became destitute and marginalized as a Galilean Jew. Therefore, the Belhar's phrasing that God "is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged," is not a statement against the rich, the well-off, the comfortable but is a statement of God's being *for* the poor and powerless.
 7. The Belhar Confession is the first and, so far, the only confessional contribution by the Reformed tradition in the Southern Hemisphere (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 279).
 - a. The whole of the CRC's theological formation is from Europe, though for the last one hundred years the epicenter of the Christian church and the majority of Christians has shifted from the West to the Southern Hemisphere. Adopting the Belhar as a fourth confessional standard would be a tangible sign of affirming the theological value and contribution from other tribes, tongues, and nations.
 - b. In our tradition, our theology has almost exclusively been Eurocentric. The time has come for us to validate and affirm our Christian sisters and brothers in the Southern Hemisphere in addition to breaking down our elitism.
 8. The Christian Reformed Church has existed throughout this history as primarily and almost exclusively a Dutch American Church. Yet we have a stated desire to be a church of all nations. The diversity vision of the CRCNA includes a commitment to reflect a multiethnic, multicultural leadership that models God's diverse and unified family. Synod 1996 produced a document titled "God's Diverse and Unified Family" to articulate biblical and theological principles for the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God. The Belhar Confession clearly expresses foundational beliefs that will help God's vision for the Christian Reformed Church unfold as we seek to be a church that is "transforming lives and communities worldwide."
 9. The current climate of racial tension in the United States and of ethnic and racial tensions and violence throughout the world gives context and necessity to a confession such as the Belhar, which calls for reconciliation, justice, and unity in the church, in order to speak against these injustices. We are not adequately prepared through the other three standards to speak confessionally to these issues.
 10. The EIRC reported to Synod 2009 that the Belhar required more than "affirmation," citing that adopting the Belhar as a confession was "the preferred and more excellent way." Also, that the act of confession is different than recognizing a document as good and helpful—confessing being an act of faith and formation.

11. Each of our three other confessional standards is contextual, just as the Belhar is. The Canons of Dort were written to address the Arminian controversy, the Heidelberg Catechism to give assurance and peace of God's salvation and love in an age filled with uncertainty and a sense of doom and dread for people in the church, and the Belgic Confession to seek toleration and understanding of the Reformed tradition from the King of Spain during the Spanish Inquisition. Our three confessions were written over 400 years ago in Europe, in response to very contextual concerns and issues, and still they are rich for faith formation and a confessional stance for us in the Reformed tradition today. How much more, then, might a present-day contextual confession addressing injustices, troubles, and laments of our twentieth and twenty-first centuries serve as faith formation and a confessional stance for the church today. In confessing the Belhar as our fourth standard, we will recognize justice, reconciliation, and unity and their implications in church and society as being at the heart of the gospel as found in Scripture.
12. Adopting the Belhar would give a more fully embodied gospel in connection with our other documents.
13. The World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in America recognize The Confession of Belhar as one of their statements of faith.
14. The Belhar Confession is a call for unity, reconciliation, and justice in the Reformed tradition, as mandated by the gospel. It is therefore demonically ironic for thoughts or threats of disunity and division to arise in light of this confession whose aim is unity.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila E. Holmes, stated clerk

Overture 14: Suspend Moving Forward with Adoption of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force Report

Classis Red Mesa overtures synod to suspend moving forward with adoption of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force report and its recommendations to allow further discussion among the Navajo and Zuni churches.

Grounds:

1. The report raises complicated issues that will require a significant amount of time to study and consider.
2. Initial responses to the report in Classis Red Mesa include agreement with many of the conclusions of the report and significant disagreement with others (see the Rehoboth CRC and Zuni CRC responses as appendices to this overture). Since many other Classis Red Mesa churches and individuals have not had the opportunity to read and respond to the report, classis asks for more time to include additional important voices in the circle of conversation.
3. In the coming months Classis Red Mesa would like to host a number of Blanket Exercise experiences, as well as some listening and reconciliation workshops, to increase our understanding of the history of the Doctrine of Discovery and its impact on ministry in Classis Red Mesa.

Classis Red Mesa
John J. Greydanus, stated clerk

Note: The Red Mesa classical interim committee (CIC) was mandated by the classis to write and submit the above overture to reflect the discussion held during the winter meeting of Classis Red Mesa. The CIC chose to include verbatim two communications they received from two of the member congregations.

Appendix A

Communication: Council of Rehoboth CRC, Rehoboth, New Mexico

As leaders of the oldest mission church in Classis Red Mesa, the Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church elders disagree with the findings of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force report, which uses the Doctrine of Discovery (DOD) as its basis. As the Rehoboth church leadership, we have a vested interest in Rehoboth church, school, hospital, and mission efforts. We strongly believe the report lacks both a balanced perspective and a reflection of the heart of our gracious Savior.

We acknowledge that the superior attitudes and the imperialistic assumptions associated with the Doctrine of Discovery may have affected our CRC mission years ago and perhaps still infect CRC people today. The DOD reflects the attitudes of that time (i.e., patterning boarding schools after a militaristic model). This grieves us, humbles us, and moves us to repent of superiority and paternalism while striving to work at racial reconciliation. The report of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force rightly brings some of these historic sins to light.

But we do have significant objections to the task force report.

A. The report suggests, but does not prove, that the Doctrine of Discovery explicitly motivated the first missionaries to Classis Red Mesa.

We did not see any historical documentation showing that the CRC publicly advocated this noxious Roman Catholic doctrine. We believe that public advocacy of a noxious doctrine is a more serious offense than expressing attitudes loosely associated with that doctrine. The report shows that the Doctrine of Discovery was an explicit doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and that it undergirded the aggressive imperialism of countries that depended upon the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church. The report also demonstrates through many painful accounts (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 495-511) that sinful attitudes of superiority and paternalism were sadly present in the CRC mission to Red Mesa. But was the Doctrine of Discovery itself ever explicitly advocated by the CRC? We refute that.

We also believe that basic Christian charity obliges the authors of the report to listen before they judge. According to the report, the task force authors did archival research for the ways the church viewed the land and the people of the land. Then they selected some of the ugliest moments of that past in order to make their accusations against these early missionaries stick. The authors of the report speak frequently about the urgent need for listening. But their research did not include listening to the missionaries and providing opportunity for them to share their own reasons and motivations for going to Red Mesa. Instead, they assigned questionable motives to the missionaries which fit the story the task force desired to tell in order prove their point. That is uncharitable! We believe the missionaries were explicitly motivated by the “glory of God” and the

doctrine of the Great Commission.¹ To be sure, sinful motives were present in their hearts as well, but basic courtesy would seek to know the motivations the missionaries themselves gave for undertaking such a courageous task.

We all prefer to be consulted about our motivations instead of having motivations assigned to us. The authors of the report rightly insist that reconciliation is based on truth. But the historical story they tell is skewed, out of balance, and therefore unfair. While seeking justice, they practice injustice. We believe the CRC would be better served by appointing first-rate historians to tell the whole story properly. One final comment regarding the veracity of the report is that the current report violates in word and spirit Q. and A. 112 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states:

Q. What is God's will for you in the ninth commandment?

A. God's will is that I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone without a hearing or without a just cause. . . . I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name.

B. The task force depicts the missionary enterprise to the Navajo and Zuni in exclusively cultural terms, refusing to see the biblical basis for some missionary rhetoric. We disagree with the conclusion that it was wrong for the CRC to establish and run a boarding school called Rehoboth.

Not all missionary rhetoric can be defended. We grieve that missionaries sometimes used demeaning descriptions of the Navajo and Zuni people, depicting them as "primitive" children. The task force rightly urges us to honor the *Imago Dei* in all people and treat them with dignity. But then the writers go on to make sweeping judgments about the entire missionary enterprise in Red Mesa:

The church viewed the geography of the Southwest as a promised land and battleground between the forces of light and darkness. The church then defined the combatants in this battle in cultural terms, firmly establishing themselves as the forces of light, and the Navajo and Zuni as working for the forces of darkness.

(*Agenda*, p. 511)

The writer then concludes, "The CRC was wrong to establish and run a boarding school named Rehoboth; the land the missionaries sought to conquer was not theirs to flourish in" (*Agenda*, p. 514). We strongly disagree with this conclusion.

The reason it appears that "the church defined the combatants in this battle in cultural terms" is because the task force writers are determined to tell their story in exclusively cultural terms. Meanwhile, we believe the early missionaries thought of the mission field in primarily spiritual/gospel terms and only secondarily in cultural terms. Again, if a professional historian reviewed the missionary letters of Rev. Henry Beets, we believe that biblical terms for non-Christian people would be dominant. We would expect biblical terms like "lost" (Luke 15), "living in darkness" (Matt. 4:16), "under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), and "perishing," but also "loved" (John 3:16). Sadly, even these gospel terms sometimes filled Christians of that era with superiority, but we believe it would be a greater error if the same terms filled Christians today with scorn, as though Gentiles possess saving light within their own culture. They do not, as our Lord Jesus clearly proclaims.

¹ John C. De Korne, ed., *Navaho and Zuni for Christ: 50 Years of Indian Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions, 1947), pp. 143-44.

So we ask the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force, does all authority on heaven and earth belong to King Jesus or not (Matt. 28:20)? We believe mission is based on his primary authority everywhere. Navajos, Zuni, and the United States government may dispute who has secondary authority on Red Mesa land, but clearly the Lord Jesus has primary authority. It comes to him as a gift from his Father, the Creator. Our Lord Jesus sends his disciples into all nations to make more Jesus followers, baptizing them and teaching them to do all he has commanded. The Lord Jesus entered this world as light for those walking in deep darkness (Matt. 4:16). He says to Paul, "I am sending you to them [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17b-18). It is King Jesus who depicts the Gentiles (Greeks, Dutch, Navajo, etc.) as spiritually blind, in the dark, and under the power of Satan. And that is why he sends Paul into mission. With the task force authors, we do not want Red Mesa to be a cultural battleground. But Red Mesa is a battleground between the spiritual forces of light and darkness, and so is Grand Rapids, and so is every human heart.

The task force writers seem unreasonably offended by the language of light and darkness. The missionaries didn't make this language up! The language comes from our Lord Jesus himself and can be found throughout the New Testament. Clearly, the missionaries proclaimed the saving light of Jesus to Red Mesa but also brought sinful darkness. We should acknowledge both historical realities.

As we see it, the authors' insightful "downstream analogy" has two applications. First, Christians in Red Mesa of all ethnicities benefit from the wonderful treasures and beauties of Native culture. We enjoy the blessing of Native culture and live downstream from it. But Native Christians also live downstream. They benefit from the message of saving light which the early missionaries, doctors, and teachers brought them. We believe the gospel creates flourishing and that many Rehoboth Christian School students would give thanks for their Christian education. Furthermore, the name *Rehoboth* has a spiritual redemptive meaning in the Bible. The flourishing promised in that name belongs to an amazing package of covenant blessings that God promised his covenant partner Abraham. In Genesis 12:2-3, the Lord tells Abraham that he will be blessed and "be a blessing"; God says, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Again, we believe that when those early missionaries said, "We will flourish in the land," they did not mean we will flourish over the Native people.² Even sinful practices, like not allowing the children to speak their language, were done according to misguided notions of helping the native people.

The task force does not acknowledge that the CRC mission of the time approached the Navajo language in several different ways. L.P. Brink, one of

² One final argument in response to the assertion, "The CRC was wrong to establish and run a boarding school named Rehoboth; the land the missionaries sought to conquer was not theirs to flourish in" (*Agenda*, p. 514) comes from *Christianity Today*, Jan/Feb. 2014. The article, which is a comprehensive research study of missions around the world titled "The Surprising Discovery About Those Colonialist, Proselytizing Missionaries," cites the work of J. Dudley Woodberry. The results of this study, which are reluctantly adhered to by secular historians states: "Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations."

the earliest missionaries, was translating the Bible, hymns, and catechisms into Navajo because he judged Navajo as a perfectly fine language for carrying the treasures of the gospel. Fair-minded scholars will credit missionaries like Brink for the enormous work they did in helping Navajo become a written language, which has greatly benefited the preservation of the language. Ongoing gospel translation was the work of both Native American and Anglo laborers and was continued by many, including Lois and Geronimo Martin, J.C. Morgan, Rev. J.R. Kamps, Rev. W. Goudeberg, and Bill Murray (Zuni translation). The missionaries that came to serve God's kingdom did not come to enrich or advance themselves. This is why missionary teachers labored on half-pay one year and why to this day Rehoboth teachers earn much less than their counterparts in Gallup.

The writers of the task force seem intent on regarding the whole Rehoboth mission from a worldly point of view. How will that bring about reconciliation? In Paul's great chapter on reconciliation (2 Cor. 5), he says, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. . . . If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old is gone, the new is here!" (vv. 16-17).

Mission is eternally worthwhile. Therefore, we the church must own up to the sins and shortcomings which the task force articulates. And we will do so. But we also join the apostle Paul in saying, "We are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." The task force would do well to acknowledge this as well. We believe the CRC missionary effort to Native Americans, including the work of education and health care, was commissioned by our Lord Jesus. Mistakes were made as missionaries carried out the work, but **the work itself was not a mistake!** It was obedience to the Lord. After reading this task force report, we fear that young people will be afraid to answer Christ's call to mission and wonder if the broader view of this report would question the motives of missiology through the ages and around the world. We pray that they will heed the call, understanding that cultures do not possess saving light of their own. Therefore, we ask synod to develop a balanced report which not only articulates the sins of the missionaries but also affirms the precious biblical value of mission.

C. The task force minimizes the work of racial reconciliation attempted by Rehoboth Christian School in 2003 and does not acknowledge the progress made in the past thirteen years.

At that significant and memorable meeting of apology and reconciliation, the confession that former Rehoboth Christian School superintendent Mr. Ron Polinder, former Christian Reformed Home Missions director Rev. John Rozeboom, and Rev. Stanley Jim made was followed by promises of changed behavior. The task force says, "That while each of these apologies was no doubt sincere, this event was not conclusive; nor was it comprehensive." But careful readers of the apology will note that the confessors never said, "This is conclusive or comprehensive." Through the years, Rehoboth has sought to initiate change based on the five promises included in the published Message of Confession and Reconciliation.³

³ A Message of Confession and Reconciliation. www.rcsnm.org/confession.pdf (accessed 27 February 2016).

Though these changes and promises are and always will be a work in progress, there are several notable efforts that should be mentioned:

1. Upon the recommendation of the honorable Edward T. Begay, the Rehoboth Christian School board approved publishing a summary of the 2003 proceedings. Full-page ads were taken out in both the *Navajo Times* and the *Gallup Independent*.
2. Already 45 years ago, Native missionaries John and Mae Charles were visiting Rehoboth elementary classrooms, teaching students Navajo language and Navajo songs. The task force report states (*Agenda*, p. 513), that Navajo is no longer forbidden at Rehoboth Christian School. But why not go further and share the very pertinent fact that Navajo is now extensively taught at Rehoboth Christian School?
3. Furthermore, in 2004 Rehoboth Christian School opened the Navajo Code Talker Communication Center to honor Navajo Code Talkers who made a decisive contribution to the Allies' victory in World War II by developing a code language to pass on secret tactical messages. Rehoboth students are surrounded by their native heroes through story, picture, and artifacts.
4. Rehoboth Christian School choir/band tours, in representing Classis Red Mesa, set out to celebrate and present the Native culture in the form of music, dance, stories, and art to the broader body of Christ.
5. From 2010 to 2015 a native leader, Mrs. Carol Bremer-Bennett, served as superintendent of Rehoboth Christian School. In addition, efforts to promote Native recruitment and hiring of staff, as well as school board members, remain a high priority.

As a church, we have seen significant fruit of repentance in the years that followed the 2003 Confession and Reconciliation meeting. Rehoboth Christian School continues to move in the direction of the motto from that time: "Vigorously Academic, Beautifully Diverse, and Thoroughly Christian."

We understand that the work of reconciliation is a process that requires patience, grace, understanding, and a humble willingness to confess again and again. By God's grace we will commit to that work. But we call on the task force writers to recognize that reconciliation moves forward when fruits of repentance are at least examined and acknowledged. When such fruits of repentance are not acknowledged, then we wonder if the task force has the spiritual good of the church in mind or if they are pursuing a cultural/political agenda instead. We believe the denomination can show transparency regarding the atrocities suffered by Native people and also acknowledge that God in his grace redeemed the work of his people and caused his kingdom to grow among the Navajo and Zuni people.

Council of Rehoboth CRC, Rehoboth, New Mexico
Rob Louis, clerk

Appendix B

Communication: Council of Zuni CRC, Zuni, New Mexico

The following is the response of the Zuni Christian Reformed Church council to the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force (DOD) report. Church members and council members were asked to read the DOD report (particularly the last 30 pages) and then to give their response. In this letter we are summarizing some of their thoughts and conclusions. Only a few of our broader church members read the report, but most of our council members did.

Our concerns as a congregation began several years ago when a visitor preached here and suggested that the ministry of early missionaries was evil. Later, when the DOD report was brought to our attention, we wondered how the writers could speak on behalf of the Zuni CRC when, to our knowledge, no one here was ever consulted prior to the writing of the report.

We are grateful that the report has prompted us to think and pray regarding a very important and ongoing issue in our church and society. Sometimes we need to be shocked out of our comfort zones. We genuinely grieve over the displacement and abuse of Native Americans. In truth, many white Americans thought of Native Americans as lesser human beings and, therefore, justified atrocities and genocide with philosophies such as the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny. Sadly, some Christians fell into this mindset too. The world is disastrous and dark in its fallen state, and we have been endlessly inhumane to each other throughout history. There is not a people group on this planet that has not been dominated, displaced, or abused at some point. But this raises important questions: Which people group do we focus on, and how far back do we go? Still today, among the Native people in the southwestern United States, there is distrust and, in some cases, hatred toward each other because of past conflicts. The human heart and sin cause problems in all aspects of human relationships. We need to have humility and understanding when dealing with the past—humility to try to see how others, especially those we disagree with, were struggling to make sense of the world.

One of our greatest concerns is the report's strong bias against the church and ministry of Rehoboth and Zuni. The report states, "The nature of CRC mission work was defined by two driving forces: the policies emanating from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the attitudes and priorities of missionaries on the ground in Navajo and Zuni territory" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 503). We are saddened that the writers of the report have jumped to these conclusions, going against the objectivity that good journalism deserves. We are also concerned about its predominantly negative focus. Shouldn't we remember the good things that were accomplished? The church of Jesus Christ also has a history of advocating for human rights and dignity. Jesus Christ through his body, the church, built orphanages, hospitals, and schools to make life better for people.

When the early Christian Reformed missionaries came to the American Southwest, they found the Navajo and Zuni people living in abject poverty. We believe that they were moved with hearts of compassion and truly came to love the people God called them to serve. Certainly those early servants of Christ made mistakes in ignorance and committed the sins of racial pride and prejudice. But we believe that almost every one of them came because they received a call from Jesus himself to go and bring the good news (in word and deed) to a people who had not yet heard. They came, not with an understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery, but with a

call from God called the Great Commission. We don't believe that the doctrines of Manifest Destiny and of Discovery were doctrines of the CRC. They were political doctrines used to justify the westward expansion of the United States of America. Was the thinking of the church tainted by these doctrines? Maybe. But the DOD report—in very short terms—declares causation. It takes something from over 500 years ago—with no regard for the complexity of human motivation and the twists and turns of historical development—and says that the DOD is responsible for what happened in the CRC ministry to Native Americans.

The following concerns were expressed by Zuni church members:

1. Many of the anecdotes regarding the early missionaries at Rehoboth and Zuni left us with a sense of complete failure. Did they do anything good? Was anything of eternal and redemptive value accomplished?
2. The writers of the report leave us with the impression that the Native people would have been better off without the missionaries. There is an insinuation that common grace was enough to open the eyes of Native people to God and to salvation and that they didn't need a verbal testimony of the gospel.
3. We have concerns that the DOD report will lead to division rather than unity. Our oneness in Jesus Christ must be the goal of any reconciliation process, not the continual reliving of the hurts of the past.
4. Over the years we've had reconciliation services at Zuni and at Rehoboth. Classis Red Mesa formed a Ke' committee with the purpose of bringing about genuine repentance and reconciliation. We believe that these efforts were sincere and effective.

We have tried to put the concerns of the report in a biblical perspective. At a recent Zuni CRC community Bible experience, we discussed the biblical narrative of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. At the end of his story in Genesis 50, Joseph looks back at the harm done to him by his brothers, which actually, in the end, led to everyone's salvation. He taught us two principles that change all relationships. First, he asks, "Am I in the place of God?" In other words, Do you understand how unqualified I am for the job? Who has the knowledge to know what people deserve for what they've done? I don't understand why people do what they do. But God does!

Second, Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (50:20). Joseph is telling us that God overcomes evil, not merely by stopping it, but by incorporating man's evil into his saving activity. God thwarts the destructive purposes of man and uses them to further his saving purposes so that ultimately Jesus Christ would be born. We do not believe that the early missionaries intended to harm anyone, but even if they had, God used it for good.

At the end of time, perhaps God will give us a high mountain on which to stand where we can see all of history at once. Then we'll see that every horrible thing that happened was used by God to accomplish his redemptive purposes. All of us—people of every nation and tongue—will be able to say, "I'm thankful that God's intent was the saving of many lives. I would have been eternally lost if Jesus Christ wasn't born in my heart."

Some of the conclusions that the council of Zuni CRC came to are reflected in the following:

1. Let us face reality and deal with racial issues in Christlike humility and love.
2. Let us honor Christ and his church by forging lifetime relationships with people of different cultures, colors, and tongues.
3. Let us continually reaffirm our covenant relationships with God and with each other.
4. Let us share the stories of racism and hurt and learn how to reconcile them without attacking the motives of Christian brothers and sisters who preceded us.
5. Let us not undercut or sidetrack the mission of the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ.
6. Let us not profile early missionaries with images of land-hungry tyrants who had no agenda but to displace Native people and disrupt their culture.
7. We believe that gaining clarity on what to do next has to include further understanding and dialogue. The more we learn about the Blanket Exercise, if it is done properly by someone who truly understands Native history, it can serve as a very good educational tool.
8. The Lord is building his church here in Zuni, and he is faithful in tearing down the dividing walls of hostility.
9. The DOD report leaves us with a sense that public acknowledgments of wrongdoing will never end—it will never be enough. As one member asked, “How many times in our lifetimes haven’t we seen civil rights issues come to the lime-light and then are forgotten because we never taught them to our children?”

Finally, there is much work to be done to undo the harm that has been caused to Native American people. But, in our opinion, this doesn’t happen by accepting and adopting the recommendations of the DOD report. The report is not balanced; it is not historically accurate; it does not serve to build or unite the church.

We offer these fallible and incomplete reflections in the hope that the dividing walls of hostility will be torn down and that our Lord will be honored.

In Christ and to his glory!

Council of Zuni CRC, Zuni, New Mexico
Alexander Smith, clerk

Overture 15: Appoint a Committee to Study Gender Dysphoria and Pastoral Care of Those Affected by This Issue

Classis Northern Illinois overtures synod to appoint a committee to study gender dysphoria and the pastoral care of those affected by this issue.

Grounds:

1. Whereas the Bible makes specific reference to sexually immoral behaviors (1 Cor. 5), it does not specifically comment on gender dysphoria. Should the condition of gender dysphoria and related behaviors (e.g., gender reassignment procedures) be considered moral or immoral simply because they have to do with a person’s sex?

2. The CRCNA position on homosexuality is well known, but the CRCNA is silent on gender dysphoria. There are also an increasing number of answers (e.g., biblical and pastoral) needed for questions related to the LGBTQ (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender) community and ministering to people in this community.
3. The synodical Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage considers the issue of gender dysphoria beyond the scope of their mandate.

Classis Northern Illinois
Gerald W. Frens, stated clerk

Overture 16: Declare a *Status Confessionis* in Response to Contemporary Errors Concerning Human Sexual Behaviors

Classis Arizona overtures the synod of the Christian Reformed Church to declare a *status confessionis* in response to contemporary errors concerning human sexual behaviors and how the church is called to respond to them.

A *status confessionis* is a situation in history when all Christians are called to unite and confess together the gospel when it is under attack from errors emerging from within its own ranks. Classis Arizona believes such a time has now arisen again.

Whenever teachings that directly contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ arise and are defended, promoted, or taught by those who claim the name of Christ, all true Christians must stand up and declare that such teachings are incompatible with the gospel and must be rejected.

Historically many such denials of the gospel have arisen, and the faithful church has stood up both to confess the truth and also to declare it is inappropriate to claim the name of Christ while defending such errors which are diametrically opposed to the gospel. These errors are opposed to the heart of the gospel, not matters over which faithful Christian churches disagree.

Among them:

1. Arianism—that the Son of God is not eternal but is a created being who had a beginning.
2. Pelagianism—that human beings are born without a sinful nature and totally innocent at birth.
3. Nazism—that a Christian should follow the government even when it is committing atrocities against our fellow humans.
4. Apartheid—that walls of cultural separation are meant to be promoted and strengthened by the church of Christ to keep Christians separate from each other.

Each of these, and many more, were defended by those who claimed the name of Christ. In response, the universal church of Jesus Christ rejected them as examples of false doctrine.

Many, if not all, of such false gospels arise out of the opinions and attitudes of the culture or subculture in which the church of the time lives and to which it is called to speak out prophetically.

Influenced by elements of 21st-century culture, two related yet diametrically opposed errors have been promoted as being compatible with Christianity by those who claim the name of Christ.

1. The error that sexual behaviors outside of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman is acceptable and blessed by God in certain circumstances.
2. The error that Christians should speak in a hateful manner or act in a hateful way to those who are living a life including sexual behavior forbidden by Christ, rather than lovingly reaching out to them with the gospel, just as we are called to reach out to all sinners.

We confess anew the truth of the gospel once for all given to God's holy people that Christ, the eternal Son of God, became human and died an atoning death to bring forgiveness, to destroy all the works of Satan, and to bring us back to living lives of gratitude that include celibacy in singleness and the blessing of sexual intimacy for individuals in the covenant of marriage involving one man and one woman. That gospel is to continue to be proclaimed in a Christlike manner in which we are friends with sinners without affirming their sinful choices as acceptable for followers of Christ.

In response, we overture synod to declare that both of these errors are incompatible with the gospel and that it is wrong for any to claim the name of Christ while proclaiming these errors.

Grounds:

1. Sexual intimacy is only appropriate between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage. At the same time, Christians are called to love those living in sin and to present the gospel to them. These have been the accepted views of Christianity from the beginning and have been reaffirmed by several synods of the CRCNA, including Synod 1973 (*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 50-53, 609-33), Synod 1999 (*Acts of Synod 1999*, pp. 601-604), and Synod 2002 (*Acts of Synod 2002*, pp. 483-84).
2. Traditionally unbelievers have defended the two errors noted above. However, now a growing number of those who claim the name of Christ have defended these errors, causing a true crisis in the global witness to the gospel.
3. In such a historic situation, our denomination together with all those who claim the name of Christ must take a stand to confess the truth together. Hence this *status confessionis*.

Classis Arizona

Jeffrey A. Dykema, stated clerk

Overture 17: Declare that the Canadian and United States Governments Have Acted Outside Their Spheres of Legitimate Authority by Redefining Marriage to Include Same-sex Relationships

I. Background

In 2013 synod created the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage. Synod mandated the committee to provide pastoral guidance on how the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) could truthfully and graciously apply the CRC's understanding of same-sex relationships in a

context where Western states have legalized redefinitions of marriage so as to include same-sex partners. During the committee's deliberations, it came to see that the CRC's pastoral response to this new legal context would in large part be determined by its answer to a very particular question—specifically, “whether the state has both the authority and the latitude to redefine civil marriage to include same-sex relationships.”

To answer this question, the committee has made use of a political philosophy known as “principled pluralism.” Helped by this philosophy, the committee has come to believe that the state does in fact have the authority to redefine civil marriage so as to include same-sex partners. We disagree.

It is our contention that the committee has arrived at its conclusion by misrepresenting principled pluralism. By accurately representing this philosophy, we believe that we can clearly show that governments do not have the authority to redefine marriage so as to include same-sex partners. Since we believe this, we believe that the CRC has a confessional obligation to protest both the Canadian and American governments' redefinitions of marriage.

II. Principled pluralism

Principled pluralism is a political philosophy of church-state relations that was developed in the Netherlands in the latter half of the nineteenth century, most notably by the Reformed statesman Abraham Kuyper. In his 1899 *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper laid out the basic tenets of this philosophy.

A. Structural pluralism

The first way in which principled pluralism is *pluralistic* is in its claim that human society is made up of a variety of different social spheres. Kuyper explains in his *Lectures on Calvinism* that the structure and goals of these spheres are derived from God's decision to order creation in certain ways. Kuyper gives the sphere of the family as an illustration. According to Kuyper, “From the duality of man and woman marriage arises. From the original existence of *one* man and *one* woman monogamy comes forth. The children exist by reason of the innate power of reproduction. Naturally the children are connected as brothers and sisters. . . . The development [of the family] is spontaneous, just as that of the stem and branches of a plant.” In other words, from God's decision to create humanity, male and female, the basic structure of marriage and the family inevitably and organically arises. The same goes for the other social spheres. Each sphere has received its most basic structure and goals directly from God's decision to order creation in certain ways.

Before the Fall, Kuyper argues, humanity would have developed these various social spheres into one harmonious society. The entrance of sin into the world, however, has removed that possibility. Currently there is conflict and struggle between the spheres for dominance over one another. To help weaken this effect of sin, Kuyper argues, God instituted the state. The state is tasked with ensuring that one sphere does not oppress another. “Whenever different spheres clash,” Kuyper declares, the state must “compel mutual regard for the boundary lines of each.” That is, the state has an obligation to defend the basic structure and authority of each sphere. In this way, human social life becomes more or less coherent and bearable.

Of course, the state, constituted by sinful people, is itself tempted to oppress other spheres. Kuyper famously warns that God has not instituted the state so

that it might “become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life.” Instead, the state must “honor and maintain every form of life which grows independently in its own sacred autonomy.” When the state does not “maintain every form of life which grows independently in its own sacred autonomy,” then, Kuyper argues, citizens must resist the state. If they do not, then the citizens acquiesce to a type of totalitarianism.

B. *Confessional pluralism*

The second way in which principled pluralism is *pluralistic* is in its claim that there are a variety of worldviews which people express while living in the various social spheres. Secularists, Muslims, Catholics, pagans, and Calvinists all strive to live and work within the different social spheres according to their own understandings of what makes for a good life. This confessional pluralism is an unavoidable feature of our current fallen world.

It is not the task of the state to determine which of these worldviews is ultimately correct. Kuyper argues that the state cannot determine the ultimate value of the different worldviews, because the state does not have the competence to determine in every case where one worldview is true and another worldview is false. But, more importantly, Kuyper argues that the state cannot choose which worldview is ultimately correct, because God has not given that task to the state. Instead, God has given that task solely to the sphere of religion. It is up to the theologian and the philosopher to determine the ultimate truth of a worldview, not the statesman. In this way, principled pluralism seeks to protect fundamental liberties of conscience and worship within any state, whether it is governed by Protestants, Catholics, or Muslims.

That the state cannot and should not attempt to determine whether one worldview is ultimately correct does not imply that the policies of the state cannot be shaped by a particular worldview. “The sphere of the State,” Kuyper declares, “is not profane.” As God’s creation, the state is ultimately accountable to the triune God for the way it acts. Accordingly, “both the State and the Church must, each in its own sphere, obey God and serve His honor. And to that end in either sphere *God’s Word* must rule, but in the sphere of the State only through the conscience of the persons invested with authority.” In other words, although the clergy and councils of the church cannot and should not seek to govern the state, the Christian voter and magistrate has an obligation to use their scripturally informed conscience to govern in a way that honors God.

It is important to note that the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage does not appear to adhere to this last aspect of principled pluralism. According to the committee, “Within the church . . . Scripture stands supreme. Within the political arena, however, a Reformed argument on marriage is not an argument from Scripture. It is an argument from shared experience of and reflection on creation. It argues from evidences—sociological, biological, political.” As can be seen above, nothing is more alien to a “Kuyperian view” of church-state relations than the idea that a Christian magistrate may not use her scripturally informed conscience when making decisions about the spheres she is called to protect.

Naturally, if there were sociological and biological evidences to help bolster the Christian understanding of marriage, the Christian would have a scriptural obligation to use that evidence (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5). But if there is no such evidence, the Christian is not thereby relieved of her duty to make a judgment in the public

sphere that she knows is right by the light of divine revelation. As she casts her vote or issues her opinion, she must always hold in the forefront of her mind that “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”

III. Same-sex relationships, marriage, and principled pluralism

As we argued in section II, A, the state has the God-given responsibility to protect the spheres from warring among themselves. One of the ways in which it does this is by protecting the basic structures of those spheres. As Kuyper says, “Whenever different spheres clash, the State must compel mutual regard for the boundary lines of each.” If the state does not protect the basic structures of society, then citizens should protest the state’s actions.

This returns us to the question with which we began: “whether the state has both the authority and the latitude to redefine civil marriage to include same-sex relationships” The answer to that question will depend on what we take the basic structure of marriage to be. For the CRC, however, the answer to “What is marriage?” should be clear. Marriage is “a God-ordained, monogamous structure, requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife.” In other words, marriage is essentially a relationship between one man and one woman. We know this not only from reflection on the natural created order, but also from Scripture.

We must conclude, then, that by redefining marriage so as to include same-sex partners, the state has failed in its duty to “compel mutual regard for the boundary lines of [the sphere of the family].” By legal action, the state is attempting to alter the basic structure of marriage—something that it has no authority to do. The minority report admits as much when it states that “the state *cannot* ‘change’ the definition of marriage any more than it can ‘change’ the law of gravity—it has neither the competence nor the authority to exact a change of fundamental, created reality.” Therefore, as representatives of a Christian Reformed worldview, we must protest the state’s redefinition of marriage.

IV. Belgic Confession, Article 36

Given that the CRC knows from Scripture that both Canada and the United States have failed to “compel mutual regard for the boundary lines of [the sphere of the family],” we also have a confessional obligation to protest their actions. According to the Belgic Confession, Article 36, governments should refrain “from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority. . . .”—that is, they are to act only within “the sphere entrusted to them.” Given our understanding of principled pluralism, we believe that it is clear that the governments of Canada and the United States have acted outside their sphere of authority by redefining marriage so as to include same-sex partners. Accordingly, these governments are exercising an absolute authority in the sphere of the family. Thus, the CRC has a confessional obligation to protest these actions on behalf of justice and the common good. Nothing less than the prophetic witness of the Church is at stake.

V. Overture

Therefore, Classis Grandville overtures Synod 2016 to declare, *contra* the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage report, that the Canadian and United States governments have acted outside their spheres

of legitimate authority by redefining marriage so as to include same-sex relationships.

Grounds:

1. Principled pluralism leads us to conclude that the state does not have the authority to define marriage so as to include same-sex relationships.
2. Belgic Confession, Article 36, puts the CRC under confessional obligation to protest the state's abuse of its power toward other spheres.

Classis Grandville
Daniel B. Mouw, stated clerk

Overture 18: Amend Church Order Article 69-c

Classis Heartland overtures synod to amend Church Order Article 69-c to read as follows (amendments made in **bold underline**):

Ministers shall not solemnize **nor bless** marriages, **or any other marital union**, which would be in conflict with the Word of God **wherein God instituted marriage to be a monogamous, lifelong, covenant relationship between one man and one woman, portraying Christ and his church.**

Grounds:

1. Historically, the Christian church and the CRCNA have repeatedly recognized this definition as God's will for marriage. Still, Article 69-c of the Church Order remains ambiguous and open for interpretation in its current wording.
 - a. Dr. Henry De Moor, in his 2010 *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (p. 368), comments on "marriages that 'would be in conflict with the Word of God,' *whatever that may be taken to mean, specifically*" (italics added). Dr. De Moor's comments here indicate the unclear parameters of Church Order Article 69-c.
 - b. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, in his 2008 *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (p. 268), writes, "This instruction as applied to a specific situation *may be open to interpretation*" (italics added). He is referring specifically to Article 69-c regarding "marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God." His commentary leaves Article 69-c vulnerable to the allowance of solemnizing marriages that have been historically and are presently in conflict with the Word of God in the CRCNA (i.e., so-called "same-sex marriages").
 - c. The current wording of Article 69-c and the interpretation of "marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God" remain ambiguous. This ambiguity leaves ministers to decide which marriages would be in conflict with the Word of God. An amended Article 69-c not only clarifies our biblical understanding of Christian marriage, but also avoids the vulnerability of leaving the current reading of Article 69-c open to individual interpretation.
2. Presently and in its current reading, Church Order Article 69 assumes a definition of marriage involving one man and one woman; however, recent state changes in North America have allowed for the legality of an

unbiblical definition of marriage. This is new motivation for the CRCNA to put assumptions aside and to create boundaries for its ministers as they work for the flourishing of Christ's church through clearly defined biblical Christian marriages. This necessary wording change would also reflect the biblical stance of the historic Christian church and the current stance of the Christian Reformed Church, reflected in the Synod 1973 Report 42 on homosexuality and the Synod 1980 Report 29 on marriage.

3. This amendment would bring our Church Order into harmony with the CRCNA synodically approved Form for the Solemnization of Marriage (1912, 1979).

a. The 1912 form (revised in 1934) indicates that marriage is between a man and a woman. It reads as follows (1987 *Psalter Hymnal*, p. 1007):

The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself . . . making a man in his own likeness. . . . God created woman of man's own substance and brought her to the man. . . . "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

b. The 1979 form indicates even more clearly the monogamous nature of Christian marriage between a man and a woman: "In marriage, as instituted by God, a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity" (1987 *Psalter Hymnal*, p. 1010).

Classis Heartland

Robert D. Drenten, stated clerk

Overture 19: Revise Church Order Articles 69-a and -c

I. Introduction

Historically the Christian church and the CRCNA have consistently recognized marriage between one man and one woman as God's will for marriage. Yet, Church Order Article 69-c of the Church Order remains ambiguous and open for interpretation in its current wording.

Dr. Henry DeMoor in his 2010 *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, p. 368, refers to "marriages that 'would be in conflict with the Word of God,' **whatever that may be taken to mean, specifically**" [emphasis added]. DeMoor's comments here indicate the unclear parameters of Church Order Article 69-c. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, in his 2008 *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*, p. 268, writes, "This instruction as applied to a specific situation **may be open to interpretation**" [emphasis added]. He is referring specifically to Article 69 regarding "marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God." His comment reveals the need for more specific language in Article 69-c so that the article is not vulnerable to a wide range of individual interpretations.

Biblically, marriage is portrayed consistently from the beginning of Scripture to the end as a covenant union between a man and a woman, a union to which God's Word assigns sacred significance as a symbol of the union of Christ and his church.

In both Canada and the United States, marriage has been legally redefined as a committed partnership of any two persons without regard to gender. Therefore it is imperative for the Christian Reformed Church to amend Church Order

Article 69 to provide a clear, consistent witness to God’s design for marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.

II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2016 to adopt the following changes to Church Order Articles 69-a and -c (boldface underlined text indicates revised language):

a. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care to marry only in the Lord (**1 Cor. 7:39**), **and to only enter into marriages that conform to God’s institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24).**

c. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages **or actively participate in wedding ceremonies (secular or religious)** which would be in conflict with the Word of God. **Marriage, as instituted by God, is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman who pledge to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity, a symbol of the union of Christ and church.**

Grounds:

1. The current wording of Article 69-c and the interpretation of “marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God” remain ambiguous. This ambiguity leaves ministers to decide which marriages would be in conflict with the Word of God. Article 69 as amended not only clarifies our biblical understanding of Christian marriage, but also avoids the vulnerability of leaving the current reading of Article 69-c open to individual interpretation.
2. The Christian Reformed Church has declared homosexual practice to be incompatible with obedience to the will of God (*Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42), and in 1980 (*Acts of Synod 1980*, Report 29 concerning marriage guidelines) recognized marriage in all instances as a sacred union between one man and one woman. The report states, “Marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will. It is a God-ordained, monogamous structure, requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife” (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 469).

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 20: Amend Church Order Article 69-c

The council of Calvin CRC in Dundas, Ontario, urges synod to amend Church Order Article 69-c to include clear and unambiguous language concerning the biblical, God-ordained definition of marriage—between one man and one woman, and not any other arranged marital union.

I. Historical rationale

A. Historically in the Christian church marriage has always been between one man and one woman. In fact, broader society knew of no culture in all of history

to approve of so-called same-sex marriage until the year 2001. The proposed amendment to Church Order Article 69-c would leave no question about the minister's responsibility toward the solemnization of any other "marriage" which would conflict with the Word of God.

B. The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has declared homosexual practice to be incompatible with obedience to the will of God (*Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42), and in 1980 (*Acts of Synod 1980*, Report 29 concerning marriage guidelines) recognized marriage in all instances as a sacred union between one man and one woman. The adopted report on marriage reads, "Marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will. It is a God-ordained, monogamous structure, requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife" (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 469). Therefore, we urge that Church Order Article 69 reflect our denomination's historical and biblical understanding of marriage: "between one man and one woman."

C. The current wording of Article 69-c and the interpretation of "marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God" remain ambiguous. This ambiguity leaves ministers to decide which marriages would be in conflict with the Word of God. An amended Article 69-c not only clarifies our biblical understanding of Christian marriage but also avoids the vulnerability of leaving the current reading of Article 69-c open to individual interpretation.

1. Dr. Henry DeMoor, in his 2010 *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (p. 368), comments on "marriages that 'would be in conflict with the Word of God,' *whatever that may be taken to mean, specifically*" (emphasis added). DeMoor's comments here indicate the unclear parameters of Church Order Article 69-c.
2. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, in his 2008 *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (p. 268), writes, "This instruction as applied to a specific situation *may be open to interpretation*" (emphasis added). He is referring specifically to Article 69 regarding "marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God." His commentary leaves Article 69-c vulnerable to the allowance of solemnizing marriages that have been historically and are presently in conflict with the Word of God in the CRCNA (i.e., so-called "same-sex marriages").

Therefore, we find it necessary to amend the wording of Church Order Article 69-c to accurately reflect the scriptural marital institution between one man and one woman.

II. Biblical and theological rationale

A. *The nature of marriage*

1. Genesis 2:23-24—Marriage was instituted by God at creation. In Genesis 2, God creates woman as unique from man. Out of that difference, he institutes marriage: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (v. 24).
2. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13—For God's Old Testament community, Israel, it was clear that the sexual activity reserved for and encouraged in marriage was an "abomination" for those of the same sex.

3. Matthew 19:3-6—Jesus reaffirms God’s will for marriage with the explicit language of Genesis. He ties language from Genesis 1:27 (“made them male and female”) to Genesis 2:24. For Christ the male-female difference is essential for marriage.
4. 1 Corinthians 7—The apostle Paul affirms the goodness of being unmarried and “devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit,” as he himself was (vv. 25-35). The church should be affirming of this vibrant vision of singleness. Further, in 7:39 we hear God’s command to marry only those who “belong to the Lord.”
5. Ephesians 5:31-32—The apostle Paul illuminates the purpose of marriage and its tie to male-female difference, further declaring it to be a “mystery” which has now been revealed in the union of Christ and his church, an image that finds its fullest realization in the new Jerusalem “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). For God’s New Testament community, “the covenant of marriage reflects the covenant of grace. Its model, and in fact its fulfillment, is the covenant which unites Christ and the church” (*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 473).
6. Throughout Scripture we see many descriptions of marriages between husbands and wives, males and females. There is not one recorded marriage in Scripture between partners of the same sex.

B. The guilt of solemnizing unbiblical marriage

1. 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Peter 2—The apostles Paul and Peter warn of sexual immorality in the church and false teachers “with eyes full of adultery . . . [who] seduce the unstable” (2 Pet. 2:14). The church is called to “put out of your fellowship” those who are proud of sexual immorality “so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and [their] spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:2, 5). From the truth and grace that Jesus embodied, and with his compassion, our heart should be for both the salvation and sanctification of God’s people.
2. Ephesians 4:17-19; 5:6-11—The apostle Paul describes a contrast in terms of light and darkness between God’s covenant community and unbelievers. He commands us to “not be partners with them” (Eph. 5:7; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 Tim. 3; 1 Pet. 4). This applies to individual marriage partnerships and also more broadly to the church’s definition of marriage versus a secular society’s. Solemnizing a marriage covenant contrary to God’s will would make ministers partners with a deviant design of marriage, disobeying God’s command to “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness” (Eph. 5:11).
3. 2 John 9—There is today in our churches concern by some about being “behind the times” regarding marriage; however, the apostle John warns against “anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ.” This is particularly aimed at teachers. A minister who blesses or solemnizes a marriage outside of Christ or a union between partners of the same sex is not continuing in the teaching of Christ. Our Church Order should reflect this.
4. James 3:1—Though the current discussion regarding same-sex attraction and marriage affects many, this overture is concerned in particular with the work of the church’s teachers. The teachers must be held to great standards, because as James teaches us, the Lord will hold teachers to great standards. If those who teach “will

be judged more strictly," it is imperative that the CRCNA expect its ministers and employees of denominational agencies to continue in Christ's teaching.

5. Belgic Confession Article 32—The CRCNA confesses that "we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way." Our church order needs to live out this confession in its stipulations regarding ministers and the human innovation of same-sex marriage. In the joy and strength of Christ we should not fear the antithesis, as Abraham Kuyper called it, between the church and world.

III. Practical rationale

A. Currently we are seeing an increase in various questionable interpretations of Scripture with regard to marriage. With a clear definition of Christian marriage in the Church Order, we will be able to preserve the unity of the church against those fracturing it with deviant interpretations of marriage. Officebearers, employees of CRCNA agencies, and all those in positions of authority that represent our Lord Jesus in the CRCNA who would not uphold the proposed Article 69-c in their preaching, teaching, pastoral care, or practice would be subject to the admonition and discipline of the church, as per Church Order Articles 78-84.

B. With government decisions in the United States and Canada over the past twenty years, the CRCNA now finds itself in a cultural context that holds to a new and deviant definition of marriage. Therefore it is necessary for synod to clarify and distinguish the CRCNA from the world around it and clearly define what Christian marriage is, in order to clarify its ministers' roles in the formation of biblical marriages.

C. This amendment would bring our Church Order into harmony with CRCNA synodically approved forms for marriage (1912, 1979):

1. The first form (1912) indicates that marriage is between a man and a woman. It reads: "The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself . . . making a man in his own likeness . . . God created woman of man's own substance and brought her to the man. . . . 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24)" (1987 *Psalter Hymnal*, p. 1007).
2. The second form (1979) indicates even more clearly the monogamous complementary nature of Christian marriage: "In marriage, as instituted by God, a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity" (1987 *Psalter Hymnal*, p. 1010).

IV. Overture

The council of Calvin CRC, Dundas, Ontario, overtures Synod 2016 to amend the CRCNA's Church Order Article 69-c to read as follows (proposed changes in **bold**):

Ministers shall not solemnize **nor bless** marriages, **or any other marital union**, which would be in conflict with the Word of God, **wherein God instituted marriage to be a monogamous, lifelong, covenant relationship in Christ between one man and one woman, portraying Christ and his church.**

Grounds:

1. Historically the Christian church and the CRCNA have repeatedly recognized this definition as God's will for marriage. Yet Article 69-c of the Church Order remains ambiguous and open for interpretation in its current wording.
2. Scripture teaches that marriage is a monogamous covenant relationship in Christ between one man and one woman, and the active participation of a minister in the formation of a marriage contrary to God's good designs, whether through solemnization or blessing, would make that minister complicit in the guilt of that sinful union.
3. Practically, presently Church Order Article 69 assumes a definition of marriage involving one man and one woman; however, recent state changes in North America have allowed for the legality of an unbiblical definition of marriage. This is new impetus for the CRCNA to put assumptions aside and to create boundaries for its ministers as they work for the flourishing of Christ's church through clearly defined biblical Christian marriages.

Council of Calvin CRC, Dundas, Ontario
Peter J. Kralt, clerk

Note: The council of Calvin CRC, along with several other councils, presented the above overture to Classis Hamilton at its meeting on February 23, 2016, but it was not adopted.

Overture 21: Adopt a Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c

I. Preamble

In 2005 the Supreme Court of Canada redefined the long-held position/law regarding marriage and deemed the definition as unconstitutional. Thus they opened the door to both civil and religious same-sex marriages, granting all the rights to such couples which had been traditionally reserved for married heterosexual couples. The Supreme Court of the United States arrived at the same conclusion in 2015.

This cultural shift with respect to marriage has affected churches, denominations, and the broader evangelical community of North America. The CRCNA, with pressure from within and from without, is being urged to respond to this cultural shift. A current study committee has been tasked with developing methods and means to effectively minister to those experiencing same-sex attractions. This overture will not address that area. The study report does, however, go beyond its mandate by seeking to give guidance to same-sex attracted people who desire to be married by or in the church, to have their marriages recognized by the church, or to hold church membership. This overture addresses those concerns from the point of view of Scripture and our Church Order.

From Scripture itself there is no support for homosexual activity, let alone same-sex marriages. Revisionists usually either argue that contemporary homosexual practice is something not covered by the texts (the practice itself is not wrong, only the abuse or inequality), or else that a new ethic of love and inclusion trump all other teachings in the Bible. But the Bible makes it very clear who can marry and for what God-centered purpose (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 5; 19; 1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5; Rev. 19-20, etc.). Further, the Bible is clear that those engaged in same-sex

activity are sinning and in danger of God’s condemnation (Lev. 18; 20; Mark 7; Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6; 1 Tim. 1, etc.).

The strength of the Reformed tradition has always been the absolute authority of the Scriptures and its application to our collective and individual lives. Belgic Confession Article 7 reminds us:

For since it is forbidden to add to the Word of God, or take anything away from it, it is plainly demonstrated that the teaching is perfect and complete in all respects. Therefore we must not consider human writings—no matter how holy their authors may have been—equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of times or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else.

Having considered and reflected on these matters, Classis Toronto believes that there is a need to clarify and reconfirm the position of the CRCNA on marriage, specifically in Church Order Article 69-c.

II. Overture

Classis Toronto respectfully overtures synod to adopt the following Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c.

Current Church Order Article 69-c

Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.

Proposed Supplement, Article 69-c

- a. The Word of God defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.*
- b. Same-sex marriage ceremonies, whether civil or religious, are in conflict with the Word of God.*
- c. Ministers who do not uphold Article 69-c would be subject to the admonition and discipline of the church.*

Grounds:

1. The biblical definition for marriage is a union between a man and a woman.
2. Church Order Article 69-c assumes this to be true.
3. The CRCNA has publically affirmed this position, but it can no longer be taken for granted and must be explicitly stated.
4. Irrespective of the legal definitions of marriage as rendered by the courts, the church is called to uphold the Bible’s clear teaching on the subject matter and to speak with clarity to these situations.

Classis Toronto

John Meiboom, stated clerk

Overture 22: Receive the Minority Report from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage as More Applicable to the Biblical Teachings of the CRC

Classis Niagara overtures Synod 2016 to receive the minority report from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage as more

comprehensively applying the biblical teachings of the Christian Reformed Church on marriage and same-sex activity.

Grounds:

1. The minority report better applies the biblical teachings and conclusions of the CRCNA's positions on marriage and same-sex activity to the question of same-sex marriage in our current context.
2. The minority report affirms most of what the majority report offers, so the good content of this report would not be lost.

Classis Niagara
Richard W. Loerop, stated clerk

Overture 23: Endorse the Minority Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

Synod mandated a committee "to give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 617, 640-41).

II. Overture

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan overtures Synod 2016 to endorse the minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

Grounds:

1. As God's ambassadors, we are called to defend and promote God's will for our lives in regard to healthy marriage relationships (Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).
2. The minority report gives clearer guidance than the majority report does.
3. We as God's people need to show not only his love but also God's desire for all people to live in harmony with his design in creation (Rom. 6:1-14).

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan
J. Cameron Fraser, stated clerk

Overture 24: Adopt Section VI, Pastoral Guidance in the Minority Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

In response to overtures from two U.S. classes, Synod 2013 appointed a study committee to do the following:

Give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as

well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.

(Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 617, 640-641)

The resulting Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage has produced both a majority and a minority report.

II. Observations

The majority report attempts to live (if at times grudgingly) within its mandate while exercising all the creative flexibility it can muster. With strong notes of grace and compassion, it helpfully reminds us of the deeply human dimensions, important ethical nuances, and numerous practical complexities surrounding same-sex marriage. These virtues commend it highly.

Unfortunately, the majority report's strength is also its weakness.

First, it runs the risk of creating a distinction without a difference in too sharply delineating the categories of *religious* versus *civil* marriage. In almost all cases, *religious* marriages are also *civil*. As noted in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, "In North America, the ordained minister of the Word who solemnizes the marriage is an agent of both church and state. It is not an either-or situation" (p. 372). Similarly, in most contexts in which same-sex civil marriage touches the church, it is at least implicitly religious. Ceremonies held in churches, with possible participation of Christians reading Scripture or leading in prayers (all possibilities the majority report makes local allowances for) are religious, not merely civil, marriages. More broadly, in the rationale for civil marriage embodied in *Obergefell vs Hodges*, are human longings and desires that are deeply religious at their core. Specifically, the court argued that the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause extends to "certain personal choices central to individual dignity and autonomy, including intimate choices that define personal identity and beliefs." That is to say, "civil marriage" is never about merely acquiring legally conferred rights, privileges, and obligations; it is fundamentally about social validation of a deeply intimate and interpersonal commitment. Marriage, in all its forms, seeks intimacy of "one flesh" not the convenience of "one tax return." To suggest otherwise is reductionist and disingenuous to and on behalf of same-sex couples seeking marriage. And to therefore sharply delineate the two forms of marriage is ultimately an oversimplification.

Second, in permitting CRCNA pastors to perform civil marriages, the majority report risks great confusion without compelling rationale. An individual who can officiate only *by virtue* of their ecclesiastical office cannot with public integrity officiate *apart from* their ecclesiastical office. That is to say, as a pastor is intrinsically a religious officiant, what they officiate is implicitly religious. More broadly, apart from a desire for the religious aspect, there seems little compelling reason for a pastor to take the role of civil magistrate if a couple (same- or opposite-sex) is only seeking the legal or tax advantages of a civil marriage. With due deference to sphere sovereignty and compromised public witness, it is our view that the potential problems of allowing such officiation far outweigh the potential benefits.

Third, running throughout this sensitive issue is a need to balance freedom in individual conscience with sensitivity to the consciences of others while submitting both to our collective understanding of Scripture's authoritative and infallible teaching. In our reading, the majority report places great emphasis on

freedom of individual conscience (cf. “Decisions to attend or not are often shaped by conscience, and conscience deserves respect. . . . We judge that the church is best served by allowing latitude and supporting thoughtful choices”—*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 380), while placing less emphasis on sensitivity to the consciences of others (cf. Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11). It also too greatly privileges situational flexibility over communal clarity. The result is such broad latitude of permissible actions for pastors, believers, and councils that collectively they ultimately work against the call for clarity embodied in the mandate of Synod 2013. They also confuse the witness of the church. Does a secular culture who sees a CRCNA member officiate a same-sex wedding understand the distinction between civil and religious marriages? Does a Sunday school teacher whose marriage publicly violates the teachings of the church best reflect an integrity of doctrine and life to a new generation? Does reflexively deferring to individual consciences best help the church embrace our shared prophetic, countercultural enactment of the *shalom* of God’s kingdom? Does the likely confusion and balkanization of practice allowed by the majority report best help those of us who are same-sex attracted to experience the CRC as a supportive community in which to flourish in the high call of Christian discipleship? Unfortunately, in each case, we do not believe so.

III. Summary and overture

While we appreciate much from the majority report, the minority report provides us both better biblical guidance in its positive affirmation of the purposes of marriage and greater ecclesiastical clarification in keeping with the mandate of Synod 2013.

We therefore overture synod to adopt the minority report in supersession of the majority report’s guidance in section VI, Pastoral Guidance relating to (1) officiating weddings, (2) playing a role in weddings and the life of the church, and (3) membership.

Grounds:

1. The minority report, in its provision of greater clarity (particularly prohibiting officiation of same-sex ceremonies 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.
2. 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).
3. Similarly, the minority report calls us to more vibrant servant leadership, suggesting that an officebearer should defer their freedom of conscience for the good of their brother’s or sister’s discipleship. For example, though an officebearer may feel in good conscience that they can participate in a same-sex marriage ceremony, if that participation causes another brother or

sister to sin, they should refrain. In so doing, they would better reflect the communal call to “carry each other’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).

4. 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 in living out our same-sex attraction. This universal call to repentance is central to Christ and the ministry of his church (2 Peter 3:9).
5. 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.

Classis Iakota

Eric B. Verhulst, stated clerk

Overture 25: Reject the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage and Recommit the Committee to Its Mandate

While we appreciate the careful research, weighty ponderings, sensitivity to the complexity of wise pastoral responses to situations that pastors and members face in this arena, and prayerful seeking of God’s guidance in these matters, Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod 2016 to reject the current report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage and recommit the committee to its mandate.

Grounds:

1. The report fails to adequately fulfill the mandate of Synod 2013 to “give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42 . . . in light of the legality of same sex marriage . . . as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 640-41). The current report rests on the 1973 report on human sexuality for its biblical content, but the report does not apply these or other Scriptures to the current context in which the gap between the church’s values and our cultures’ values has significantly widened.
2. The report fails to provide scriptural instruction on how to provide pastoral care when our biblical position is countercultural. Despite the thoughtful advice the study committee does provide, the report fails to provide the kind of comprehensive and thorough biblical guidance on pertinent, pastoral questions churches are seeking, such as the following: How do churches counsel and equip parents whose child acknowledges same-sex attraction in a climate where such attraction is now affirmed and celebrated? How do consistories minister with grace and truth to same-sex attracted members of their congregations who seek to legally solemnize their relationship? How do churches engage in authentic, orthodox, gospel ministry to married or single LGBTQ persons within our communities? How can we equip our members in intentional relationships with LGBTQ persons without compromising our biblical convictions?

3. Because the minority report addresses only the three areas within the majority report that it cannot endorse, it is inadequate in fulfilling the mandate of Synod 2013 as a stand-alone report.

Classis Pacific Northwest
Rob W. Jansons, stated clerk

Overture 26: Recommit the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage to the Study Committee

I. Introduction

The decision of Synod 2013 to appoint a team to give guidance and clarity to the denomination regarding same-sex marriage from a biblical perspective in light of our Reformed faith is both aptly timed and greatly anticipated. This report, received by the churches in November 2015, now presents us with an offering of recommendations to guide the church.

We commend the team for their hard work throughout the process, yet we feel there is still work to do with these recommendations. We believe that the recommendations come short of providing the solid, biblical, historically Reformed foundation and identity that is ours as a confessional community of believers. The recommendations largely miss the mark of the necessary and helpful “guidance and clarification” that affirms our essential biblical identity as a Reformed community of believers and leaves unintentional and unnecessary gray areas for individualized interpretation.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Lake Superior overtures synod to recommit the report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage back to the study committee and instruct the committee to use the “Theologically Framing a Discussion of Same-Sex Marriage” of the minority report to inform, instruct, and rework the study committee’s “guidance” provided in section VI of the majority report.

Grounds:

1. Theological clarification

- a. The majority report’s dichotomizing of marriage under “religious” and “civil” umbrellas in order to make it less difficult to answer the challenges of the day reflects a societal accommodation to the present reality. Instead the committee should take the advice of the minority report and do the difficult, yet necessary work of applying hard truths of Scripture in the face of an emotionally charged issue.

We acknowledge, with the committee, the complexity of addressing the reality of same-sex marriage and empathize with grappling with the potential scenarios that face our church today. However, due diligence in the Reformed context—yielding to the unchanging Word of God, surrendering all areas of life under the sovereignty of God, humbling ourselves under the convicting shadow of the cross, and allowing the Spirit’s good work of sanctifying our lives—is hard work. A racing to accommodation can, and often does, short-change God’s kingdom work in our lives. The burden is not on the biblical model of marriage to fit

today's accommodations but rather to submit and resubmit daily every aspect of our relationships to the lordship of Christ.

- b. The substantial weighty use of societal opinion, survey findings, and listening sessions in the majority report, coupled with the notable absence of biblical underpinnings noted in its work, leaves the committee's work lacking in fulfilling its mandate to provide the much-needed guidance, clarification, and application of "biblical teachings." The minority report makes a concerted effort to provide such foundational, biblical guidance and clarity, and thus would provide a stronger, healthier, Reformed response to the concerns regarding same-sex marriage. While the committee, we believe, honestly wrestled with the reports of 1973 and 2002, and understandably would be unduly burdened in citing "chapter and verse" of which "biblical teachings" they are applying from those reports, the lack of such references, along with stating the committee's angst with the "troubling" terminology of the 1973 and 2002 reports, (citing only two instances of such troubling language) lends to more confusion than the mandated clarification the church is looking for.

In fact, we believe the absence of such references—namely, without the substantive biblical underpinnings noted in the 1973 and 2002 reports—leaves a critical door open to indirectly endorse the present-day reality of same-sex marriage, a view incompatible with Scripture. This is evidenced by the majority report's references to the "CRC" or "Reformed understanding of marriage" as opposed to the biblical understanding of marriage. Examples of this include, "the biblical and theological understanding of marriage within the CRC" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 372); "religious marriage, as understood by the Christian Reformed Church" (*Agenda*, p. 377); and "the CRC understanding of marriage" (*Agenda*, p. 381), among others. These qualifying phrases are seemingly an attempt by the majority report writers to distance the CRC's current teachings about marriage from historically held biblical teachings rather than affirming the CRC's current understanding of marriage as biblically correct and justified. The majority report would be strengthened if it took the 1973 and 2002 reports as well as the 1980 report on marriage as a "biblical understanding" as opposed to the "CRC's understanding."

The minority report brings biblical teaching and the CRC's teaching much closer when it states, "The biblical teaching on marriage, then, seen in Scripture and espoused in the CRC's 1980 statement on marriage . . ." This phrasing puts the CRC's understanding in direct relationship to, and under the authority of, Scripture rather than distancing itself from it.

2. Pastoral guidance to the churches

- a. The minority report's guidance has the needed tone and directness of approach that is lacking in the majority report. We applaud the committee for wrestling with and challenging the church to provide a "welcoming, belonging, and discipling" model not "based solely on presumptions." Yet the pastoral guidance provided in section VI of the majority report gives general guidelines instead of specific instruction and therefore does not speak clearly for the church when we feel it ought. The minority report again does the hard work of demonstrating the strength

of our history and heritage when it comes to a biblical understanding of marriage that applies to our congregations, and gives helpful advice to congregational life, together.

- b. Therefore we request that the committee endorse and adopt the recommendations from section II, Areas of Disagreement, points 1 through 4, of the minority report in place of the majority report sections VI, A, 2, a, b, and d; A, 4; B, 2.

Classis Lake Superior
Henry G. Gunnink, stated clerk

Overture 27: Recommit the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

In response to two overtures regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage, Synod 2013 formed a committee tasked with a mandate to

- a. Give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42 (c.f. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these in a truthful and gracious way within North America. . . .
- c. Identify and guide the churches, members, and clergy, regarding the ramifications of the legal, ethical, and spiritual issues that they face.

(Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 640-41)

In late October 2015 the report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage was distributed to the churches in preparation for deliberation at Synod 2016.

We commend the committee for their hard work in clarifying the complexities of various ministry situations relating to pastoral care for individuals experiencing same-sex attraction, and for churches desiring to minister in love. The report highlights the many nuances involved as churches minister in this context, and it brings recommendations that are clearly motivated by a desire to demonstrate the love of our Lord Jesus—an admonition that must be heard and taken to heart by our churches.

The committee also brought greater clarity to the implications of the new state of affairs in the civil and legal contexts of Canada and the United States and to the challenges facing the church.

However, the report is lacking key counsel and pastoral guidance as well as scriptural support for its conclusions, and it was written by a committee that (while qualified) does not reflect the cultural diversity of the Christian Reformed Church.

Three specific areas stand out:

A. The report lacks guidance that would help pastors and churches call those who experience same-sex attraction to holy living on the basis of their union with Christ. For example, in section VI, B, 3, the report discusses how a church can disciple believers, but the advice centers specifically on how the church should respond to same-sex couples seeking marriage. The category of discipleship in

the church to individuals with same-sex attraction should also involve direction for how to call individuals to live out their identity in Christ with regard to their sexuality (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 394). This approach, perhaps, stems from a limited address of the mandate by the committee. The majority report notes that the committee was asked to “give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings . . . in light of the legality of same-sex marriage . . . as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America” (*Agenda 2016*, p. 362; also see *Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 640-41). Indeed, the majority report concludes that “the committee has therefore focused its attention on civil same-sex marriage and ministry to persons affected (in various ways) by it” (*Agenda 2016*, p. 363). However, synod also mandated the committee to “guide the churches, members, and clergy regarding the ramifications of the legal, ethical, and spiritual issues that they face” (*Acts of Synod 2013*; p. 641). In this way the committee has chosen to emphasize the part of their mandate that involves the pastoral implications of same-sex marriage (*Agenda 2016*, p. 363) but has neglected the broader part of their mandate that has to do with the “spiritual issues” for churches and for same-sex-attracted people. This is no small oversight, and the Christian Reformed Church would benefit from additional counsel that would guide local congregations in pastorally calling people to live out their union with Jesus Christ.

B. The report lacks solid scriptural support. While it is true that the committee was not asked to revisit previous synodical reports, scriptural principles could have been articulated that give a basis for the guidance offered. Only a few passing references is insufficient for a report of this importance. We note that the minority report cites Scripture with noticeably greater frequency, particularly in its arguments for supporting marriage as a creation institution.

C. The report lacks diverse cultural representation. In recent years, the denomination has increasingly been working toward a more inclusive approach to cultural diversity at all levels. Yet when this committee was formed at Synod 2013, it was evident that the makeup of the committee was rather homogeneous. To that end, a motion was made and adopted to instruct the committee to “consult extensively with pastors in Canada and the United States, [and] members of different ethnic minorities” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 643), with the grounds that “the approved list of committee members does not have an adequate racial diversity to represent the stated goals of the synod and the CRCNA” (*Acts 2013*, p. 644). While this was a step in the right direction, it is not adequate. Synod 2011 adopted a statement of vision that called the Christian Reformed Church to “reflect a multi-ethnic, multicultural leadership” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 859). While this statement specifically addressed hiring practices, the principles outlined at that time also speak to the need for multiethnic, multicultural leadership on synodical study committees. We have no doubt that the committee listened carefully to representatives from minority communities; nevertheless the absence of minority representatives on the committee is a glaring shortfall. In fact, Synod 2008 recommitted a study report to an expanded committee because of the lack of diversity on the study committee (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 477); at that time synod rightly noted, “It is essential that emerging and ethnic minority churches be included in this discussion in order to be fully representative of the diversity of our denomination.” We maintain that this report regarding same-sex marriage is lacking adequate diversity and therefore does not well represent the diversity of our denomination.

II. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures Synod 2016 to recommit the report to a committee that includes a better representation of the multicultural makeup of the Christian Reformed Church for the purpose of addressing the deficiencies in the present draft of the majority report, in accord with the mandate.

Grounds:

1. The report offers important guidance on questions related to how the church ministers with same-sex marriages and couples; however, the report lacks guidance on how to call people to live into their identity as holy people. More needs to be said about how the church can apply the hope of the gospel in a way that helps us live out our identity in Christ.
2. The report lacks foundational biblical reference for its guidance, and a report of this importance needs the support of solid biblical evidence.
3. The report lacks the diverse perspectives of the CRC in that it fails to include as authors of the report a diverse cultural representation of the broader Christian Reformed Church.

Classis Columbia
Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 28: Affirm the Enduring Position of the Bible and the CRCNA on the Issue of Same-Sex Relationships

I. Background

The CRCNA has since its beginning had various internal struggles about what it means to be a part of the broader culture around us, and the CRCNA was born out of some of this struggle. If we look at our own history, even recent history with the issue of women in office, as well as the broader record of church history, there are often three responses to challenging issues within the church. These are broad categories, but within them we can see the paths that we might follow on the issue of same-sex marriage, attraction, and sexual actions. One is the path of *assimilation*. If we approach same-sex actions as our broader culture has, the church will take the path of being affirming of same sex actions as has happened in the broader culture. Second is the path of *polarization* where clear sides are taken, and there is a final result of division. Third, there is the path of *isolation*, which is when the church, perceiving the threat of the culture, isolates itself from the culture in order to seek to protect its beliefs and practices. In our history we can see how the impulses of assimilation, polarization, and isolation have shaped who we are as a denomination, but these are not the impulses that have been examples of the CRCNA at its best. When we are at our best, we have thoughtfully, biblically, and graciously sought to follow a different path than these. This impulse, implemented imperfectly by fallen persons, has been a desire to approach cultural struggles with *gospel-informed engagement*. We believe that there is not a single issue that falls outside the purview of the gospel, and there isn't a single place where we ever need to be afraid to go.

If we follow the path of polarization, assimilation, or isolation, there will be overtures back and forth, first one direction and then another, one committee after the next, and then we as a denomination will see years of contentious debate, ultimately to end in a significant exodus from our denomination. If we

follow that path, some will leave because of a feeling of tiredness around the battle, some will leave or stay for matters of principle, and overall we will become more divided and polarized rather than more unified in the mission that we have to proclaim that every square inch of the world belongs to God. We need to fervently pray that God would give us wisdom to take a different path so that we can rejoice in our unity around the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than become more divided.

The time-bound nature of terminology and pastoral counsel makes this matter more likely to generate negative responses because of our history of not always treating those that struggle with respect. It is therefore important to acknowledge that we are not seeking to defend the terminology or pastoral council of current or previous reports, but rather the biblical foundation.

With this in mind, we ask the question, **How are we to understand the Bible?** Are the issues of women in office and same-sex sexual activity the same? Are these issues biblically and morally the same? They are similar in terms of the way in which they are polarizing and culturally sensitive issues, but when it comes to the biblical record the answer is that they are not the same. The Fall 2015 issue of the *Calvin Seminary Forum*, which informs our theological background, takes up this matter, saying the following;

The issues are very different. One is about the church order, the other about the moral order. More basically, there are biblical texts affirming female leadership, and ordaining women can be defended from Scripture using the standard Reformed hermeneutics (that is, our method of interpreting the Bible). But there are no texts supporting same-sex relations, and none of the dozens of recent new interpretations is consistent with our approach to scripture.

(Article by John Cooper, P5-9, <http://www.calvinseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/Forum-October-2015-Copy.pdf>)

We therefore cannot take the same path of debating this issue back and forth over time, because, as we can see, this isn't at its core a matter that the Bible, our theology, or our hermeneutics leaves in doubt. We already have the benefit of the work of our seminary's scholars on this issue, as well as many recently published books within the broader church that take all manner of positions (Kevin DeYoung in "What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality," Matthew Vines in "God and the Gay Christian", etc.). Our scholars have already carefully addressed various positions on this issue, applying the Bible and the gospel to it. We therefore cannot take the same path as we did with women in office, declaring that both positions can be held in good conscience, because these issues are fundamentally different.

We also note from the 2016 report on same-sex relationships commissioned by the CRCNA the potential dividing lines that will only grow more likely to bring division in the future should we institute another committee, and we further note from this report that the uncertainty of our denomination around this issue is already creating a great deal of angst.

The answer for our moment in time is to learn from our history and to act clearly based on biblical principle. Will this be difficult? Yes, it will come with much soul searching and with even some deciding that they can no longer be a part of the CRCNA. But those consequences will be far less drastic than for the next ten years of to be filled with controversy. To not be proactive on this issue will create discouragement, thwart positive momentum, discourage giving, divide congregations and classes, and discourage church planting and

missional activity. The very things our denomination most needs to be doing will be damaged the most if we cannot put this issue to rest. We cannot be naïve and think that the decline and controversy that has marginalized the mainline denominations in North America on this issue will not happen to us if we follow the path of assimilation. There is no time like the present to act clearly and graciously for the long term good of the church!

As a denomination we are at a Joshua 24 moment. We must choose now whom we will serve! Will we be transformed by the culture and made irrelevant by allowing for sinful behavior, or will we choose this day to stand upon God's Word, the gospel, millennia of Christian teaching, scholarship, and the faithful hermeneutics of our own scholars? Either the Bible teaches that same-sex sexual actions are good and wholesome, grounded in the created order, and celebrated in Scripture, or it teaches that they are a distortion of what is good and wholesome, contrary to the created order, and that they are a sin to be repented of as God's people are made new creations in Christ. "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The CRCNA, in 1973, in 2002, and most recently in the Fall 2015 issue of the *Calvin Seminary Forum* shows us clearly that we have had a consistent and biblical position on the issue of same-sex sexual actions, and in the midst of the uncertainty that the 2016 report presents us, it is necessary for the church to reaffirm the Bible as it speaks clearly to today. **As a denomination our individual churches will have different ways of supporting believers seeking to be faithful to the Bible and our denominational position. On the basis of the survey contained in the 2016 report we see that as a church we have been unfaithful in communicating these scriptural truths to our young people and our congregations, and we must repent of this sin and resolve in new obedience to reaffirm the Bible's teaching. We must teach and disciple our people regarding the sinfulness of same-sex actions.** We cannot wait for another committee when good exegetical work has already been done by our scholars and the broader church, and we cannot allow this issue to continue to boil in our churches and compromise the unity of the CRCNA.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Heartland overtures synod to adopt the following statements:

1. We reaffirm the timeless exegetical conclusions of the 1973 and 2002 reports in their finding that same-sex sexual actions are sinful and contrary to the Bible, including advocating, promoting, or approving of same-sex actions. **Therefore, any position that accepts same-sex sexual actions as acceptable practice is one that is contrary to the Bible and the Covenant for Officebearers.¹ If officebearers believe or promote the acceptability of same-sex**

¹ *Calvin Seminary Forum* article by John Cooper: "If the approach to the Bible that supports same-sex marriage cannot reliably generate and defend the creeds and confessions, then it is not compatible with our Reformed understanding of Scripture or the Covenant of Officebearers" (p. 8). <http://www.calvinseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/Forum-October-2015-Copy.pdf>

sexual relationships, churches and classes are advised to take loving and firm actions to seek repentance.

2. We will promote God's call to show Christ's grace to those suffering from this broken condition called "same-sex attraction."
3. We adopt this statement as the enduring position of the Bible and our denomination on this issue.

Classis Heartland
Robert D. Drenten, stated clerk

Overture 29: Reject the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage and Reaffirm the CRC's Understanding re Homosexuality and Definition of Marriage

I. Background

A. Principled pluralism

"Principled pluralism," as described in the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage report, grants the state the right and priority under civil law to redefine God's covenant of marriage (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:18-35; Matt. 19:4-9; Eph. 5:22-32) for its own purposes. The report contends that, because of the state's priority, the church *should* think and act according to Scripture and confessional standards when organized for "religious" purposes, *but may also* celebrate what is condemned in Scripture and our confessional standards when organized for "civil" purposes.

The result is that the majority and minority reports effectively fracture our Christian witness into two separate but equal testimonies of God's nature and relationship to his church. "Allowing" Jesus to be honored as Lord of all people in "religious" circumstances, but ceding that lordship to the state in "civil" laws removes the church's prophetic voice from the world and insulates people from the gospel.

Because of these applications of principled pluralism in the majority and minority reports, the reports contradict Scripture, specifically examples of believers speaking truth to authorities and even defying those authorities when injustice is done to God in the application or mishandling of civil law (Mark 6:17-20; Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 4:18-31; 16:35-40), as well as Belgic Confession Article 36,¹ and therefore should be rejected as incompatible with our biblical and confessional nature.

B. The lack of scriptural guidance in the reports

The committee, having some members who do not accept God's Word regarding the sinfulness of same-sex intimacy, and who openly sanction "same-sex marriage,"² has demonstrated that it cannot produce sound scriptural guidelines

¹ "And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship. . . . They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted."

and pastoral care to the church regarding “same-sex marriage.” Thus, the committee refers much more to Scripture that should not be applied to this discussion than to Scripture which speaks directly and helpfully to the issue of “same-sex marriage.”

C. *The lack of consideration of the 1973 and 2002 reports*

The 1973 and 2002 reports call the church to do what the 2016 report dismisses in consideration of “conscience” and “discretion”:³

The church should speak the Word of God prophetically to a society and culture which glorifies sexuality and sexual gratification. It should foster a wholesome appreciation of sex and expose and condemn the idolatrous sexualism and the current celebration of homosexuality promoted in literature, the theater, films, television, advertisements, and the like.

(*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 53; see *Agenda for Synod 2002*, p. 336)

The majority and minority reports convey an erroneous assumption that since a particular form of marriage has been legalized in Canada and the United States, it must have a *legitimate* place in the lives of Christians. While civil law certainly affects the lives of Christians, the state’s granting of civil legality to certain actions does not justify a Christian’s acceptance—or even a celebration—of such actions. Examples can easily be cited in which civil law decriminalizes and also legitimizes abortion, euthanasia, slavery, no-fault divorce, and even national immigration policies that rightfully have no “religious” counterpart precisely because the church *speaks prophetically from Scripture that these things do not reflect God’s holiness and righteousness*, regardless of a “civil” legality.

God has clearly spoken regarding his view of homosexual orientation and behavior. The church has received this Word, has affirmed it, and has given pastoral advice regarding God’s revelation. In light of the committee’s attempt in the majority report to shield Christians from standing with God’s Word, we should hear the 1973 report again and affirm it:

In summary we conclude that homosexuality is forbidden in the Old Testament. It is forbidden to those who engage in it by mutual consent as is clear from Leviticus 18 and 20.

(*Agenda for Synod 1973*, p. 619)

We conclude that the New Testament passages which make reference to homosexual behavior are in harmony with the judgment of the Old Testament: homosexual acts are sinful.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 621)

Scripture clearly teaches that man was originally created “male” and “female.” The fact that a male homosexual can only fully experience his “maleness” in relation to another male and a female homosexual only in relation to another female is therefore

² *The Banner*, January 29, 2016; <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2016/01/synodical-committee-member-participates-in-same-sex-wedding>

³ *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 380, in regard to someone attending or participating in a same-sex civil marriage: “Some within the CRC may attend because they celebrate the relationship and do not consider same-sex committed relationships as inherently sinful. Decisions to attend or not are often shaped by conscience, and conscience deserves respect. . . . We judge that the church is best served by allowing latitude and supporting thoughtful choices.”

Also *Agenda*, p. 385, in regard to ordained leaders attending or participating in a same-sex civil marriage: “Suffice it to say that ordained and commissioned church leaders should exercise caution and discretion in their public roles.”

a reversal of the created order. Although not explicitly stated, this may well be the reason why homosexual acts are forbidden and are considered loathsome in Leviticus 18 and 20. It is explicitly stated that their practice defiles those who practice them (Lev. 18: 24-30).

Turning to the New Testament we find the creation order of Genesis reaffirmed several times: by Jesus in Matthew 19:5-6, and in Mark 10:6-8; by Paul in Ephesians 5:31 and 1 Corinthians 6:16. In the light of this constant reaffirmation we may assert that homosexuality is a disorder of human nature and more than a mere variant.

(*Agenda 1973*, pp. 623-24)

This means that the homosexual who is a Christian will not adopt the interpretation of sexual inversion that the "gay activists" now give it, when they commend and celebrate homosexuality as a desirable condition and glorify the lifestyle of homosexual behavior. Instead, the homosexual must make use of the means of grace, the pastoral care of the church, and the therapy available to him from scientific sources.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 627)

In view of the biblical position on homosexual practice, and in view of the fact that no exception to this position is scripturally defensible, obedience to God appears to require a homosexual unable to marry according to the divine ordinance to accept celibacy as his way of life and continence as his moral duty. . . .

. . . Homosexuality (male and female) is a condition of disordered sexuality which reflects the brokenness of our sinful world and for which the homosexual may himself bear only a minimal responsibility.

. . . . Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.

. . . Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and to the employment of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. They should recognize that their sexuality is subordinate to their obligation to live in wholehearted surrender to Christ.

(*Agenda 1973*, pp. 631-32)

D. A biblical repentance is necessary for everyone in the church

In our sinful nature, we are all tempted to reject God's illumination of our sin.⁴ As we hide from God, even what he has created to be good can be made ultimate (an idol) in our own lives to separate us from other sinners God is seeking and saving.⁵ As the church, we have often sinned in this way with our heterosexuality, marriages, and family culture, to the marginalization and exclusion of same-sex attracted people needing the same redemption we have often taken for granted, so that we have severely hindered the witness of Christ's gospel of mercy and grace.⁶ We lament this reality with the words of the 1973 report:

It is imperative for us to enter sympathetically into the plight of the homosexual. It is one of the great failings of the church and Christians generally that they have been lacking in sympathy and concern for the plight of the homosexuals among them.

(*Agenda for Synod 1973*, p. 614)

⁴ John 1:1-11.

⁵ Keller, Timothy; *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), p. 136: "Jonah had a religious idol, simple moral self-righteousness. He felt superior to the wicked, pagan Ninevites. He didn't want to see them saved. Jonah's cultural and personal idols had melded into a toxic compound that was completely hidden from him. It led him to rebel against the very God he was so proud of serving."

⁶ Romans 2:17-24.

Homosexuals who are in their disordered constitution unable to fulfill the creation ordinances of sexuality need not be considered lesser persons in the New Testament church or the kingdom of God. In Luke 14:21 Jesus teaches that those forbidden from the service of the worshiping congregation of the Old Testament people (Leviticus 21:18-21) are welcome in his kingdom.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 625)

Unfortunately the homosexual has not experienced this kind of love and acceptance of his person in either the church or society. It has been said that the homosexual has been far more sinned against than he has sinned. In the light of our understanding of homosexuality today, Christians bear a great burden of guilt relative to such persons.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 626)

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul proclaims that those who had engaged in homosexual practices were also among the saved in the name of Christ and in the Spirit. We may believe that they were liberated from their homosexual behavior. But it does not follow that if there were constitutional homosexuals among the saved in Corinth, they were also liberated from their inversion and became heterosexual in their sexual propensity.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 627)

The homosexual may not, on the sole ground of his sexual disorder, be denied community acceptance, and if he is a Christian he is to be wholeheartedly received by the church as a person for whom Christ died.

... The church must exercise the same patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his sins as for all other sinners. The gospel of God's grace in Christ is to be proclaimed to him as the basis of his forgiveness, the power of his renewal, and the source of his strength to lead a sanctified life. As all Christians in their weaknesses, the homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself to be defeated by lapses in chastity, but rather, to repent and thereafter to depend in fervent prayer upon the means of grace for power to withstand temptation.

(*Agenda 1973*, p. 632)

We encourage the church to continue its discussion of sinful brokenness in all aspects of life,⁷ in order that the Holy Spirit may show Christ to be a great Savior⁸ and that our common bond as sinners redeemed by a Jesus who knows our sufferings⁹—all of our sufferings—grows and matures in repentance and love.¹⁰

E. If anyone, the church must reaffirm God's revealed view of marriage

Since the covenant of marriage is given by God and therefore defined by God, marriage is what God has made it to be, irrespective of the ceremony being "religious" or "civil." It cannot be redefined as merely a "civil contract," "kinship bond," or any other relationship less than a lifelong union of a man and a woman as one flesh apart from all others.

Marriage involves sexual intimacy *as designed by God* to, in part, fulfill the cultural mandate to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), and also express a unique, holy love for the spouse (Song of Solomon). Since Scripture limits this physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy to a man and a woman in Genesis and confirms it as such a union in Jesus' words of Matthew 19 and in Paul's description of marriage as a mystery illustrating the relationship between "Jesus and his bride, the church" in Ephesians 5, we

⁷ Romans 3:10-12; Colossians 2:13.

⁸ Luke 7:44-50.

⁹ Hebrews 4:15.

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

understand that such intimacy is neither holy nor righteous in a same-sex relationship. Yet there is certainly no *expectation* of celibacy by the state in a “civil” same-sex marriage.

Because of God’s institution of marriage in the Bible and the human desire and capacity for physical expression of love, it is assumed, whether in a heterosexual “civil” ceremony or in a same-sex “civil” ceremony, there will be physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy in expressing love for one another. *At the very least*, if the church were to condone civil same-sex marriages with the provision that such intimacy was not an element of those relationships, it would still put same-sex-attracted couples in a position of grave temptation toward sin.

F. Avoiding confusion and schism requires clarity

Scripture is represented in two footnotes on page 370 of the 2016 report. Also, a phrase from Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 are quoted as examples of “texts that apply only tangentially, if at all” and are stated as harmful when “applied to all same-sex oriented persons.”¹¹ On the previous page, the report *encourages* people “to read widely, from a variety of interpretive perspectives.”

If the Bible is widely censored and even more narrowly applied when dealing “pastorally” with life issues, but a wide view of opinions and perspectives are encouraged, then the witness of the church will quickly assume the likeness of the world rather than Christ.¹²

Abraham Kuyper wrote, “A creed is not for the purpose of stating our own surmises or conjectures, but for professing that, of which, on the basis of God’s revelation, we possess most certain knowledge.”¹³ Would we not say that confessional standards exist to clarify the church’s faith and unify our testimony of God’s redemptive work? If the denomination abandons confessional unity, we risk *promoting* schism—even unwittingly so.

CRCNA officials, writers, and speakers do not always clearly affirm the biblical revelation regarding homosexuality and marriage.¹⁴ This lack of theological and hermeneutical unity creates a confusion among members and seekers alike. Denominational speakers and writers would do a great justice to God and his church—and be a help to pastors and lay leaders—by promoting and defending the denominational unity of the creeds and confessions in all of their statements and advocacy.

II. Overture

Classis Hudson overtures Synod 2016 to take the following actions regarding the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage majority and minority reports:

¹¹ *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 400.

¹² 1 John 2:15-17

¹³ Kuyper, Abraham; “Calvinism and Confessional Revision,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, July 1891, p. 20.

¹⁴ De Moor, Bob; “Don’t Walk Away!” *The Banner*; June 26, 2015. Mark Hilbelink, “How Gay Marriage Is Forcing the Church to Grow Up,” *WeAreYALT.org*, July 1, 2015. Jessica Kantrowitz, “Uncomfortable baking a cake for a gay wedding? ‘Bake them two,’” *thinkchristian.reframemedia.com*, April 9, 2015.

A. Reject both the majority and minority reports submitted by the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (hereafter referred to as “committee”) as incompatible with our biblical and confessional witness.

B. Dissolve the committee.

C. Reaffirm the CRCNA’s understanding of homosexuality as stated in the 1973 Committee to Study Homosexuality report and the 2002 Committee to Give Direction about and Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members report, given to the committee in its 2013 mandate.

D. Reaffirm that the church, in opposition to the Word and Spirit, has often marginalized people struggling with same-sex attraction and must continue to repent and build up all members in Christian faith and repentance, as stated in the 2002 report.

E. Reaffirm that marriage, whether “religious” or “civil” in its ceremony, is a covenant between a man and a woman, according to Genesis 1:26-30; 2:18-35; Matthew 19:4-9; and Ephesians 5:22-32.

F. Mandate that future study and advisory committees have a thorough, scriptural foundation in their reports and recommendations and that the interpretation of such scriptural foundations accords with the CRCNA confessional standards.

Grounds:

1. The majority and minority reports of the committee advise believers in Jesus as Lord and Savior to reason and act in accordance with an unbiblical and unconfessional “principled pluralism” worldview.
2. The committee has filed its reports and did not produce sound scriptural guidance.
3. The committee, in allowing generous space for Christians to place conscience above Scripture in order not to offend the church and unbelievers with the Word of God¹⁵—even to celebrate what God detests—has rejected their mandate by advising against the pastoral advice of the 2002 report on Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members.
4. The body of Christ must cultivate relationships among her members and among unbelievers according to the pattern set by Jesus and his apostles.¹⁶ Where the church has not done this, we humbly repent and ask forgiveness from God and those we have injured.
5. In reaffirming the gift of the covenant of marriage as revealed in the Bible, the CRCNA clarifies its adherence to God’s unchanging Word within a shifting culture of human desires and solidifies its position in the event of future discussions.
6. Because the CRCNA today is facing debates over hermeneutics, mission, and, even in some respects, the nature of justification, atonement, and repentance, we need and desire the unity that our confessional standards provide.

Classis Hudson

Mary B. Stegink, stated clerk

¹⁵ Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-10; Jude 1:7.

¹⁶ Matthew 5:1-12, 43-48; 9:36; Mark 10:15; 2 Corinthians 1:6-7; 2:4; 7:8-9.

Overture 30: Do Not Adopt the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage Reports; Appoint a New Study Committee

We live in a changing culture, and nowhere has that been clearer than in the realm of gender, human sexuality, and marriage. Once accepted ethical boundaries are disappearing all around us. Once inconceivable actions are now considered normal and good. The members of the Christian Reformed Church are increasingly confused about the most basic fundamental assumptions about who God made us to be and how he wants us to live in this area of life. We have discussed individual issues here and there in the life of the church, from divorce to remarriage to same-sex attraction, to our most recent discussion regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage. But the issues are bigger and deeper than any of these reports.

Sexual activity before marriage, after the end of a marriage, and outside of marriage is common. Cohabitation and divorce are rampant. Pornography is freely available 24/7. Confusion about sexual ethics within marriage abound. Same-sex relationships and marriage have been accepted by the culture and are common in our communities. Culturally we have “put our confidence in sex but lost our faith in marriage [in such a way that] the Christian view of sexuality seems naive and unrealistic.”¹ And all this is happening at a time when church cohesion, denominational loyalty, and church discipline are on the decline. The church must respond! We cannot sit by while God’s good plan for marriage and sexuality and human flourishing are distorted by the culture. We cannot sit by while God’s ethical will for his people is unknown or ignored. We cannot sit by while good is called evil and evil is called good. The gospel is at stake.

The most recent report concerning pastoral guidance re same-sex marriage has exposed a deeper divide and confusion regarding the fundamental purposes and design for gender, human sexuality, and marriage. The report has some helpful things to say, and it makes some good conclusions regarding the duty of officebearers. However, the theological underpinnings of the report reveal a low view of the authority of Scripture and an impoverished view of human sexuality and marriage. The report explicitly tells us not to use the Scriptures that speak to this issue directly because ostensibly the Scriptures have nothing to say about it that we could understand. The report determines that though the church is answerable to God and his Word, the civil government is not and can define marriage how it pleases. The report finds marriage to be a merely earthly endeavor; it is “good as it meets the needs of those being married” (p. 370). It concludes that marriage is “creational; it is not eschatological” (p. 370).

The Scriptures give us an opposite viewpoint. Marriage was in the mind of God already before the creation of the world, for “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph.1:4) He elected a bride for his Son, and he chose to mirror that eternal marriage in our gendered sexuality and covenant marriages on earth. In speaking of human marriage and the duties of husband and wife, Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the

¹ Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2015) p.16.

church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). This is because “a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31-32). Marriage was the first gift of creation, and it will be the first gift of the new creation, for God’s elect will gather on that day at the wedding supper of the lamb. Marriage is not just an eschatological reality, it is *the* eschatological reality. Every earthly marriage points to that great marriage between Christ and his bride, the church, in which we will live for all eternity. Marriage is a shadow of that future reality and is meant to point to it and reflect the truth of the gospel—the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

It is time for a new, comprehensive, biblically driven report which uses our Reformed hermeneutical principles to definitively lay out an entire theology of gender, human sexuality, and marriage. Our culture, our churches, and our church members need to see again the beautiful truths of the Scriptures regarding marriage, God’s good plan for human sexuality, and God’s eternal purpose for these realities. We need to see afresh for a new generation the glory of God in this eschatological picture of the gospel. We need to be called again to holiness and fidelity to our Savior and eternal groom. We can no longer address these many complex issues separately. They are all intimately connected together, and we must finally and definitively deal with them as such.

Therefore, Classis Zeeland submits the following overtures to Synod 2016:

A. That synod not adopt either the majority or minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

B. That synod form a new committee to provide a comprehensive report on ethical boundaries of human sexuality based on a thorough biblical and theological analysis of God’s creational and teleological purposes for gender, human sexuality, and marriage that clarifies how human sexuality reflects God’s glory, points to Jesus, and proclaims the gospel; specifies how sin has affected gender, sexuality, and marriage and the consequences of that distortion; provides clear ethical guidance for what a holy and healthy Christian life looks like regarding marriage and sexuality, delineating what is obligatory, what is permissible, and what is impermissible; and gives pastoral guidance that explains exactly how the gospel provides hope and wholeness for those struggling with sexual confusion and temptation.

Grounds:

1. The Christian Reformed Church has addressed this topic tangentially in multiple reports, but the current culture demands a comprehensive report to deal with all issues of human sexuality.
2. The most recent report by the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage indicates a deeper disconnect within our denomination regarding God’s purpose for gender, sexuality, and marriage. We cannot agree on the specifics until we agree on the core principles.
3. The discussions surrounding same-sex marriage have made clear that the real debate in our church is about the authority of Scripture, God’s nature, the person and work of Jesus, and the definition of the gospel. We cannot argue about surface level ethical specifics until we do the deep and hard work of providing unified foundational grounds for those decisions.

We need a report that does the deep biblical and theological work first and then comprehensively applies that to the entire realm of gender, sexuality, and marriage for the 21st century. Our new cultural situation demands a rearticulation of the ancient truths of Scripture and how they apply to our lives and culture.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 31: Receive the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage for Information, But Do Not Adopt It; Reaffirm the CRC's Current Biblical Definition of Marriage; Adopt Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c; Constitute a New Study Committee

I. Analysis of the report

A. Background

Synod 2016 has before it a majority report and a minority report from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage [hereafter referred to as “the committee”]. Synod 2013 gave the following mandate to the committee:

give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.

(*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 617)

Note: We will generally refer to the report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage report as “the report” and cite it as “Report.”

On October 30, 2015, the committee’s report was commended to the churches for study. We have considered the report, and Classis Wisconsin offers its response, as well as this overture to synod.

B. Response to the report

1. What’s good about the report?

- a. **The committee did a lot of work to carry out a mandate that was challenging, in that the cultural landscape is changing very rapidly** (as the report observes). The mandate also proved challenging to the committee in that many of its members seemed to feel constrained by their mandate’s requirement to stay within the boundaries of the 1973 and 2002 reports, and sometimes even said so publicly. Given that set of circumstances, the committee produced a majority report that is careful and thoughtful and that mostly stays within the boundaries of previous synodical decisions and current Church Order. (However, we agree with the minority report, which identifies some places where the majority report’s pastoral advice does not stay within the confines of the committee’s mandate or of Church Order

[e.g., the majority report envisions CRC leaders officiating at or participating in civil same-sex unions].

- b. **The tone of the report is generally respectful of the church and its diverse membership, which is not an easy thing in our current cultural and ecclesiastical climate.** In our view, the majority report should have been more careful, especially in speaking about minority communities or in making assumptions about pastoral care in those settings. We also find that the majority report failed to say enough on behalf of Christians who are challenged by same-sex attractions but who desire to remain faithful to the biblical guidelines articulated in earlier synodical committee reports. However, we do commend the report's generally careful and respectful tone.
- c. **The majority report offers much useful information and reflection, especially about the diversity of thinking among CRC leaders and members, and in exploring the *civil* issues and the *civil* implications of same-sex unions.**
- d. **The majority report recognizes the limitations of the mandate and the constraints laid upon the committee, and it accurately points out some valid reasons why the 1973 report does not enjoy the full confidence of church members.** The report rightly calls for a more contemporary treatment of the biblical teaching on human sexuality.

2. What's not so good about the report?

- a. **The majority report does not sufficiently articulate (or rearticulate) the theological foundations on which sound pastoral advice to the churches must rest** (as the minority report points out quite clearly). That was a judgment call the committee made, for which it offers a rationale as follows: "Synod observed that the [earlier] synodical reports . . . had served the denomination well by establishing biblical principles and foundations" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 362).

Presumably on that basis the committee concluded that its task was "to focus its work on the implications of those teachings in light of recent political, legal, and social developments" (*Agenda*, p. 362).

Unfortunately the absence of a well-articulated theological foundation makes the report less useful to its readers. Not only that, but the absence of a clearly articulated theological foundation also seemed to limit the vision of the majority report's authors and the scope of the majority report's pastoral guidance. In fact, many of the majority report's other deficiencies stem from this one. The majority report is much weaker in its exploration of the *theological* issues and implications of same-sex unions than it is in exploring related *civil* issues and implications.

- b. Perhaps as a direct result of its failure to articulate a foundational theology of marriage, **the majority report offers a stunningly barren understanding of the purpose of Christian marriage in comparison with civil marriage.** The majority report says (in a chart at the bottom of p. 377) that the purposes of Christian marriage are twofold: it "establishes a covenantal relationship between a woman, a man, and God within a covenantal community," and it "demarcates appropriate and inappropriate sexual relations." That is a seriously inadequate and unimaginative summary of

the purposes of Christian marriage. The wedding liturgies in the *Book of Common Prayer* and in the *Psalter Hymnal* do a far better job of articulating the richness of what God intended by instituting marriage for the human race. The majority report offers a minimalist understanding of the meaning and purpose of marriage and completely overlooks marriage as a sign of the present and future union between Christ and his church. The majority report's less-than-visionary understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian marriage is a particularly telling weakness in the wake of the landmark *Obergefell* decision of June 2015. In that decision, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned earlier, traditional understandings of the meaning and purpose of marriage, and conceived marriage mainly in terms of individual rights, based on "the concept of individual autonomy." The court posited a "better informed understanding" than the traditional understanding received from "ancient sources." Similar developments have occurred in Canada. We acknowledge that these judgments are rational and consistent interpretations of the U.S. Constitution and of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But we cannot fail to note that they also constitute a rejection of divine revelation. Our culture offers an understanding of the purpose of marriage that is defined not by the Creator, but by the autonomous individual. But that is precisely what is at stake: a right understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage, and of who defines those things. Especially in the wake of this kind of cultural and spiritual upheaval, the church must be able to offer a robust, winsome, and compelling understanding of the true meaning and purpose of marriage, especially including the purposes for which it was instituted by God. The majority report fails to do so.

- c. **The majority report takes stock of current cultural trends and government actions but offers virtually no thoughtful Christian critique of them.** Nor does the majority report offer the church any helpful framework by which it may constructively speak to the government or to the culture at large. It is quite striking—even alarming—that the majority report argues that "the task of the government is not to compel everything that is right or moral by Christian standards" (*Agenda*, p. 373), whereas the Belgic Confession (Art. 36) tells us that civil rulers are "called . . . to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God." And surely the church is called to be a light in the world—to declare to governments and to all members of a pluralistic society exactly what it is that pleases God. The committee, for whatever reasons, did not see it as part of its mandate to offer a serious critique of the culture. We find that to be a serious defect of the majority report. The committee's mandate was to "give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973 Report* 42." We cannot imagine any credible way to do that in our current cultural and historical context without offering some critical analysis of that context. The committee was fully aware of that context. As the majority report observes, "The church in its ministry is moving in shifting cultural waters." The majority report immediately goes on to make this declaration: "It is as great an error to presume more certainty and knowledge than we currently possess as it is to claim too little" (*Agenda*, p. 377). We fear that the majority report may be

working so hard to avoid the first error that it ultimately commits the second error: claiming too little certainty. Do we not have the mind of Christ?

d. The pastoral advice the majority report actually offers is sketchy and uneven, especially in the critical realm of Christian discipleship. In particular, the report says too little about two areas of serious pastoral concern:

- 1) The report often seems more sympathetic to the perceived needs of those who *do not* intend to live within biblical norms than to the needs of those who *do*. The voices of Christians who are tempted to express their sexuality outside of biblical norms, but who do not wish to do so, are strangely marginalized in this report. In the regard, this report offers little in the way of concrete pastoral advice to the churches in challenging, counseling, and equipping people to live within biblical norms, whether or not they desire or intend to do so. The report provides insufficient pastoral guidance of that kind, despite the acknowledged need for it in earlier synodical reports.
- 2) The report observes that younger members' experiences and opinions "often show a critical disconnect with the conclusions of the 1973 report and its biblical interpretation" (*Agenda*, p. 396). If younger members of the CRCNA have a moral imagination that is shaped less by God's Word than by cultural influences, that is a four-alarm fire. As the report states, "the church ignores [this] disconnect . . . at its peril" (*Agenda*, p. 396).

Given these two enormous pastoral concerns, the majority report's guidance on "communicating the 1973 position with grace and truth"—to individuals, in church contexts, and in the public arena—is astonishingly sketchy, making up only four pages (*Agenda*, pp. 399-402), most of which spell out things to *avoid*. The same is true of Appendix D (*Agenda*, pp. 425-28), an additional four pages designed to help the church engage in dialogue, but again more concerned with things to avoid than with positive ways to shape the community's moral imagination. In both cases the committee offers points of helpful advice on how to speak with decency and grace (points that are well taken), but on the other hand offers far too little in the way of creative, positive suggestions about how the church may offer faithful guidance to its members and may bear faithful witness to Christ in the world. The majority report almost seems to anticipate and expect this criticism when it says, "The pastoral guidance that we offer in this regard is of a cautionary sort and, we surmise, deeply unsatisfying in many ways" (*Agenda*, p. 396). Unfortunately, the pastoral guidance the majority report offers is not so much unsatisfying as it is unbalanced and incomplete. We are convinced that the church can and must do better. If we have received holy wisdom from God, we need to speak it to one another and to the world.

e. Finally, the majority report offers a very questionable understanding of the extent to which church members (and especially church leaders) are free to disagree with the ethical positions that CRC synods have approved and that are still considered "settled and binding." The majority report hastens to remind us of the judgment expressed by Synod 1975—"that synodical reports which function as pastoral advice on ethical matters remain open to discussion and even disagreement because they are not

confessional matters" (*Agenda*, p. 365). However, the report also immediately makes this concession: "These reports, however, do bind the behavior of the church's members" (*Agenda*, p. 365). We would hasten to add that many of the previous reports that offer pastoral advice do express theological positions. For example, the 1980 report on marriage and divorce (cited in the minority report) contains pastoral advice but also articulates a theological understanding of marriage that was adopted by synod. It seems a stretch to call this a matter that is "open to disagreement." Furthermore, there are always reasonable limits as to how much disagreement is permissible. There are matters in which disagreement is detrimental to the church's ministry and harmful to its witness to the gospel. This is especially true in the case of officebearers in the church, who have a responsibility to subscribe sincerely to approved church doctrines and to teach and act in ways that are consistent with approved church doctrine and practice. When there is serious disagreement, members (and *especially* officebearers) have the opportunity (and the *responsibility*) to bring their disagreements to the church's attention via overtures and gravamina, as the Church Order provides. It seems clear that this committee's mandate requires it to offer pastoral guidance that is consistent with already-approved doctrinal as well as ethical positions. But in fact, the majority report rarely misses an opportunity to point out the diversity of opinion within our own church tradition. It seems obvious that some committee members chafe at their mandate. And whether intentionally or not, this report seems to be laying groundwork for a plurality of approaches to questions of sexuality within the CRC. That does not seem the best way for our church to respond to our pluralistic culture, much less to speak truth to it clearly.

C. Conclusion

It is clear that our concerns are mainly with the majority report, where most of the pastoral guidance is expressed. For the most part, the majority report stayed formally within the boundaries of the mandate given by synod (except as already noted above). However, more than formal compliance with the mandate was necessary. The majority of the committee did not seem to carry out significant aspects of its mandate with enthusiasm, as is evident in the resulting report. The majority report offers advice to the churches that is mostly correct but is uneven, incomplete, and sometimes lacking in imagination. The minority report addresses and corrects many of the majority report's deficiencies and restores some of the balance that was lacking. But even with the addition of that balance, too many flaws remain.

The greatest flaw is that the majority report does not articulate a compelling theological and moral vision on which to base the church's ministry and witness. That may be due (or partly due) to the mandate this committee was given, or to the committee's interpretation of that mandate, or to the actual composition of the committee, or to other factors. Identifying the cause is not so important. But recognizing the problem is essential.

To be clear, we do not wish to question whether the report's authors acted in good faith as servants of the church. We do, however, question whether this report, if adopted (even with the helpful addition of the minority report), will serve the church well. We think it will not. We think there is much good in both reports, and we would not care to see all of that work wasted. Rather, we would

like to see our church take what is already useful in the two reports, build upon that work, add whatever may be lacking, and in this way equip ourselves to be the salt and light that Jesus has already declared us to be. That's what our church needs, and that's what the world needs.

The minority report made the point that is probably most important of all. We need a cogent and compelling theological and moral vision, and without that vision we will be in a terrible position. Given where we now stand, our church will have to speak a loving and gentle, yet firm, "no" to same-sex marriage—both in responding to the culture and in discipling our own members. If *all* we have to say is "no," we will have a thoroughly unpalatable message. And more importantly, we will not be faithful witnesses to the God who has entrusted to us the keys of the kingdom, and to the task of being agents of *shalom* (peacemakers). We have been entrusted with a positive and redemptive vision for humanity and for all human beings. We need to articulate that vision clearly and compellingly.

This is a time that will define our church and our culture, our ministry and our moment. As one of the report's authors recently said in an interview, "Religion can take something intended to be life-giving and really mess it up." (http://www.ontopmag.com/article/22103/Former_Ex_Gay_Head_Wendy_Gritter_Rejects_Conversion_Therapy_Marries_Gay_Couple)

We heartily agree. That is a strong biblical theme: the whole human race, in all the spheres of its endeavor, has a great capacity to take things that God intends to be life-giving and really mess them up. In the sphere of the Christian church—both in our discipleship of members and in our engagement of the culture we live in—we must not be guilty of that. We need to be sure of our message and speak it compellingly. So much is at stake. We need to get this right. The report that has been presented to the churches and that will be considered by synod is helpful in many ways. But it simply does not offer enough to meet our present needs. It does not adequately equip us to speak with the right measure of conviction and compassion to our culture. We are called to speak the *truth* in *love*, and we cannot afford to compromise either of those heaven-sent gifts.

II. Overture

Classis Wisconsin, therefore, overtures synod

A. To receive the study committee report for information, but not to adopt it or recommend it as synodically approved pastoral advice to the churches.

Grounds:

1. The majority report is deficient in a number of significant ways, as observed above. The majority report does not offer an adequate understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage for our current context. And despite this committee's explicit mandate, the majority report does not provide adequate guidance to equip the church for its pastoral ministry and its witness to the culture.
2. The minority report addresses and corrects some of these deficiencies, but even with the adoption of the minority report not all of those deficiencies would be addressed. The mandate remains unfulfilled.

B. To dismiss the current committee with thanks for its members' investment of time and effort.

Grounds:

1. The committee went about as far as it could go, given the constraints of its mandate and the disposition of its membership.
2. The committee was not able to produce a unified report and is not likely to do so.
3. The committee deserves the thanks of the church for the time and effort it invested and for the genuinely good work it produced.

C. To reaffirm the CRC's current biblical definition of marriage.

Grounds:

1. In the current cultural context, so rapidly changing, the church ought to offer a clear and biblical view of marriage and be faithful to that view.
2. The report indicated that there is a wide range of opinion within the church, and synod would serve the churches well to reaffirm and clarify the church's position.
3. This is especially necessary, given the outspoken disagreement and opposition to the CRC's current position by church leaders and even by members of the committee.

D. To specify that CRC ministers and other CRC officebearers may not officiate at same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Grounds:

1. The Church Order bars pastors from officiating at weddings that conflict with the Word of God. According to the CRC's current understanding of marriage, same-sex marriage is in conflict with the Word of God.
2. Since the church's ministry and witness to the culture are at stake, this constraint should extend to other church leaders whom the state may permit to officiate at weddings.

E. To adopt the following Supplement to Church Order Article 69-c:

Proposed Supplement, Article 69-c

Ministers and other CRCNA officebearers may not officiate at same-sex weddings, since our church understands such marriages to be in conflict with the Word of God.

Grounds:

1. Even though it should go without saying that ministers and other officebearers may not officiate at same-sex marriage ceremonies unless and until the church changes its theological and ethical views, some CRC leaders have already felt free to officiate at same-sex weddings, and this clarification is therefore necessary.
2. In some jurisdictions, other officebearers (besides ministers) may be permitted to officiate at weddings, and the Church Order ought to address this.

F. To constitute a new study committee mandated to do the following:

1. Provide a complete biblical and theological examination of embodied human sexuality, including (a) an exploration of what it means to bear God's image in our maleness and femaleness, and in the relationship between the two embodied human genders, and (b) a thorough examination of the New Testament

understanding of embodied life in the present age and of life in the body of Christ, specifically including marriage, singleness, sexuality, and celibacy.

Grounds:

- a. A sound, careful, and credible biblical and theological framework is needed as a basis for the church's pastoral ministry and witness to the culture.
 - b. The earlier reports (1973 and 2002), while sound and careful, do not seem current to many members due to their age, language, and other issues.
 - c. Any study of human sexuality ought to explore the way God's image is expressed in the fruitful relationship of male and female, a primary place where God bestows blessing upon humanity. This rich biblical teaching is foundational not only to our understanding of marriage but also to our understanding of human nature. This foundation must be the basis of our pastoral ministry to all persons within the context of singleness, marriage, gender, and sexuality, and of our witness to the fallen world.
 - d. The New Testament has a particular, eschatologically charged understanding of embodied life. This is the larger framework within which the church and its members need to understand issues of human sexuality.
 - e. Our members, particularly younger members, need to be equipped with the kind of thoroughly biblical understanding of sexuality that we envision in order to live holy lives and to bear faithful witness in our broken culture and our fallen world.
2. Serve the church with pastoral advice based on that biblical and theological examination of embodied human sexuality.

Grounds:

- a. The current committee's mandate was to provide advice of this nature.
 - b. The church is in great need of clear guidance in our rapidly shifting cultural landscape.
 - c. Younger members in particular, as noted in the present report, are in need of this theological and pastoral guidance.
3. Draw on the expertise of Calvin Theological Seminary faculty. (Classis Wisconsin nominates several members of that faculty: Dr. John Cooper from Philosophical Theology, Dr. Jeff Weima from New Testament, Asst. Professor Sarah Schreiber or Dr. Michael Williams from Old Testament, Dr. Mary Vandenberg from Systematic Theology, Dr. Cory Willson from Missiology and Missional Ministry, Dr. Lyle Bierma from Historical Theology, and Lecturer Danjuma Gibson from Pastoral Care.)

Grounds:

- a. Since a sound, careful, and credible biblical and theological framework is needed as a basis for the church's pastoral ministry and its witness to the culture, it would be wise to draw on the recognized theological and pastoral expertise of people the church has already examined regarding their faithfulness, and who are consecrated servants of the church—namely, the faculty of our denominational seminary.
- b. The issues are complex enough that we need to draw on the expertise of people in a variety of theological disciplines, and from a variety

of perspectives. Moreover, there is no aspect of the church's life and mission that is not affected by these matters.

- c. The seminary faculty we are nominating offer reasonable racial, gender, and age diversity within the seminary faculty.
 - d. Many of the seminary faculty we are nominating also have pastoral experience.
4. Include, if possible, one member from among the previous committee's majority report's authors and one member from among the previous committee's minority report's authors.

Grounds:

- a. Some continuity between the two committees would be desirable to make the most of the work already done.
 - b. The diversity of perspectives may be a useful representation of the diversity of perspectives among church members (noted in the report).
5. Draw on the expertise and experience of minority communities in the CRC, and seek to include minority members on the committee.

Grounds:

- a. This committee needs to be able to understand and address the pastoral needs of all persons and communities within the CRC.
 - b. The current report makes some assumptions about pastoral care to members of those communities that may be perceived as uninformed, condescending, or dismissive to members of those communities. We need to make sure that will not happen again.
6. Draw on the expertise and experience of CRC members who deal personally with same-sex attraction and issues of gender identity, and seek to include them as members on the committee.

Grounds:

- a. This committee needs to be able to understand and address the pastoral needs of all persons and communities within the CRC.
- b. We must avoid making assumptions about pastoral care to such members that is (or may be perceived as) uninformed, condescending, or dismissive to those members.

Note: One could imagine several ways in which implementing this provision might be problematic:

- Many people who deal personally with same-sex attraction and issues of gender identity have left the CRC because of its stance on these matters.
- Not all of the people who deal personally with same-sex attraction and issues of gender identity wish to be identified as such.
- On the other hand, many people who deal personally with same-sex attraction and issues of gender identity actively wish and work to see the CRC change its stance.
- There are people who deal personally with same-sex attraction and issues of gender identity and who agree with the CRC's stance but who feel marginalized in the current discussions.

This list is representative, not exhaustive. There may well be other challenges. But the main point is this: if we want our church to be credible and hospitable to all its members, and if we want to lay a solid and plausible foundation for our mission and our witness to the culture, we cannot fail to listen as carefully as we are able to the people most concerned.

7. Include in the new committee's membership at least a majority of members who support the CRC's current biblical understanding of marriage.

Grounds:

- a. While a Reformed church (ecclesia Reformata) is always willing to reconsider its positions in the light of God's Word (semper Reformanda secundum verbum Dei), the normal place to start is with people who affirm the church's current theological and ethical positions. We would not, for example, be likely to form a committee to study the doctrine of election (to name a theological issue) or abortion (to name an ethical issue) composed of a majority of people who did not agree with the church's current position.
- b. A majority of the current committee's membership did not seem to support the CRC's approved positions about marriage and sexuality (in fact, some have been outspoken against these positions), and this hampered the committee's ability to serve the church according to its mandate.

Note: A case could be made for 100 percent agreement. Support of the church's doctrinal and ethical positions is normally assumed on the part of church leaders, since the Church Order provides the means for them to ask the church to review its positions via overtures and gravamina. However, some demonstrable willingness to listen to good-faith dissent seems advisable in order to fulfill the spirit of "semper Reformanda"; thus we have not asked synod to ensure that 100 percent of the committee's members endorse the CRC's current position.

8. That synod, prior to approving nominees to this committee, interview all nominees (or seek written statements from them), asking them to address the following issues: (a) what they think of the CRC's current positions on marriage and human sexuality, (b) what they understand the church's greatest pastoral concerns to be in the areas of marriage and human sexuality, and (c) what the church most needs in order to speak the truth of the gospel into our diverse North American culture.

Grounds:

- a. As the body that approves the membership of this committee, synod should put itself in the best possible position to ensure that the committee is constituted in such a way that it can reasonably be expected to fulfill its mandate and serve the church. This information will help make that so.
- b. Since this overture will be published in the agenda for synod, the churches and classes will have sufficient time to seek nominees for this committee and present them to synod.

G. To instruct the churches not to take any action that is inconsistent with the denomination's current understanding of marriage and sexuality in the realm of wedding ceremonies, baptisms, welcoming people into membership, or calling members into leadership positions until a future synod has received, considered, and acted upon the new committee's report.

Grounds:

1. The unity of the church and of its witness to the culture is at stake.
2. This is the “decent and orderly” way to consider matters of serious concern to the churches, as our polity requires.
3. Synod should discourage change that comes via local or individual activism rather than by collective mutual discernment of God’s will.
4. Some parts of the current study committee report seemed to lean toward a local option, and synod ought to address this clearly.

Classis Wisconsin
Kenneth Prol, stated clerk

Overture 32: Do Not Adopt the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

As part of the synodical study to provide pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage, Synod 2013 instructed the committee

to consult extensively with pastors in Canada and the United States, **members of different ethnic minorities**, and others who have a broad range of experience and expertise (i.e., biblical, pastoral, ethnic) **to both inform and provide feedback** regarding the work of the committee.

(Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 643-44)

After consulting with a “spectrum” of ethnic minorities, the committee concluded that ethnic minorities supported the CRC’s 1973 position on same-sex attraction, but then the committee went on to report:

In the case of immigrant minority persons, first-generation immigrants and those who have spent less time in North America were more likely to consider homosexuality in a wholly negative light. Same-sex oriented persons who are also ethnic minority may need significant pastoral support and enfolding.

(Agenda for Synod 2016, p. 396)

Homosexuality not only is “a condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world” (CRCNA Position Statement concerning Homosexuality <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/homosexuality>). It is, at its core, sinful by nature because human beings are, by nature, sinful. David in Psalm 51: 5 writes, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” As such, the only thing that sinful human beings are deserving of is the full wrath of God on sin. However, God in his great love and mercy toward his imagebearers chose to redeem sinful humanity by making a promise that one day he would rescue us from sin and death.

Thus, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord has done this. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has rescued us from sin and death, and he now calls all people, everywhere, to repent of sin, homosexuality included, and be transformed by the power of the gospel. Likewise, the apostle Paul writes concerning deliverance from sin, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, *nor men who practice homosexuality*, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such*

were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Therefore, even though we are fully deserving of God’s judgment on our sin because we are sinful by nature, the good news of the Bible is that God brings his judgment on his Son instead and cleanses us of all unrighteousness. The Lord now accepts us not because of who we are (sinful human beings) and what we do, but he accepts us on the merits of what Jesus has done on our behalf and on the sinless nature of Christ alone. Thus, in the person of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are transformed into a new creation, and we are no longer slaves to our sinful nature, homosexuality included.

With that being said, the report that came out regarding pastoral guidance on homosexuality and same-sex unions does not offer any hope of the gospel. It does not offer any indication of the transforming power of the gospel to people who live in sin. And thus the report does not offer any common ground in the gospel upon which all cultures must agree concerning homosexuality and same-sex unions, and by suggesting that homosexuality is exclusively a “North American” issue, it further divides the church on this matter especially when it comes to the ethnic minorities in the CRC. By doing so, the report has unknowingly dismissed any opportunity to learn from, be corrected by, and grow in unity with the ethnic minority community in the CRC concerning this issue.

II. Concerns

While Classis Holland appreciates the work that the committee has done to address the issue of same-sex unions both in the church and in the culture in general, we find its conclusion discouraging and dismissive, especially with regard to ethnic minorities in the CRC. The report implies that the issue of homosexuality and same-sex unions is exclusive to North America and thus inadvertently dismisses the biblical interpretation and concerns of ethnic minority individuals and ethnic minority churches in the CRC. An individual’s “time in North America” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 396) should have no bearing on whether or not the issue of homosexuality and same-sex unions should be seen in a positive or negative light; rather, one’s consideration of the issue has to be grounded in what the Bible says about marriage and sexuality. The report has failed to do this. Instead the report makes the claim that the CRC’s 1973 position, the “biblical position,” the position that ethnic minority churches agree with, restricted the committee’s work, and thus the report does not take the concerns of the ethnic minority community on this issue seriously.

The report also implies that ethnic minority individuals “who have spent less time in North America” are ill-equipped to shepherd and care for other ethnic minorities who may be struggling with same-sex attraction, and because of this, the report also unintentionally implies that “same-sex oriented persons who are also ethnic minority” need more pastoral support and enfolding because their own culture and people are not capable of providing this to them. As a result, the report can mistakenly be interpreted as saying that the responsibility to “support” and “unfold” such individuals then lies with the “white” churches who have spent more time struggling with this issue. If this is the case, then this conclusion does not take into account the transforming power of the gospel as it enters into different cultures and therefore is detrimental to the unity and flourishing of all cultures within and outside of the CRC, because it seems to suggest that one culture is superior to another.

Finally, the only minority group mentioned in the report are Asians. There is no mention of African Americans, Hispanics, or Native Americans in the report. For example, in Appendix A under “Summary of Survey Findings” the only ethnic minority group cited in the survey was Asian/Pacific Islander (pp. 407, 409). Thus the report can imply that only Asians view the issue of homosexuality and same-sex unions in a negative light. This is simply not true. By not including its findings from the African American, Hispanic, and Native American cultures, the report has silenced the voices from these communities and has also done a great disservice to the church and what the church can learn from these groups as well.

III. Overture

Classis Holland overtures Synod 2016 to not adopt the majority or minority reports of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage and asks synod to acknowledge the report’s dismissive tone toward the church’s ethnic minority community.

Grounds:

1. The report can be read as being divisive and detrimental to the unity of the church when it unintentionally implies that homosexuality is a “North American” issue. The issue of homosexuality deals with human sinfulness. The report should have included a biblical foundation from which it could speak into all cultures concerning this issue.
2. The report is dismissive of the concerns of ethnic minority churches, failing to mention how African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans view this issue.
3. The report fails to consider how the ethnic majority church can benefit and learn from the experience and perspective of the ethnic minority community when it comes to the issue of homosexuality and same-sex unions.

Classis Holland
Calvin Hoogstra, acting stated clerk

Overture 33: Do Not Adopt the Report of the Study Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

Summary Outline

I. Introduction

II. The importance of the church-state question

III. The committee’s flawed definition of principled pluralism (sphere sovereignty)

- A. The parameters of a Reformed framework were determined by our comfort rather than by objective standards.
- B. The definition of *Reformed* that is employed is circumstantial rather than either historical or theological.
The committee’s *Reformed framework* leads us to a position that is not historically or theologically Reformed, as it restricts the church’s voice in the political arena to nonscriptural arguments.
 - a. Historically Reformed examples contrary to their assertion

- 1) Kuyper
- 2) Calvin
- b. American historical examples contrary to their assertion
 - 1) The Abolitionist Movement's use of arguments from Scripture against slavery
 - 2) The arguments from Scripture employed by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., during the civil rights era
- c. Theologically Reformed example contrary to their assertion
 - Belgic Confession, Article 36
- C. The committee's new understanding of principled pluralism confuses the need for government to be *confessionally* neutral with the notion of the need for the state to be *religiously* or *morally* neutral.
 - This is both impossible and foolish
 - Historically Reformed example to counter their assertion
 - Kuyper

IV. The results of the committee's misunderstanding and misapplication of sphere sovereignty lead to many unwise pieces of pastoral advice in the report

- A. Its affirmation of the state's new definition of marriage (civil marriage)
- B. Its encouragement to engage those in these relationships as positively as possible, ignoring the sin, upon which these relationships are fundamentally based
- C. Its warnings regarding the use of Scripture texts that clearly call those engaged in homosexual activity to repentance
- D. Its warnings regarding the use of formal church discipline in such cases
- E. Its warnings against claiming that traditional (biblical) marriage is superior to same-sex marriage

V. Conclusion

VI. Overture

I. Introduction

The Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage has provided synod with a report that begins by outlining an understanding of the church-state relationship that is neither historically nor theologically Reformed. This misguided understanding restrains the church from speaking prophetically from the Scriptures in both the state and the church, effectively emptying the gospel of its power to redeem both people and culture. The evidence of this is seen, first, in the report's explanation of principled pluralism (sphere sovereignty) and, second, in the specific recommendations it makes regarding the ministry of the church in addressing the same-sex marriage issue. The summary outline above provides a brief explanation of our position.

II. The importance of the church-state question

The question of the relationship between church and state is of the highest importance for any society—ancient, medieval, or modern. Where the two are blended together, the result is theocracy and the eventual binding of the individual conscience, leading to punishment and even death for all who fail to share the faith of the sovereign.

Such was the case for Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in ancient Babylon, leading to their need to face both the lions' den and the fiery furnace, respectively. This was also the case during the Middle Ages, leading to the Spanish Inquisition on mainland Europe, and the enduring legacy of Bloody Mary, Queen I of England, who burned some 300 Protestants at the stake during her short reign for their refusal to convert to Catholicism. Even today we need look no further than the new Islamic Caliphate, taking shape under the direction of ISIS, which is forging a bloody path everywhere its theocratic ideology takes hold. The blending of church and state has a long and bloody history.

However, to separate the church and state too much leads to its own deadly results. Such a course is of more modern design, yet the examples and evidences of the destruction that it brings are many. Witness the Reign of Terror that followed immediately after the onset of the French Revolution with its tens of thousands of executions—executions of those considered to be “enemies of the revolution”—a revolution centered in many ways on the removal of God from public life. Add to that the many communistic regimes of the 20th and 21st centuries whose rejection of the voice and teaching of the Christian church have brought untold suffering and death upon millions. From Stalinist Russia, to Mao's Cultural Revolution in China, to the killing fields of Cambodia under Pol Pot, all the way to the extreme brutality of North Korea today, the evidence is overwhelming that the elimination of the voice of the Christian church in relationship to the ideologies and activities of the state brings a growing, but certain, destruction to human culture and society.

For these reasons it is commendable that the study committee sought to cast the issue of same-sex marriage within the proper boundaries of the critically important relationship of church and state. While no one believes that the church's position on this issue is likely to immediately bring about any reign of terror on the order of those listed above, the church does bear clear responsibility before God to work in ways that will help to ensure stability and true justice in society rather than to help contribute in any way to its weakening or destruction, either through theocracy or atheistic ideology.

The problem, however, is that while the committee rightfully identified this as a fundamental aspect of this discussion, it failed to provide an accurate definition of the concept of sphere sovereignty, which guides us here—a genuinely Reformed concept—a concept that has blessed many millions of people who have lived in the modern nations which have employed it—nations that have been largely peaceful, stable, virtuous, and prosperous.

In fact, the understanding of sphere sovereignty that the committee employed led them to conclusions and recommendations that will eventually silence the church of its prophetic voice, both inside and outside the church. And without the prophetic voice of the church speaking into the other spheres of society, particularly the state, fallen human society, guided by unredeemed human reason alone, will move ever more resolutely toward another cycle of tyranny and human oppression.

III. The committee's flawed definition of principled pluralism (sphere sovereignty)

While the committee introduces the concept of principled pluralism in section III, B of its report, a more significant engagement with the concept is unpacked for us in the report's Appendix C: Two Views of Church and State. We focus our

attention here first rather than at the body of the report, since it is here in Appendix C that the committee reveals to us more fully the understanding of principled pluralism that guided it throughout its work and its report. For clarity, we quote it at length.

During the committee's listening session at Synod 2015, delegates were asked to consider four options describing the relationship between the church and the state regarding marriage. The four options offer a spectrum of views that have been found within the Christian church. The options discussed were as follows:

1. Marriage is fundamentally a religious institution. The state should recognize the religious nature of marriage and only authorize marriage as understood by religious authority.
2. Marriage as the covenantal union of a man and a woman is grounded both religiously and by proper recognition of the created order. The state, even if it attempts to be religiously neutral, makes a profound error when it ignores what nature itself teaches, and authorizes civil same-sex marriage.
3. Both the state (civil government) and the church have a direct interest in family structure and well-being, but these interests are not identical. Both the state and the church have latitude (within limits) to define marriage to pursue their legitimate interests, even though those interests may not be the same. The state and the church may end up with different definitions of marriage.
4. The church does not tell civil authority what to do. The church simply defines marriage as it finds itself compelled by Scripture and orders its internal life as Scripture and the gospel requires. What the state does is the state's business.

(Agenda for Synod 2016, pp. 421-22)

The committee then excludes both options 1 and 4 for our consideration as guiding principles as they are both judged to be inconsistent with a Reformed framework, claiming that option 1 is of medieval Roman Catholic origin and that option 4 is Anabaptist. However, both options 2 and 3, it claims, do fit into the aforementioned Reformed framework. It states,

Options 2 and 3 both fit within a Reformed framework, with Option 2 tapping into the Reformed concept of creation order to argue for society-wide acknowledgment that marriage is a gendered and biologically complementary relationship between a man and a woman. While society is pluralistic and civil government should recognize this reality, there are limits to pluralism that are evident within the ordering of creation itself. Option 3, on the other hand, allows for a greater distinction between religious and civil purposes of marriage, and suggests that pluralism in combination with sphere sovereignty allows the state latitude to define marriage in terms different from those of the church. The majority of 2015 synodical delegates identified either Option 2 or Option 3 as the one with which they were most comfortable.

(Agenda, p. 422)

We have several concerns with this section of the committee's report, and we believe that it is the problems located here that lead to the misguided direction the report takes with reference to its topic: pastoral guidance re same-sex marriage.

The first concern we have with this aspect of the report is that it presents opinions of personal comfort as if they were objective statements of scholarly fact. To say that "the majority of 2015 synodical delegates identified either Option 2 or Option 3 as the one with which they were most comfortable" (emphasis added) does not establish either of those two opinions as necessarily *Reformed*. Given that each of the delegates at Synod 2015 was either an elder or a minister in the Christian Reformed Church, one might assume that each has a well-formed understanding of what a proper Reformed position is on the question of the relationship

between church and state, specifically as it regards the issue of same-sex marriage. However, contemporary belief among Reformed Christians on the proper relationship between church and state varies considerably from person to person and often seems to change depending on which specific public policy issue is in question at the moment.

Furthermore, the issue of same-sex marriage, and the intense accompanying public pressure that it brings with it, can very easily “make us more comfortable” with a position that seems to remove us from the focus of that public scrutiny, even if that position is not historically or theologically Reformed. The claim that the committee makes—that options 2 and 3 both fit within a Reformed framework simply because they were the two that most of the synodical delegates to Synod 2015 felt most comfortable with—is not only seriously flawed in its approach to establishing a genuinely Reformed position on this question; it also creates the idea in the mind of the reader that if the report proceeds on either of these two paths (options 2 or 3), it will be operating on firm *Reformed* ground. We do not believe that this is the case.

The second concern we have with this aspect of the committee’s report, which flows directly from the first, is that it uses the term *Reformed* in what seems to be more of a circumstantial way than it does in either a historical or theological way. In other words, options 2 and 3 are deemed within a “Reformed framework” because a lot of people who belong to the Christian Reformed Church and who were delegated to Synod 2015 are comfortable with them. These positions then are Reformed *circumstantially*: because a lot of “Reformed” people hold them. This is very uncertain footing from which to be deciding issues of this magnitude.

Furthermore, as the report unfolds, we find that this circumstantial definition of a Reformed position is not simply the result of a less-than-careful way of establishing it, but is rather being chosen consciously, specifically in contrast to what one might call a *historically* Reformed position on the church-state question.

With regard to option 2, the report rightly acknowledges that it is closer to what might be called a *historically* Reformed position. It reads,

The first line of argument [Option 2] has the authority of the historical Reformed tradition underlying it. Going back to John Calvin, the Reformed tradition understood marriage to be founded on both the teachings of Scripture *and* the evidences of creation. These are not separate authorities; rather, the testimonies of Scripture regarding marital relationships echo the observational reflections of persons familiar with the workings of the created world and human society.

Whereas Calvin would have used the language of “natural law”—this is not a matter in which he would deviate from Roman Catholic theology—succeeding generations of Reformed theologians were to speak of creation orders, or the ordering of creation. In creating the world, God established certain structures and institutions through which the divine will for society is manifest. Marriage is one such institution. Marriage as an institution between a man and a woman is grounded biologically and socially as well as biblically.

(*Agenda*, p. 423)

Here then, we have what the committee understands to be the historically Reformed position, both (presumably) with regard to the church-state issue in general and with regard to the specific role of the state in the institution of marriage. Yet it is precisely this historically Reformed position from which the committee seeks to distance us. For shortly afterward it states,

For others within the Reformed tradition, however, there is uneasiness at the confidence and the structural specificity of the creation order tradition. The Reformed tradition exists in a different social, political, and cultural context today than it did in Calvin's Geneva or, for that matter, at the height of the Kuyperian era of the late 1800s. It has been shaped by historical experience and chastened by missteps along the way. It understands the ordering of creation by God in less rigid terms than in traditional Reformed theology, although it takes seriously the biological and social character of human life and relationships.

(*Agenda*, p. 424)

First, we note that rather than speaking in historical terms at all, the committee begins to speak in contemporary terms. The committee does not say that throughout history there were some Reformed thinkers who *had* "uneasiness at the confidence and the structural specificity of the creation order tradition." Rather, the committee is stating that there are those among us today who have this uneasiness.

This tells us, in no uncertain terms, that the committee sees this as a moment of significant *change* in the historical development of Reformed thought. We are not then being presented with two options (options 2 and 3) that are both commonly understood to be within the *historically* Reformed framework. We are being presented with two options that are both held by contemporary Reformed believers, one that they present as the historically Reformed position and one that is not—one that is new—one that is presented to us as a new direction for the church to take in the church-state question (and specifically as it relates to same-sex marriage).

Now, one might well expect that after such a suggestion the committee would embark on an examination of the theology that was the foundation for the historically Reformed position, not only to show its potential uncertainties or weaknesses, but also to show how this new direction is supported by a better Reformed theological examination of the issue. However, this does not happen. In fact, no theological justification is given either for our move away from that which is presented as the historically Reformed position or for the suggested move toward a new one. Rather, the committee simply goes on to mention two 20th century examples of the aforementioned "missteps" that the historically Reformed approach to the church-state relationship supposedly led to, which it believes should be more than enough to give us pause in employing that approach in our current day—namely, the contribution of Lutheranism in the evils of the German Nazis and the role of Reformed theology in justifying the evils of apartheid.

We find these examples both surprising and troubling. First, it is troubling that they are not explained in any way, but simply tossed onto the table as though we will all readily acknowledge the point. But of greater concern is that a close examination of these examples will show that they were not in fact the result of the church following the approach to the church-state question that is summarized in option 2—quite the opposite. But we will address that point later.

Our primary concern at this point is the level of uncertainty that the committee believes many (and we expect, they themselves) have on the certainty of the evidence related to God's creational design for marriage. As quoted above, these contemporary Reformed thinkers have great uneasiness as to "the **structural specificity** of the creation order tradition," and as such they "understand the ordering of creation by God **in less rigid terms** than in traditional Reformed theology."

In the context of our broader discussion, then, we are to understand that many within our Reformed circles are uncertain as to the empirical, creational evidence

that God's structural design for marriage in creation was that marriage was to be an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. In summary, the concern is that this conclusion might be *too rigid* in its *structural specificity*.

This is deeply troubling, in and of itself, but even more troubling is the reason why the committee finds itself in the uneasy position of needing to make this argument purely from the empirical creational evidence: it believes that the church's argument on this issue in the realm of the state *must not include arguments from Scripture*.

As it states in Appendix C,

Within the church, of course, Scripture stands supreme. Within the political arena, however, a Reformed argument on marriage is not an argument from Scripture. It is an argument from shared experience of and reflection on creation. It argues from evidences—sociological, biological, political.

(*Agenda*, p. 424)

Here again we have confusion as to the meaning of the word *Reformed*. Is it the contention of the committee that to use an argument from Scripture in the political arena is not *historically* Reformed, not *theologically* Reformed, or just not *circumstantially* Reformed (in other words, not one that many Reformed Christians would be "comfortable with" today)? It seems that it is the latter.

A rather quick examination of the historical record will show that such a belief is certainly not *historically* Reformed. Abraham Kuyper, upon the 25th anniversary as editor of *De Standaard*, stated clearly his position:

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.¹

God's holy ordinances, to which both the Bible and creation bear witness, were to be *carved into the conscience of the nation*, including the state, "for the good of the people."

Now, Kuyper did not desire to bring this about through the overstepping of the rightful authority of the state by a national church. It was not to be done through a theocracy of coercion. Rather, he believed that the church (and individual Christians) should so preach the holy ordinances of God, and call those in authority to obedience to those ordinances, that those in authority would guide the nation according to God's ordinances by the guiding power of their own consciences. In other words, the role of the church in society was not to take over the sphere of the state, but it was to speak the truth of God to those who hold positions of authority in the state. For he was convinced that the only decisions and laws that can bring good to the people are those that are drawn, ultimately, from the Word of God.

He made this belief more certain in his Antirevolutionary Party platform, as John Bolt has observed:

¹ John Hendrik de Vries, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961), p. iii.

In the third article of the Antirevolutionary Party platform, *Ons Program*, he formulated his vision in this way: “[The Antirevolutionary Party] also confesses [that] the eternal principles of God’s Word [are applicable] in the realm of the state. [This is true] in the sense that the authority of the state is bound by God’s ordinances, not directly, not even by direct proclamations of any church, but only via the consciences of persons in positions of authority.”²

Though outside its own sphere the church does not speak only from Scripture; still its *main* argument regarding issues of morality in the political arena is scriptural. The church makes that scriptural argument not through proclamations of authoritative coercion, but through passionate persuasion—committing itself then, as Paul did in his ministry, “to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2).

But Kuypers was not alone in this position. Calvin writes in the *Institutes*,

... when David says, ‘Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth;’ “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry” (Psalm ii. 10, 12), he does not order them to lay aside their authority and return to private life, but to make the power with which they are invested subject to Christ, that he may rule over all.³

If God, through the pen of David, directly addresses the kings and judges of the earth in Psalm 2, to subject their authority to Christ, why would the church fail to do the same? A bit later Calvin adds,

This consideration ought to be constantly present to the minds of magistrates, since it is fitted to furnish a strong stimulus to the discharge of duty, and also afford singular consolation, smoothing the difficulties of their office, which are certainly numerous and weighty. What zeal for integrity, prudence, meekness, continence, and innocence, ought to sway those who know that they have been appointed ministers of the divine justice! How will they dare to admit iniquity to their tribunal, when they are told that it is the throne of the living God? How will they venture to pronounce an unjust sentence with that mouth which they understand to be an ordained organ of divine truth? With what conscience will they subscribe impious decrees with that hand which they know has been appointed to write the acts of God? In a word, if they remember that they are the vicegerents of God, it behooves them to watch with all care, diligence, and industry, that they may in themselves exhibit a kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice.⁴

There is only one way for the magistrate to be “told” these things (as Calvin refers in the above quote), and that is for the voice of the church to proclaim them to him.

And, finally, Calvin speaks of the nature of *just* civil laws—that while specific laws may differ from nation to nation, for laws to be truly just—that is, to establish equity among all people—they must be founded on God’s moral law, revealed in Scripture.

As constitutions have some circumstances on which they partly depend, there is nothing to prevent their diversity, provided they all alike aim at equity as their end. Now, as it is evident that the law of God which we call moral, is nothing else than the testimony of natural law, and of that conscience which God has engraven on the minds of men, the whole of this equity of which we now speak is prescribed in it. Hence it alone ought to be the aim, the rule, and the end of all laws. Wherever laws are formed after this rule, directed to this aim, and restricted to this end, there is no

² John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 329.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (4, 20, 5).

⁴ *Ibid.* (4, 20, 6).

reason why they should be disapproved by us, however much they may differ from the Jewish law, or from each other (August. de Civit. Dei, Lib. xix. c. 17).⁵

Any law, then, that is not in conformity with God's moral law cannot be truly just.

It was the very belief that magistrates were both called and answerable to God to conduct their affairs according to the divine law (the law that is above them), and the practice of the church in reminding them of the same, that led to the development of the very political, religious, and economic freedoms we enjoy today. Eliminating, or even restraining, this activity of the church will have the opposite effect on all of those freedoms.

Now, while the quotations above by Kuyper and Calvin do not themselves establish the testimony of the moral law of God on the issue of same-sex marriage, they do establish without question that in the political arena, the historical Reformed argument on any moral issue was indeed an argument from Scripture. A Reformed argument in the political realm is often more than that—it seriously takes into consideration evidences of the created order—but to eliminate the testimony of the Scriptures from the public voice of the church is to eliminate the voice of the Creator from discussions regarding his creation.

This is of the greatest concern to us, for in eliminating the voice of the Scriptures from the public square we ignore the central role that the voice of Scripture has had in some of the most significant issues of justice in the history of North America. Not only was Scripture one of the most frequent guides to those who founded our nation, Scripture was also at the heart of the arguments made against the institution of slavery among the abolitionists, as well as those that were later made against segregation by leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

These examples remind us of one of the examples that the committee gave for departing from our historically Reformed view of our relationship to the state: South African apartheid and the assertion that it was defended with Reformed theology, for they are somewhat similar.

While Scripture is sometimes misused in the public square, as it is in the church, it is incumbent on faithful Christians and faithful churches to publically correct those wrongs with true scriptural teaching. While there were those in the antebellum South who tried to use various Scripture passages to affirm the institution of slavery, it was a thorough examination of the true biblical teaching on slavery by men like Theodore Dwight Weld that won the day. A central part of the role of the church is to defend the honor of God and his Word when it is falsely used to affirm sinful activities among men. Whatever the role of Reformed theology may have been in affirming the evils of South African apartheid, we are sure that this was a false use of Reformed theology. If the church is not going to correct these falsehoods from Scripture in the public square, who will? This example, then, we see as a powerful argument in favor of the use of Scripture in the political arena, not one in favor of its absence.

This same dynamic was played out during the civil rights era, where men like Martin Luther King, Jr., routinely used Scripture to address the cultural evil of segregation. Silencing the church's scriptural witness in the public square on moral issues is the single most terrifying piece of advice that the church could be given, in our opinion.

⁵ *Ibid.* (4, 20, 16).

The position of the study committee, then, is definitively not *historically* Reformed; nor is its position *theologically* Reformed. This we can see very clearly in the testimony of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession.

*We believe that
because of the depravity of the human race
our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.
He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies
so that human lawlessness may be restrained
and that everything may be conducted in good order
among human beings.*

*For that purpose he has placed the sword
in the hands of the government,
to punish evil people
and protect the good.*

*And being called in this manner
to contribute to the advancement of a society
that is pleasing to God,
the civil rulers have the task,
subject to God's law,
of removing every obstacle
to the preaching of the gospel
and to every aspect of divine worship.*

*They should do this
while completely refraining from every tendency
toward exercising absolute authority,
and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them,
with the means belonging to them.*

*They should do it in order that
the Word of God may have free course;
the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress;
and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.*

*Moreover everyone,
regardless of status, condition, or rank,
must be subject to the government,
and pay taxes,
and hold its representatives in honor and respect,
and obey them in all things that are not in conflict
with God's Word,
praying for them
that the Lord may be willing to lead them
in all their ways
and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life
in all piety and decency.*

While many aspects of this article are instructive and warrant their own reflection, we want simply to draw your attention to the shaded paragraph. For there we see four important things. First, we see that the civil rulers are called to contribute to a society that is pleasing to God. How else can a civil ruler know if his work is pleasing to God unless he is being guided by the Word of God? Some may suggest that civil rulers would be guided by common grace and the faculties of human reason. Certainly these play a role. But can we conceive of a situation in which God would lead the civil rulers, purely by human reason, aided by common grace, to a position on a moral issue that is contrary to God's revealed

will in the special grace of his Holy Word? Such a conception would defy logic and basic common sense.

Second, it states that the task of the civil ruler is subject to God's law. There is a law above civil rulers—a law that they themselves must follow—and it is God's law—his moral law.

Third, we are told here that the civil rulers are to remove every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel. If the state, however, should affirm an activity that the Scriptures declare to be sinful, even enshrine that activity by civil law, such a civil declaration would create a significant barrier to the preaching of the gospel. For a central call of the gospel is the call to repentance of sin. Such civil declarations are already creating this barrier in certain localities where those who preach about the sinfulness of homosexual activity have been charged with hate crimes. Making the gospel a hate crime is certainly a barrier to its being preached.

Fourth, the civil rulers are to be removing all barriers to "every aspect of divine worship." Here, certainly, the church intends every aspect of life, which is an outgrowth of our worship of God—a broad, Romans 12:1-2 understanding of worship. This then would include our vocations, such as cake decorating or photography. If the government were to affirm a sinful practice as no longer sinful, it could easily create situations in which godly people would be coerced into activities contrary to their Christian consciences. And this, in fact, is exactly what is happening in many places in North America.

The committee seems to recognize that this will be the case, but, sadly, the committee seems to accept the perspective of the state in these situations with resignation rather than resistance. And rather than being a voice to defend this free worship of God, the church becomes a silent accuser of those whose consciences will not allow them to participate in such activities. By failing to defend them, the church denies that their position is just (*Agenda*, p. 385).

For all of these reasons we believe that the position of the committee is neither historically nor theologically Reformed.

This leads us to our third and final concern regarding the committee's explanation of a Reformed position on the relationship between church and state. The committee confuses the need for the state to be *confessionally* neutral (providing for the equal treatment before the law of all religious sects) with the idea of the state being *religiously* or *morally neutral* (refusing to define morality according to the teaching of any particular religion). This confusion is embedded in options 2 and 3 of the committee's four original options for the church-state question. The committee implies the affirmation of state religious neutrality in option 2 and carries that idea over into option 3.

The confusion of these two concepts is significant and is often misunderstood today. The idea of separation that was developed throughout the history of Reformed thought, and which significantly informed the founders of the United States, was not that the state was to be guided by a nonreligious worldview or nonreligious version of morality (for such a thing does not exist), but rather that the state would provide for the freest atmosphere for all religious sects and provide for the most stable, peaceful, and prosperous society if it was both formed and informed by the central tenets of Christianity, specifically a Reformed expression of Christianity.

Kuyper refers to this at the opening of his Stone lecture on Calvinism and Politics. In claiming that it was Calvinism that led to the great modern expressions of political freedom in the West, he writes,

That this had to be so becomes evident at once to everyone who is able to appreciate the fact that no political scheme has ever become dominant which was not founded in a specific religious or anti-religious conception. And that this *has* been the fact, as regards Calvinism, may appear from the political changes which it has effected in those three historic lands of political freedom, the Netherlands, England and America.⁶

What Kuyper was saying is threefold:

1. Every government will necessarily be formed upon some particular set of religious (moral) beliefs.
2. Ours has been formed according to the religious (moral) beliefs of Calvinistic Christianity.
3. This is what accounts for our political freedom.

From this we can draw certain important conclusions. The first is that the way in which a government makes room for other kinds of beliefs (provides for an atmosphere of confessional pluralism) is not to empty itself of all moral or religious beliefs, but rather to operate according to the moral beliefs that are specifically Christian and *Reformed*.

A second conclusion is that to attempt to remove an authoritative, prophetic, historically, and theologically Reformed voice from the political arena is terribly foolish, as it simply allows that government to be guided by some other set of religious or moral beliefs. The moral vacuum left when we decide that we are not to authoritatively call the state to Christian morality will be filled with something else—a false morality, which will lead the entire society away from freedom and into bondage, both spiritual and civil. In other words, the only way to secure an atmosphere that allows for confessional pluralism in society is to establish a government firmly upon the moral teachings of Reformed Christianity.

The position of the committee seems to be that the state should be guided by its own set of moral beliefs, which are to be determined without the aid of Scripture—perhaps without religion at all. But from where do these beliefs come? What kind of morality is this, and what does it create? If we believe that God would not have the government guided by our moral beliefs, whose moral beliefs do we believe he would have it guided by, for it will be guided by someone's.

Our position, then, is that while the government should seek to create an atmosphere of confessional pluralism where religion is not coerced, it cannot do that by adopting religious or moral pluralism. If it moves in that direction, separating itself from the divine moral law of God, it moves away from the atmosphere of confessional pluralism that it seeks to secure, and toward oppression.

It is very clear, then, that the position of the committee regarding the relationship between church and state is neither historically nor theologically Reformed. What is also clear is that our nations have never been in greater need of the very historical and theologically Reformed voice that the committee is seeking to restrain. Our nations are in need of being guided by the proven ways of the past. Instead of being restrained, the church needs to be mobilized and inspired to engage in the calling of our nations, and of our governments, back to the eternal truths of God. This new "Reformed" perspective cannot provide that voice and will lead to disaster.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931), p. 7.

IV. The results of the committee's misunderstanding and misapplication of sphere sovereignty lead to many unwise pieces of pastoral advice

We believe that the results of this intentional move away from a historically and theologically Reformed engagement with the state on moral issues, allowing the state to define what is moral and good in its own sphere, are clearly visible in the pastoral advice that the committee gives related to ministering to same-sex relationships. We will mention only a few.

First, this is clear in the committee's affirmative designation of the state's new definition of marriage. It states,

Civil marriage, as noted earlier, has diverged from religious marriage in important respects. If . . . the Christian church is not bound in its understanding of religious marriage by the state, the church should acknowledge that the state has freedom to define civil marriage as it deems most just. Civil marriage is a matter of public policy, which is legitimately under the authority of the state.

(Agenda, p. 377)

Because of the committee's new conception of sphere sovereignty, the church is instructed to keep silent about the state's new definition for marriage. More than that, we are to recognize that it is being done for genuinely just reasons. This is the state's realm, and we are to mind our own business, trusting that its work is sound.

But while this hands-off approach to the issue begins outside the church in the public square, it quickly moves inside the church as the societal "good" that the state is addressing in civil marriage needs to be embraced as positively as possible by the church. This begins by recognizing the many good aspects of these relationships and reminding ourselves that just because people have entered into a same-sex marriage doesn't mean that they are practicing same-sex sexual activity.

During the cultural contentions over same-sex marriage, the focus from religious communities has been almost exclusively on objections to same-sex sexual relationships. At times, the debate has been in danger of reducing these relationships to their sexual dimension.

Marriage, whether civil or religious, requires personal traits and social commitments that are highly valued by Christians—things like commitment, patience, self-sacrifice, and loving kindness. Same-sex couples, like traditional opposite-sex couples, value and display these traits, forming relationships that can provide stability and continuity within a social framework. The Christian church must be careful, in its commitment to truth and being cognizant of how it represents the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to be guilty of reducing same-sex marriage solely to sexual expression.

(Agenda, p. 378)

Later, it states,

Civil same-sex marriage does not, in and of itself, entail improper sexual relations. Civil marriage provides a legal environment in which persons can establish stable, familial relationships, whether those relationships be opposite-sex or same-sex and whether or not those relations involve sexual expression.

(Agenda, p. 378)

From the perspective of the committee, the fact that these relationships are based upon same-sex attraction or same-sex sexual activity does not in any way detract from the stability and continuity that these relationships create. While the Scriptures would tell us that relationships based in sin can never provide that for which we hunger, Scripture is silent here too. Earlier we were silent on the

biblical testimony because we were not operating in our own sphere. Now we are silent on the biblical testimony because we don't want to deny the essential good of the relationships that the state has now created.

The silence of Scripture to these situations is a common thread in the report. While the report does encourage us to “use scriptural texts appropriately” (p. 400), it also warns us against the use of passages that clearly teach the sinfulness of homosexual practice. While we believe it is always helpful to be encouraged not to misuse Scripture, we find no encouragement in the report to use Scripture in a way that leads to *repentance*. The first message of the gospel is one of conviction of sin. How can the church effectively call people to the grace of the gospel if the church is warned against using biblical passages that identify homosexual practice as both sinful and, like other sin, destined to meet with the wrath of God on the day of judgment?

Here we begin to wonder whether the reason the committee forged a new *Reformed* understanding of the church-state relationship was not specifically because the committee wanted to establish a Reformed rationale for the gradual acceptance of same-sex marriage, if not homosexual practice itself. For the church is not only encouraged to be very careful about the Scriptures that it uses, but it is also strongly cautioned against administering discipline in these situations.

We call the church's attention to a matter that troubles us as a committee. The formal process of discipline leading to excommunication is rarely exercised in our churches today. Perhaps the church will find that its teaching and discipling on same-sex sexual relations will result in either repentance or same-sex persons/couples leaving the CRC without formal discipline. It is deeply disturbing that the one category of sin that the church seems to affirm in its intention to discipline to the point of excommunication is same-sex sexual relations. We run the risk of living into the stereotype that the world has of Christians.

(*Agenda*, pp. 394-95)

For the committee, the fact that official church discipline is rarely exercised in our churches today is not something to be mourned. Rather, it is a rationale for thinking twice before entering into church discipline in situations of same-sex relationships. Given that church discipline is simply the formal application of the threats of the gospel⁷ to a situation where a professing believer is refusing to repent of sin, a warning against employing church discipline in these cases seems to be based on doubt regarding that fact—whether that which is being unrepentantly engaged in is, in fact, sin.

We share the observation with the committee that church discipline is rarely exercised in our churches today, but as one of the three marks of the true church,⁸ this lack of church discipline concerns us greatly.

Finally, we note that the committee's embrace of the state's new definition for marriage is so complete that we are warned against taking the position that the design of the traditional Christian family (the biblical design for family) is superior. It states,

There is also a temptation within parts of the Christian community to argue for the absolute superiority of the traditional Christian family and to warn against the damage that will ensue for families headed by same-sex couples. We suggest that this is neither honest nor beneficial.

(*Agenda*, p. 395)

⁷ See the use of this phrase in the Canons of Dort, Fifth Point, Article 14.

⁸ Belgic Confession, Article 29.

The committee grounds this admonition not on the biblical testimony but on the evidence that current studies on the comparable benefits of a traditional over a same-sex family are not conclusive.

Again and again we find the committee admonishing us to tread carefully with regard to taking a biblical and gospel-centered approach to this issue. Instead, based on its acceptance of the state's modern definition of marriage, we find the committee encouraging less certainty and less clarity on the moral nature of these unions and inviting the church to make sure that those involved in these relationships are made as comfortable as possible in our midst.

While we want all people to find a home in the church of Jesus Christ, his church can only be our home when we acknowledge before him our sinfulness, repent of that sinfulness, and seek, by the power of his Spirit and direction of his Word, to walk in holiness. This is not the path into the church for those alone who struggle with same-sex attraction. It is the path for all whom he has called out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

V. Conclusion

The committee has given us a report that begins by outlining an understanding of the church-state relationship that is neither historically nor theologically Reformed—restraining the church from speaking prophetically from the Scriptures, both in the sphere of the state and of the church, effectively emptying the gospel of its power to redeem both people and culture. The evidence of this is seen both in the report's explanation of principled pluralism (sphere sovereignty) and in the specific recommendations it makes regarding ministry to the church in addressing the same-sex marriage issue.

If adopted, this course will solidify what has already become an unspoken rule of silence in speaking clearly on the issue of homosexual practice from the Scriptures and empty the ministry of the church of its power—the power of the gospel. We strongly implore the synodical delegates to reject both this report and this course.

VI. Overture

Classis Holland overtures synod not to adopt the study report from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

Grounds:

1. The report operates from a flawed understanding of sphere sovereignty (principled pluralism) in its conception of the relationship between the church and the state. While calling this position *Reformed*, it is actually a new conception of this relationship for the Reformed community, which is neither historically nor theologically Reformed, silencing the prophetic, scriptural, voice of the church and the eternal moral truth of God in matters of the state.
2. This flawed understanding of the church-state relationship effectively severs the state from the moral grounding necessary for it to faithfully execute its divinely ordained task, while at the same time requiring the church to receive with gratitude the morally misguided creations of the state, including its newest creation: "civil same-sex marriage."
3. This silencing of the church in the sphere of civil government also in turn silences the church within its own walls as the church is instructed to make

- those who engage in such marriages as comfortable as possible in its midst, even being careful to avoid the use of Scripture that might offend them.
4. Thus the church, instead of providing the moral clarity that all spheres of society need in order to administer their duties as God has designed, and instead of calling individuals to a truly new life through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, becomes complicit in the acceleration of society's descent into brokenness and immorality.

Classis Holland

Calvin Hoogstra, acting stated clerk

Overture 34: Do Not Adopt the Recommendations of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

The biblical position that was approved by Synod 1973 and reaffirmed by Synod 2002 is that sex is a sacred expression within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman. All sexual expression outside those bounds is immoral and prohibited. The Bible doesn't teach that people are guilty for having been tempted with same-sex attraction any more or less than those tempted by heterosexual attraction. But the Bible does prohibit same-sex behavior—Genesis 18-19; Leviticus 18:21-25; 20:10-21; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. If homosexual behavior is a corruption of God's good creation and declared as sin, then it's abnormal and unnatural. Far from being simply an acceptable "alternative" way of living, it's actually a destructive lifestyle. The Bible teaches and illustrates that homosexual behavior is deeply harmful relationally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually to its practitioners. Homosexual behavior is a moral issue in which something "wrong" and sinful is being promoted as something right and good.

Synod 2013 mandated a study committee to give guidance on how to apply the 1973 and 2002 reports on homosexuality today when same-sex marriage is now a legal reality and the church's views are now in the minority in our culture. The mandate of the committee was to

give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.

(*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 617)

Synod 2013 was clear in establishing the 1973 and 2002 reports as the biblical and theological baseline for the work of the committee and indicated that it did not want the biblical grounds reopened at this time. This is a limitation that the committee laments repeatedly. Beginning on page 402, the committee becomes more explicit with its misgivings concerning the report of Synod 1973 and calls for a new report because recent changes in society "compromise the ability of the 1973 report to continue to serve the church well" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 402). But to their credit, the committee did not disregard their mandate or demand a new one. The report is designed to guide and inform churches on how to navigate new cultural waters that include legalized same-sex marriage. Unfortunately, the pastoral advice with regard to same-sex marriage issues recommended by the committee

in section VI of their report often seems inconsistent with the official CRC position adopted in 1973.

Classis Illiana has serious reservations about the guidelines given. Highly unusual situations are presented to argue that “a civil same-sex marriage is not inherently in conflict with the CRC understanding of same-sex orientation and behavior nor with the church’s position on marriage” (p. 383). This failure to acknowledge same-sex marriage as being contrary to God’s design for marriage, even in those situations where the individuals involved are celibate, results in guidelines that are flawed and deficient.

The Fall 2015 *Calvin Seminary Forum* contains articles by Professor John Cooper titled “Not Like Women in Office: Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Same Sex Relations” and by Professor Jeff Weima entitled “Same Sex Activity: What Does the New Testament Say?” Cooper articulates that Reformed hermeneutics as used in the women in office discussions does not lend itself to supporting same-sex marriage. Weima writes that the New Testament cannot be interpreted to support same-sex marriage.

II. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2016 to reject Recommendations B, C, and D of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage report (included below and signed by both majority and minority committee members) and to dismiss the current committee. If the church still desires a committee to provide pastoral guidelines, it must appoint a new committee and make sure that the members are committed to working out of the official CRC position adopted in 1973.

B. That synod receive the accompanying report for information and recommend it for consideration to churches, pastors, and church leaders and members for background understanding and to promote informed discussion on the matter of civil same-sex marriage.

C. That synod adopt the pastoral guidance contained in Section VI of this report as its counsel to churches, pastors, church leaders, and members for addressing the ramifications of civil same-sex marriage as it affects the church and its members.

D. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marriage.

(Agenda for Synod 2016, p. 404)

Grounds:

1. The report fails to acknowledge same-sex marriage as being contrary to God’s design for marriage, even in those situations where the individuals involved are celibate. God’s design for marriage is described in the following verses from Genesis 1 and 2:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. . . . So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”

(Gen. 1:26-28)

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she

shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

(Gen. 2:20-25)

These verses show that God created Adam and Eve in his own image. He created them male and female so that they can be fruitful and increase in number. God fashioned a woman from and for the man, then personally officiated at their wedding, thus instituting the first marriage. The groom wholeheartedly, enthusiastically received his bride and their union as a wondrous gift from their Maker. This is the capstone of creation. The one God, who eternally exists in relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lovingly fashioned one indissoluble union of two distinct, complementary beings. Anticipation fulfilled, companionship, oneness, recognition of value, celebration of difference, cherishing, honor, holding fast, intimacy, unbridled passion, nakedness, vulnerability, transparency, and complete, utter freedom from shame. God's design for marriage is stunningly good, beautiful, pure, and right.

2. The advice given in the report is contradictory. There are several areas of disagreement between the majority report and the minority report. They differ on what is a Christian wedding as opposed to a civil wedding, whether a CRC minister may perform a same-sex marriage in a civil setting, whether officebearers may participate in a same-sex ceremony, and whether a CRC member entering a same-sex marriage is to be considered under discipline. In light of the church's theological teaching on marriage, the minority report notes three main areas of disagreement with the majority report: (1) officiating same-sex weddings, (2) playing a role in weddings and in the life of the church, and (3) questions of membership. But in the end, the majority and the minority present the same three recommendations printed above, putting their differing advice out there and leaving it up to the reader to decide whose advice to accept.
3. The advice given in the report lacks clarity. Whether same-sex couples may serve in various church activities and functions, the committee recommends that "one size does not fit all" and these decisions "belong to the discernment of the local church" (p. 388). The majority report cautions against immediately placing a same-sex couple under discipline, saying it will be difficult "from a formal membership perspective to say 'thus far and no farther'" (p. 389). The minority report says that discipline is more of a fluid concept that is the same as discipleship and "something every Christian *necessarily* experiences" as part of growing in Christ (p. 441). A member entering a same-sex marriage must come under "the regular admonition and discipline of the church" (p. 442), but it does not have to be formal discipline, and the goal must be "restored fellowship."

This lack of agreement and clarity leaves churches without adequate guidance when they face difficult ministry situations in their ministry. While the church can and should do more to be welcoming of people with same-sex attraction, we need to maintain our opposition to same-sex behavior. We also need to maintain our stand against same-sex marriage as being contrary to God's design for marriage, even in situations where

the individuals involved are celibate. We must demonstrate compassion without compromise. We must speak the truth in a way that shows we are committed to letting love, acceptance, and God's grace rule our words and actions. We need to stand with people in their struggles, overcoming our own prejudice and fear. Then we will rejoice to see God bring forgiveness and transformation to lives in desperate need of healing.

Classis Illiana

Laryn G. Zoerhof, stated clerk

Overture 35: Reject the Report by the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

Recognizing the need for clear scriptural and pastoral advice, Classis Heartland overtures synod to reject the study report by the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

Grounds:

1. The study committee did not, finally, fulfill its mandate.

The committee was called to "give guidance on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973 Report* 42 . . . in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in some jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 617).

We observe that the committee's understanding of the mandate (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 365) assumed a separation between inseparables, namely the foundational principles of 1973 and the pastoral advice features of this report. This approach is destined to fail.

The 83-page report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (CPPGSM) seldom mentions biblical teaching or scriptural references from the Scripture-saturated 1973 report.

Further, the committee stated, "Not all committee members are in complete agreement with the 1973 and 2002 reports" (*Agenda*, p. 365). We are not surprised, then, that little guidance follows to apply the biblical teachings of 1973. Scripture is cited in two footnotes (*Agenda*, p. 370). The wealth of Scripture from the 1973 report is only vaguely referenced, with the caveat that many of its texts "apply only tangentially, if at all" and are harmful when "applied to all same-sex oriented persons" (*Agenda*, p. 400), and readers are thus warned to "avoid misuse of texts [from the 1973 report]." So the report distances itself from the 1973 report and its Scripture references. And while the CPPGSM report warns of danger in using Scripture to clarify these issues, the report tells us "to read widely, from a variety of interpretive perspectives" (*Agenda*, p. 399). No caution is even offered at reading other literature or the potentially skewed findings of social science.

While we admit that the committee studied legal issues with due diligence, they dodged guidance from scriptural teaching. Again, they seemed

to distance themselves from the 1973 report, by speaking of its “logic,”¹ not its scriptural basis (Prov. 3:5).

The committee’s misgivings about the reports from 1973 and 2002 become more explicit at the bottom of page 402, leaving this report on shaky ground and short of its mandate.

2. The CPPGSM report uses biblical terms differently from the 1973 and 2002 reports.

The committee says we must beware of “temptation,”² though it doesn’t refer to the temptation referenced by the 1973 and 2002 reports (i.e., the temptation to homosexual sin.)

Further, the committee says “repentance is needed” (*Agenda*, p. 387). However, one finds that the committee means repentance from offensive comments toward same-sex attracted people. Though true, the church may not forget or overlook the call to repent of homosexual sin. The 1973 and 2002 reports call for this.³

This inconsistent use of biblical terms illustrates the lack of clear direction in the mandate which, we believe, led to a separation between foundational principles and pastoral advice.

3. The report misunderstands the historic Reformed concept of sphere sovereignty, reducing it to a “principled pluralism” (*Agenda*, pp. 372-74).

Principled pluralism suggests that the church should not voice its concerns to the government sphere.

Abraham Kuyper never introduced such an autonomous, amoral sphere called “the state.” He did say that the church doesn’t bear authority over the state. However, the church must speak to it. Further, all the spheres (church, home, school, government, etc.) must mutually submit to God, as part of his created order.

¹*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 365. The committee often speaks of the “logic” of the earlier reports instead of the scriptural basis of the reports. The term “logic” is dismissive of the biblical content and paves the way for a piling up of the language of social science and political legality. Note the way this occurs (e.g., p. 391, the first full paragraph). The report from the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage says that “the logic of the Church Order on membership and the 1973 report on homosexuality is that a person in a same-sex sexual relationship is committing sin.” This is not logic but the univocal message from God’s Word at Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 1:10; and all of Scripture.

²*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 395. The report cautions against what it calls “a temptation . . . to argue for the absolute superiority of the traditional Christian family and to warn against the damage that will ensue for families headed by same-sex couples.” It claims, “The church will not fare well in the long run if it overstates differences in outcome.” That is at odds with the Bible’s warning about the long-term outcome of those who engage in sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:9; Rev. 21:8).

³“The homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself to be defeated by lapses in chastity, but rather to repent” (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 632). This said, it is interesting to note other inconsistencies. Note which of the Ten Commandments the present report cites and how: The report respects same-sex advocates saying, “It would be wise for the church to read carefully and consider well the arguments offered as underlying rationale for civil same-sex marriage . . . [for] Christians are duty bound by the ninth commandment to represent them accurately” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 374). Ironically, nowhere does the report say that we are “duty bound by the seventh commandment to call same-sex married couples to repentance.” The silence is deafening, even if the earlier synod reports were presupposed. Such infrequent and curious references to Scripture are symptomatic of a politically correct document. They strike us as imbalanced. They assume grace without truth though the original mandate called for both.

The report ignores the prophetic/pastoral calling of the church. The church must speak God's rule and law to government (2 Kings 18:17-18; Matt. 14:2-3). The Belgic Confession in Article 36 clearly states, "Our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers . . . so that human lawlessness may be restrained . . . and . . . to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God . . . subject to God's law."

This report creates an excuse for church passivity and silence in the public sphere on an issue addressed in God's law. The concept of "principled pluralism," as brought by the report, leaves the CRC going along to get along.

4. The majority report posits hypothetical situations in which justice may, the committee members say, make it appropriate for a CRC minister to perform civil unions of same-sex couples.⁴

Justice that contradicts God's created norms and moral law (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 1:26-27) is unjust. The situations posited do not rise to the level of marriage. Marriage is a unique sexual relationship between man and woman (Eph. 5:25-32), and it is bound by sexual intimacy (1 Cor. 7:5-6).

If one argues that sex is not necessary to marriage and the report states that some same-sex couples might be offended that their relationships are often reduced to the sexual aspects alone (*Agenda*, pp. 397-98), let us remember God's Word. He calls male/female marriage good (Prov. 18:22) with its sexuality (Song of Songs). He calls the husband and wife to maintain sexual relations (1 Cor. 7:3-5). He is angry with those who engage in same gender sexuality (Rom. 1:18, 26-27).

Further, though the Bible upholds the fidelity of same-sex friendships, even those of deep care (2 Sam. 1:26; Phil. 1:8; Rom. 16:16), these are not only free of sexual activity and sexual impurity; they are never labeled a marriage.

They may be take on labels such as "co-workers" (1 Cor. 3:9), "spiritual parent" (1 Tim. 1:2, 18), and others, but never wedded spouses.

The report insists that its "examples demonstrate that a civil same-sex marriage is not inherently in conflict with the CRC understanding of same-sex orientation and behavior nor with the church's position on marriage" (*Agenda*, p. 383).

The use of examples is in no way a substitute for Scripture. An illustration does not support a premise—it only applies or extends it, and here we have no clearly stated biblical principle—only cultural conjecture.

The men in the situation posited might be reminded of God's injunction to King Saul. Saul "felt compelled to offer a burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12) in order to preserve the security of Israel and the morale of a fighting force. He acted impetuously. He acted against the revealed will of God and was not blessed.

⁴ *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 371. The report cites a 2004 government accounting office report which says that 1,138 federal rights, responsibilities, and privileges are provided to married couples in the U.S. On page 383 the report then posits a situation involving two older men who have built up a relationship "over the years. Neither has married. They share a house, friends, and business interests. As they age, they realize the vulnerability of their legal, medical, and personal situation. . . . They approach [a CRC] pastor and ask if s/he will marry them in a civil ceremony." The report sets this matter of "justice" at the feet of the church and minister.

Pastoral guidance could entail some examples like these waiting on the Lord's provision; calling on deacons of the church to assist; and seeking help with other governmental avenues of assistance. The situation does not require or entail same-sex civil union performed by a minister of the CRC.

5. Lastly, the committee suggests that churches have become lax in discipline and, so, we must beware the temptation to single out same-sex activity or same-sex marriage for church discipline.

If the nature of church discipline is found to be lacking, that matter should be addressed. We should not passively approve of *any* matter of sinful behavior. That includes things like greed, slander, abortion, gluttony, drunkenness, sexual immorality, or homosexual activity. Scripture calls God's people from all types of sin (1 Cor. 6:11). Eternal souls are at stake and worthy of care (Matt. 18:10-20).

May we be faithful to speak truth and grace in Christ, that true freedom may belong to all who call on Christ for salvation.

The CRCNA must do everything possible to witness to the truth, mercy, and transforming power of Christ (Matt. 11:28; John 8:11).

Classis Heartland

Robert D. Drenten, stated clerk

Overture 36: Do Not Accept or Recommend to the Churches the Report (Majority and Minority) of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

I. Background

Synod 2013 appointed a study committee with the following mandate: To "give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy, and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the Acts of Synod 1973 Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 617, 640-41). As the committee considered its mandate, it decided to focus on civil same-sex marriage, which is now legal in both Canada and the United States, and ministry to persons affected by it (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 363).

Ministering to people includes pastoral care. Discipline/discipling is an essential component of pastoral care. So we would expect the report to offer sound, biblical guidance for the discipline/discipling of members of the CRCNA who are affected by civil same-sex marriage.

II. Discipline/discipling

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession describes discipline in a positive way and calls it a mark of the true church:

The (true) church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel;
it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them;
it practices church discipline for correcting faults.

In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God,
rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

Belgic Confession Article 29 also states that true believers may be distinguished from false Christians. We do not presume to be able to judge anyone's heart (Matt. 7:1), but we may distinguish true from false disciples by considering their life choices. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:16). Thus the Belgic Confession says that true believers may be known by several distinguishing marks:

... namely by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works. Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.

Discipline/discipling is the church's effort to challenge and encourage believers to live new and holy lives as they follow Jesus. Through discipline/discipling we urge one another not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

In order to discipline/disciple one another with respect to same-sex "marriage," we need a clear understanding of God's will for marriage and whether or not there are circumstances in which God approves of same-gender "marriages." Unhappily, the report does not address these matters adequately. On the one hand, the report cites previous CRCNA definitions of marriage, noting that marriage is to be the union of husband (male) and wife (female). Quoting from the 1980 Report on Marriage, the committee says,

Man and woman, created in the image of God, were made for each other to become one flesh in marriage. Thus marriage is not a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will.

(Acts of Synod 1980, p. 469)

However, the report also refers to marriage as being a civil institution and notes that the state (in Canada and the U.S.) has seen fit to confer "a variety of rights, privileges, and obligations" on those who are married (*Agenda*, p. 371). So questions arise for the state and the church. Must the state redefine marriage so that all people in committed partnerships may have access to such legal rights, privileges, and obligations? Also, to avoid discrimination, must the church also broaden its definition of marriage?

The authors of the minority recommendations correctly observe and emphasize that because God established marriage as part of the created order, "the state cannot 'change' the definition of marriage any more than it can 'change' the law of gravity—it has neither the competence nor the authority to exact a change of fundamental, created reality" (*Agenda*, p. 435).

However, instead of insisting that same-gender partnerships are not in fact marriages, both the majority and minority authors call such partnerships same-sex marriages. The report also speaks of same-sex weddings, implying that it is possible for people of the same gender to become married to each other.

The report creates more confusion by stating that the CRCNA teaching with respect to same-sex sexual relationships is not necessarily incompatible with same-sex marriage, provided that the partners in such marriages pledge to be celibate. Both the majority (*Agenda*, p. 383) and minority (*Agenda*, p. 439) authors offer this opinion. But in doing this, the report presents a truncated definition of marriage. The report correctly argues that it would be wrong to reduce marriage

to sexual activity, since healthy marriages include much more than sexual activity; there must also be commitment, trust, companionship, etc. However, by suggesting that same-gender couples may remain married as long as they are celibate, the report denies that marriage is the God-ordained institution that sanctions sexual relations between husbands and wives who are married to each other.

Since the dawn of time (Gen. 1-2) marriage has created space for God-approved sexual activity between a husband and wife who are married to each other. The Bible calls sexual relationships outside of marriage the sins of fornication and/or adultery. However, sexual relations within marriage are part of the way God unites husband and wife so that they who are two become one flesh. Note that in 1 Corinthians 6:16 the Bible condemns prostitution, saying, "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.'" Thus, one reason a sexual encounter with a prostitute is forbidden is that it removes the one-flesh-forming-effect of sexual union from its proper context (i.e., it is outside of marriage).

Also, 1 Corinthians 7 speaks of the marital duty (i.e., to provide sexual intimacy for one's spouse) of those who are married. So it would be wrong to advise two people of the same gender that they may remain married as long as they are committed to being celibate, since that would contradict the teaching about "marital duty."

As noted above, the report correctly states that we should not reduce marriage to sexual activity. However, the report errs by suggesting that marriage is less than the God-ordained institution that sanctions sexual intimacy between husband and wife. The following statement, therefore, must be rejected: "In other words, *remaining* in a same-sex, celibate relationship may not be in conflict with biblical teaching on sexuality and marriage" (*Agenda*, p. 439).

III. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2016 to not accept or recommend to the churches for study and reflection the report (majority and minority) of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

Grounds:

1. The report does not reflect a clear understanding of the Bible's teaching about marriage and same-gender relationships. Therefore the report does not provide adequate guidance for pastoral care (including discipline/discipling) with respect to same-sex "marriage."
2. The report presents a working definition of marriage which denies that from the beginning of human history the institution of marriage was designed by God to provide space for sexual relations between a husband and wife who are married to each other. Thus the report suggests that people of the same gender may remain "married," provided they are celibate.
3. Due to the lack of clarity in the report's foundational teachings, the majority and minority conclusions offer conflicting pastoral advice with respect to practical concerns, such as whether officebearers in the CRCNA may participate in same-sex civil "marriages."
4. Both the majority and minority conclusions are based on the report's distinction between "civil" and "religious" marriages and mistakenly teach that civil same-sex "marriages" are not necessarily in conflict with the

CRCNA understandings of same-sex orientation and behavior or with the CRCNA's understanding of marriage. See the *Agenda*, p. 383 (majority), and *Agenda*, p. 439 (minority).

5. The report does not fulfill the committee's mandate to help the CRCNA apply, in grace and truth, the Bible's teachings as set forth in Report 42 (*Acts of Synod 1973*) in our changing cultural context.
6. The report views marriage as being good to the degree that "it meets the needs of those being married" (*Agenda*, p. 370), without mentioning that the union of husband and wife is a symbol of the union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33).
7. In effect, the report suggests that CRCNA congregations should not hold one another accountable in the discipline/discipling of members (*Agenda*, p. 395). This promotes congregationalism by isolating congregations from one another and minimizes the mutual accountability that is essential to the third mark of the true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 37: Do Not Adopt the Report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

Classis Toronto overtures Synod 2016 to not adopt the report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (majority and minority).

1. The study committee was mandated by Synod 2013 to "give guidance and clarification on how members, clergy and churches can apply the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42 (cf. also the report to Synod 2002) in light of the legality of same-sex marriage in certain jurisdictions, as well as how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America" (*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 617, 640-41).
2. The committee did not fulfill its mandate to communicate "the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* Report 42" graciously and truthfully concerning marriage within North America when it stated, "At the very least, however, these examples demonstrate that a civil same-sex marriage is not inherently in conflict with the CRC understanding of same-sex orientation and behavior nor with the church's position on marriage" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 383 of the majority report; *Agenda*, p. 439 of the minority report).
3. The report puts us at odds with Belgic Confession Article 36, which states that we are to be subject to government in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word. Same-sex marriage (civil or religious) is in conflict with God's Word because God's Word teaches that marriage is a creation ordinance covenant between a man and a woman.
4. The committee makes a distinction between religious and civil same-sex marriage, then argues that civil same-sex marriage is not in conflict with the denomination's and the Bible's position on marriage. A religious marriage ceremony has civil significance and a civil ceremony has religious significance. Jesus, when speaking on marriage (even though all marriages in his day were

civil, not religious—not performed by or on authority of a synagogue), said, “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6).

5. The report reveals a tension between 2016 and 1973, which is reflected in the committee’s making a distinction between religious and civil marriage and then calling for a need to revise the 1973 report. Evidence for this tension follows:
 - a. Not all committee members were in complete agreement with the 1973 and 2002 reports, nor were they asked to be (*Agenda*, p. 365).
 - b. By referring to “the logic” of the 1973 report and the Church Order, the committee infers that the understanding that drove the 1973 report is wrong or outdated when the committee states, “This logic (and indeed our mandate itself) inevitably pushes the discussion in a direction that focuses almost exclusively on same-sex sexual behavior. Same-sex oriented believers in our churches have long felt the reduction of their personhood to proscribed sexual behavior, even when they commit to celibacy in keeping with the church’s teaching” (*Agenda*, pp. 365-66).

One example: the term *homosexual* “as a noun applied to persons is no longer considered respectful by the majority of those it once aimed to describe” (*Agenda*, p. 366); that term is used in 1973 report.

- c. The committee claims that “the affirmation of 1973 was adopted amid significant disagreement within the church” (*Agenda*, p. 386), but no references are given to support this statement.
- d. The survey is used extensively to support the tension between 2016 and 1973. References appear frequently (see *Agenda*, pp. 364, 366, 377, 380-81, 386-87, 396-400, 402, 415 and 442)—not to mention that the survey result (*Agenda*, Appendix A, pp. 405-16) makes up a large portion of the report (13%). And yet “the committee cautions the reader to use these survey results lightly and prudently. The pastor and student samples were samples of convenience rather than random samples, and the church member sample, while selected through a random process, is not to be considered representative of all CRC members/attenders” (*Agenda*, p. 406). The following quotes indicate that the committee used the survey results heavily:
 - 1) “The committee commissioned a denominational survey through the Calvin College Center for Social Research. Over 4,000 people responded to the survey, including feedback from 700 pastors and 226 respondents who identified themselves as same-sex oriented (gay, lesbian, bisexual, or same-sex attracted). The survey provided background information on experiences and attitudes among CRC members regarding same-sex marriage and ministry with same-sex oriented persons” (*Agenda*, p. 364).
 - 2) “Respondents to the survey, for example, raised important questions relating to transgender persons, gender identity, and sex assignment” (*Agenda*, p. 366).
 - 3) “If there is a primary message from the committee’s listening sessions and survey, it is that a wide variety of experiences and social settings exist within the CRC” (*Agenda*, p. 377).

- 4) "The denominational survey and classical listening sessions conducted by the committee indicate that CRC pastors have received requests to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies and weddings" (*Agenda*, p. 380).
- 5) "In our own survey, 52 percent of the CRC-affiliated students who responded said they support civil same-sex marriage, and 41 percent believe same-sex marriage should be allowed in the church. . . . Their experiences and opinions often show a critical disconnect with the conclusions of the 1973 report and with its biblical interpretation. In their daily lives they make no distinctions between same-sex oriented and opposite-sex oriented persons. Many do not understand why that distinction should matter in the church" (*Agenda*, p. 396).
- 6) "Same-sex oriented respondents to the survey were the demographic most insistent that the church must continue to talk about homosexuality and ministry with sexual minorities" (*Agenda*, p. 398).
- 7) "In the survey, we found that 80 percent of CRC ministers polled, 75 percent of CRC students polled, and 57 percent of respondents in the survey's church member sample personally hold that same-sex attraction is not sinful, as synod advised in 1973" (*Agenda*, p. 400).
- 8) "The survey has been a valuable means of listening to the denomination on matters relating to same-sex marriage. While we cannot treat this data as being representative of the denomination as a whole or of any subset of the denomination, results nevertheless give a useful and rich description of the range of views and questions at a given point in time (Spring 2014)" (*Agenda*, pp. 415-16).

Ground: The definition of marriage presented in the report does not reflect the biblical teachings reflected in the *Acts of Synod 1973* and Report 42.

Classis Toronto
John Meiboom, stated clerk

Communication 1: Classis B.C. North-West

Classis B.C. North-West presents this communication to Synod 2016 to express gratitude for the report of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force. It is our hope that synod will accept and implement the recommendations.

The timing of this report is intriguing. We sense that there is now in Canada a *kairos* moment. The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue and other justice agencies have long advocated for new relationships with First Nations people. The National Truth and Reconciliation Commission has submitted its final report, and the federal government has committed to adopting the report's recommendations. We sense the Holy Spirit moving this country toward reconciliation, and the recommendations of the report will help us participate in the Spirit's work.

Now is the time to ensure that the ongoing work of the CRC in Canada continues and expands (Recommendation F). Though we still see through a glass darkly, we see faint glimpses of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language streaming into the presence of God (Rev. 7:9); we sense an opportunity to join God's gathering and reconciling work.

Further, many classes and congregations have participated in the Blanket Exercise and are asking for next steps, and recommendations in the report will be of immense value. The development of materials to help us understand the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (Recommendation G) would help us to participate faithfully and give meaningful direction to local and national efforts at renewed relationships with First Nations people. Resources for prayer and lament (Recommendation I) help give voice to our sadness upon learning of the wrongs that our nation has committed against First Nations people and guide us to repentance. The call for a common story (Recommendation K) would help us enter into humble and meaningful dialogue with First Nations neighbors; this is an essential part of the communication of the gospel.

Again, we express both our gratitude to the task force and our support of the recommendations.

Classis B.C. North-West
Andy de Ruyter, stated clerk

Communication 2: Classis Hudson

The Doctrine of Discovery Task Force has completed its work and submitted to the churches a lengthy report detailing a complicated and painful history of interactions between the Native peoples of the Americas and those peoples of

European descent who moved to the Western Hemisphere after A.D. 1500. There is much to be studied and noted carefully in this report. An honest reading of American and Canadian history reveals that our nations and the colonial governments which preceded them have been guilty of using deception, violence, and callous indifference to subdue Native cultures and deprive them of their land and livelihood. Sadly, the story of the Native peoples of the Americas has included many instances of injustice and oppression even at the hands of those claiming the name of Christ. Even if these stories are uncomfortable for us to hear in the CRC today, the pain evident in this report calls us to be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

Several items of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force’s work¹ in particular are worth considering in today’s diverse culture, as we consider the hard task of reconciliation:

- “We drink downstream.” This report reminds us that we cannot ignore past wrongs or the reality of broken relationships (pp. 499-501). Even sins committed in the distant past continue to affect our lives today.
- Those of European descent have many inherited privileges as a result of their dominance of the American continents. In many cases, these privileges have come at the expense of Native peoples (p. 536).
- Our language presents challenges for the way the gospel message is heard, especially when too often “conversion” went hand in hand with “being like the Europeans” (pp. 506, 509).²
- As Christians, we are called to “mourn with those who mourn,” even when we didn’t directly commit the sins in question.

These realities call those in privileged positions in every culture and every situation to a certain humility as we consider the pain of those around us. One of the things the Bible tells us about God is that he hears the cries of the oppressed (Ps. 10:17), and Christians would do well to offer a long, listening silence to the cries offered in this report.

However, several aspects of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force’s work and recommendations could benefit from additional clarification. We offer these, not in an attempt to deflect guilt from the real sins committed against Native peoples in the past, but from an honest desire to see the “circle of conversation” (pp. 477, 498) do more than impose a smug “hindsight wisdom” onto complex historical and cultural developments (p. 498; cf. Matt. 23:39-41).

1. Rather than repudiate the “Doctrine of Discovery” (Recommendations D & E), synod should reaffirm that its intention is to name as sinful the attitudes of racial and ethnic superiority, in particular where members of the Christian

¹ This will necessarily address information beyond the task force report itself, as much of the history presented in the task force’s report appears to be drawn from an earlier summary found on the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force’s web site; see the comment on p. 480 in the report and the literary review by Seth Adema, accessible at www2.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/cpd/Lit%20Review%20final2.pdf.

² Though we also recognize the problem that the use of language is very complicated, as with Adema’s claim that the word “Eskimo” is offensive. While this is true in Canada, the case in Alaska is different, and the contention that the term is derogatory is much debated by scholars. Compare, for example, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/eskimo?s=t> and <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit-eskimo/>

Reformed Church have been guilty of intentionally or unintentionally perpetuating sinful cultural myths which legitimated practices depriving Indigenous peoples of their land and their culture. The phrase “Doctrine of Discovery,” by itself, leaves itself open to much interpretation as it refers to a series of legal, cultural, and popular attitudes and ideologies. Furthermore, we would note that the report paints the history of the last five hundred years with very broad strokes which may be open to scholarly dispute.³ A clear statement of the report’s intention would strengthen its impact.

2. Where the task force offers several different recommendations calling, in various ways, for education, lament, and continued investigation of wrongs (Recommendations E, G, H, and I), the denomination would be better served by referring the report to the churches and agencies for reflection, study, and repentance where need be, while encouraging local congregations and classes to identify instances of injustice which still require just resolution. It is readily apparent that the numerous instances of sin cited in the report call for lament and repentance on the part of those who benefit from these injustices, whether or not they are directly responsible for the wrongs that have been done (Dan. 9:1-19; Rom. 12:15). However, it is not clear that the task force has consulted with local churches or parties such as Classis Red Mesa, which have presumably been wrestling with these issues for some time; in fact, the task force is rather dismissive of previous efforts at reconciliation (pp. 513-14). Yet both Scripture and the Church Order have seen local assemblies as a better starting point for the resolution of injustice than major assemblies (Matt. 18:15-17; Church Order Art. 28),⁴ and where past resolution is inadequate, appeals procedures are available (Church Order Art. 30). The redress of wrongs identified in the report (and especially the requested uncovering of wrongs which God has graciously allowed us all to forget) must be weighed carefully among the other important cultural and missional causes which demand the time and financial resources of the CRC.

³ For example, papal bulls such as *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1454) were written in the context of wars between Christians and Muslims in the period just before the Muslim conquest of Constantinople. The report also ignores figures such as Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de las Casas, who wrestled with the application of just war theory to the conquest of the Americas. *Inter Caetera* (1493) notes that the Native peoples were “living in peace” and who “believe in one God, the Creator in heaven, and seem sufficiently disposed to embrace the Catholic faith. . . .” The papal bull *Sublimus Dei* (1537) prohibited enslaving the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. These facts, it would seem, would be relevant for understanding the history and especially the documents cited in the report. In addition, the conquest of the Americas took place within the framework of the so-called “right of conquest” which governed international relations (and, in fact, was practiced among Indigenous peoples as well) through 1945, and while subject to criticism today is at least understandable within this context. For another perspective on the Crusades, compare the scholarship of Thomas Madden or Jonathan Riley-Smith, both renowned medieval scholars. See Madden, “The Real History of the Crusades,” *Christianity Today* (May 6, 2005), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/mayweb-only/52.0.html> and Riley-Smith, “Rethinking the Crusades,” *First Things* (March 2000), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/03/rethinking-the-crusades>. Thus the task force’s conclusion that “a seamless intellectual web connects the Crusades to the colonial conquests” (Adema report, p. 7; cf. task force report, p. 480) or that the Church’s teaching of the era demonized “others” (task force report, p. 480) is at the very least a simplification which could be challenged on scholarly grounds.

⁴ The Board of Trustees itself seems to have recognized this in regard to a particular story shared with the task force (p. 525).

3. While we affirm the importance of cultural sensitivity as we share the gospel and engage with our Indigenous brothers and sisters in Christ (Recommendations J and K), it would be helpful to state explicitly that such affirmation can and should be done as Christ is made known. Though it may be true, in a cosmic sense, that “Christ was sovereign among the Navajo and Zuni before the *bilagáana* [. . . “white man”] arrived” (p. 503; cf. Col. 1:20), the authors leave the impression that the CRC was wrong to bring the gospel to the Southwest. This seems to ignore the clear call of Scripture to make Christ known (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 10:14-15, 15:20; *Our World Belongs to God*, para. 42).

In short, we believe that a more restrained and balanced review of the history of the past five hundred years and a more modest list of recommendations would better serve the churches and the cause of reconciliation which the report seeks. Though we recognize the danger that a majority culture may dominate a conversation in such a way that other voices may be lost, the report’s refusal to hear any “buts” (p. 514) and its repeated characterization of objections to its process as manifestations of “settler’s trauma” (pp. 514, 538) do not invite the kind of dialogue which is needed to bring about understanding and reconciliation. As a classis comprised of a significant number of Korean immigrant congregations, we are sensitive to the unintended implications of the task force’s read of history on the movement of peoples today. The conquest and colonization of the Americas is a diverse phenomenon, and while it is true that we all “drink downstream,” that does not necessarily mean that we are guilty simply by standing downstream (Ezek. 18), except perhaps in some universal sense which would also include Indigenous peoples who benefited from their own wars of conquest throughout history.

We want to conclude by affirming the task force’s desire for a “common story” (p. 541). In particular, the testimony of Susie Silversmith is noteworthy for its recognition of the hope which is ours—that God’s grace breaks through our brokenness and the sin committed against us to bring us to a place where we can speak boldly and joyfully of the work of Christ, who makes all things new (pp. 530-32). Though our common story includes the brokenness and sin of our past, we would hope that it would also clearly point to Christ. We all, indigenous and European, Korean and African, need redemption. And in Jesus we celebrate that we have a Redeemer. We hope that this modest communication will enhance the conversation about this difficult and painful topic, and in the process make the glory of Jesus shine more clearly in and through our shared story of grace.

Classis Hudson

Mary B. Stegink, stated clerk

Communication 3: Classis Arizona

Classis Arizona desires to share the following communication with synod and its advisory committee assigned to examine the majority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage:

We take strong exception to the claim that “civil same-sex marriage does not, in and of itself, entail improper sexual relations. . . . The church . . . should not carry out its ministry based solely on presumptions” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 378).

The Scripture speaks of civil as well as religious marriage when it teaches in Hebrews 13:4a, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure." The "all" clearly includes those who are married by the civil authority and not only those married in the Christian community. The marriage bed clearly refers to sexual relations. While entering into a civil same-sex marriage does not technically necessitate that a couple is having or will have sexual relations, it does give the blessing to do so if they choose, and it is a normal expectation, not a presumption, that that option is being exercised. As such, it is wrong for a Christian same-sex couple seeking to live a celibate life to enter into such a state and places them on a path of either repentance or formal church discipline. We hope the advisory committee and/or synod will revise the report accordingly.

Classis Arizona
Jeffrey A. Dykema, stated clerk

Communication 4: Classis Grand Rapids East

Classis Grand Rapids East wishes to communicate to Synod 2016 the availability of the Classis Grand Rapids East Study Report on Biblical and Theological Support Currently Offered by Christian Proponents of Same-Sex Marriage. We offer this report to synod and member churches of the CRCNA as an additional resource for ongoing study and discussion regarding pastoral guidance for dealing with same-sex marriage and related matters.

The full report is available at www.classisgreast.org/downloads/ssmstudyreport2016.pdf.

I. Background and purpose of the report

The biblical and theological basis for the CRC's official position on same-sex marriage comes from a report to Synod 1973. This year a synodically appointed Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage has submitted their report for consideration at Synod 2016. That synodical committee was instructed not to revisit the theological/biblical basis for the CRC's current stance on same-sex marriage.

There has been significant theological consideration of these issues since 1973, both in the Reformed tradition and in the wider Christian church. Scientific understanding of same-sex attraction has grown during that time. In recent years, the social and legal landscape has changed considerably, with same-sex marriage becoming legal in Canada in 2005 and in the United States in 2015. The CRC's latest official statement regarding biblical teachings on this issue is now more than forty years old. Classis Grand Rapids East has on two recent occasions unsuccessfully asked synod for a reexamination of the biblical/theological arguments in the Synod 1973 report. In January 2014, in response to an overture from Sherman Street CRC citing these factors, Classis Grand Rapids East appointed its own study committee to produce this report.

The Classis Grand Rapids East study committee worked independently from the synodically appointed committee. The two committees neither compete with nor duplicate the other's work.

II. Summary of the report

When arguments in favor of same-sex marriage focus exclusively on the life experiences of individuals with same-sex attraction, as powerful as those stories might be, they often fail to convince Christians who hold traditional views because those with traditional views believe that the Bible clearly teaches against same-sex marriage. When the debate is framed this way, it can seem like Christians face an over-simplified choice between obedience to God's law versus compassion for individuals with same-sex attraction. This is a false choice. Individuals on each side can be compassionate. Individuals on each side believe that their position is biblically sound and obedient to God's will.

When arguments in favor of same-sex marriage focus exclusively on alternative interpretations of particular biblical passages, as plausible as those alternative interpretations might be, they often fail to convince Christians who hold traditional interpretations of those passages. This is because it appears to them that those alternative interpretations allowing for same-sex marriage, taken only by themselves, are not preferable or conclusive compared with the traditional interpretations that oppose same-sex marriage.

The most convincing arguments made by Christian proponents of same-sex marriage come from weaving together multiple strands. The strength of the overall argument comes from how these different strands reinforce each other. This report has ten sections (summarized here) which examine in detail particular strands of argument and how that strand reinforces the other strands. The eleventh section offers additional pastoral advice on maintaining unity within churches.

1. *The Holy Spirit and the reinterpretation of Scripture.* At various times in history, the Holy Spirit prompted and guided the church into better interpretations of some parts of Scripture through a variety of means, including the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the suffering caused by social evils, the good that came out of social innovations, and science. Comparing the issue of same-sex marriage to other historical cases suggests that this might be another occasion in church history when the Holy Spirit is prompting a reexamination of Scripture.
2. *Advances in scientific understanding.* The science of sexual orientation and gender has proliferated since the Synod 1973 report. Most of the current science acknowledges that sexual orientation and gender identity are influenced by a complex and indeterminable number of biological and social factors that are often intertwined. Further, while most people are unambiguously male or female biologically and psychologically and are heterosexually attracted, not everyone is. Some individuals are born anatomically and hormonally intersex, due to chromosomal or genetic factors. Some are transgender, biologically one gender but psychologically identifying with the other gender. Attempts to assign intersex and transgender individuals to be unambiguously male or female—through medical intervention, therapy, or social pressure—often lead to destructive results. The fact that male and female exist on a spectrum, rather than as a dichotomy, has profound implications for our understanding and definitions of same-sex marriage.
3. *Same-sex attraction and gender variance: disorder versus creational variance.* Because of various genetic and hormonal influences, biological sex is not a

simple binary but exists on a spectrum. As with other congenital features that exist on a spectrum (e.g., height, eyesight acuity, eye color, handedness), identifying what constitutes a “defect” as opposed to “normal variation” is problematic. These variants arise naturally in human and animal populations by the ordinary operation of genetic and other biological processes. Theologians of disability, who reflect on the experiences of individuals who are part of a marginalized minority because of a condition that the majority find undesirable, offer helpful perspectives for this discussion. Thus, advances in science lead us to reconsider whether various forms of same-sex attraction and intersex conditions should be seen as “creational variants” rather than “disordered.”

4. *Guidelines for interpreting Scripture.* Reformed hermeneutics, affirming the inspiration and authority of Scripture, seeks the best interpretation of Scripture by taking into account the literary, linguistic, historical, and cultural context of passages, using knowledge gained from the study of God’s general revelation, acknowledging God’s accommodation to human limitations, taking into account Scripture’s progressive revelation, and remembering Scripture’s overall purpose, which is the redemptive revelation of God in Jesus Christ.
5. *Examination of various interpretations of biblical passages.* Some scholars for a “traditional” interpretation see gender differentiation (male and female) as associated with the creation of humanity in God’s image. Some traditional scholars believe procreation is fundamental to the governance of creation to which humanity is called, and that gender differentiation is a necessity for marriage. Some scholars for same-sex “affirming” interpretations question whether gender differentiation can be seen as necessary for the full bearing of God’s image. Affirming scholars also reject procreation as a requirement for fulfilling God’s mandate to govern creation, since not all people who carry out this mandate reproduce. Biblical references to “male and female” were a common way of speaking in the culture of the original authors and audiences, and are not intended to teach “gender polarity” or “gender essentialism.” Therefore, a marriage of one man and one woman will be the most common creational pattern but need not be considered a prescriptive creational norm. Same-sex practices in ancient cultures typically involved pagan temple prostitution, pederasty, or high-status males using their power to convince or coerce low-status males (youth, poor, slaves, war prisoners, etc.) into submitting to exploitative sex. These practices constitute sinful disobedience to God and a disordering of the creational purposes for sex. The idea of lifelong same-sex unions of equal partners was rare in ancient times: biblical writers assumed gender hierarchies and did not have the benefits of modern scientific understandings. For those reasons, when biblical writers justly condemned same-sex practices of their times, they were teaching against, or motivated by, the common practices with which they were familiar and had no way of considering the possibility or the potential benefits of lifelong same-sex unions of equal partners who are innately same-sex attracted.
6. *Quotations of contemporary authors.* We have compiled a collection of direct quotations from biblical scholars and other authors on contested passages of Scripture that address gender and same-sex intercourse, and a bibliography of references that our committee has found useful.

7. *Historical, biblical, and theological foundations for marriage.* In our tradition, marriage is an earthly ordinance intended to promote human flourishing. Two individuals leave their birth families and form a new family, creating a “kinship bond” with all of the mutuality and obligations that implies. For many married couples, marriage is the correct setting for procreating and raising children. But marriage is not limited only to couples who can procreate, and raising children well is not limited only to such families. Scripture’s allusions to husband-wife relationships to describe God’s relationship to his people and Christ’s relationship to the church made use of common imagery with which people were familiar, but these allusions were not intended to be prescriptive. Across history, people of faith have changed assumptions about marriage several times (e.g., from favoring arranged marriages to expecting romantic choice, from allowing polygamy to mandating monogamy, from viewing marriage as inferior to celibacy to seeing it as an equal calling, from shunning interracial marriage to accepting it). Allowing same-sex individuals to share the benefits of marriage with same-sex partners could be another such occasion of changing biblical assumptions about marriage.
8. *Social and psychological goods typically enabled by marriage.* For many married individuals, the marriage relationship is the source of many psychological, physical, social, and spiritual benefits. Our society organizes many social goods ordinarily through marriage, including care for spouses, care for children, care for members of their extended families, financial support and stability, emotional support, sharing of insurance, sharing of economic costs like housing and transportation, legal support, sharing of inheritance, tax benefits, shared property ownership, power of attorney, and more. While most of these goods can be obtained with greater difficulty without marriage, and while legal marriages without sexual intimacy are possible, it is still the case—for a variety of biological, psychological, and sociological reasons—that lifelong committed relationships that include sexual intimacy are the means by which most of these creational goods are obtained by most people most of the time.
9. *Psychological issues involved in full inclusion versus noninclusion.* The church’s current treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Christians has caused suffering. Research shows that sexual orientation is beyond the individual’s control in all but a few cases. Given that gays and lesbians have the same emotional, intimacy, and social needs as heterosexuals, many experience great psychological harm from enforced lifetime celibacy, which denies them any possibility of the flourishing that is enjoyed by heterosexuals in relationship with a loving, affirming spouse and supported by the church. Depression and suicidal ideation is a consequence of feeling rejected by God, the church, family, society, and friends while being forbidden a cherishing partner. Empathy for those who are suffering has led the church to reinterpret Scripture in the past. Some conservative, evangelical, and Reformed church leaders (e.g., Brownson, Smedes, Wilson, Gushee, Johnson, Pauw, etc.) are beginning to step forward, many of them after their conscience demanded they acknowledge the pain suffered by LGBT Christians at the hands of the church, to reexamine Scripture, and they find it does not condemn Christian gays in committed relationships.

10. *Personal stories of LGBT Christians.* The church's traditional treatment of same-sex attracted, transgender, and intersex individuals has caused a great deal of pain. Some of these individuals share that when they saw their gender identity as a variation that God created rather than as a disorder, and when in some cases they entered into a lifelong committed relationship, this brought about flourishing in their lives and enabled them to better use their spiritual gifts for God's kingdom. These stories add weight and urgency to the other arguments.
11. *Pastoral advice on maintaining unity.* There is a range of views within the CRC on this topic. Concern and love for the CRC run deep in many of us, and none of us wants this debate to create differences such that we cannot listen to and dialogue with one another with the care and respect that is due to brothers and sisters in Christ. This may be a situation where all continue to grow and learn, but where full agreement at a foundational level will not be achieved this side of heaven.

This report comes as a result of much study, dialogue, and writing. Our study committee members came to the same-sex marriage issue from several perspectives. Some believe that marriage is ordained by God to be between one man and one woman. Others desire to see our LGBT sisters and brothers have the opportunity to experience committed marital relationships. Still others support some portions of each of the above perspectives. All views arise out of sincere prayer, study of God's Word, and review of the writings of current authors, heart perspectives, and meaningful life experiences. The variations in perspective reside in people who are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to the Bible as God's Word to God's people. Our discussions have, through prayer and God's mercy, been open, respectful, and grace-filled.

Congregations need, also, to struggle honestly with a response to lifelong same-sex relationships. In the congregation there will be families at many different places on the path of seeking God's will relative to their loved ones, and many members may have personal struggles or family members struggling who are unknown to the congregation. There will be perspectives on LGBT persons and same-sex relationships that differ widely, as wide as the continuum of possibilities. The arrival at unity may well need to arise from much prayer, listening, storytelling, and study—all in the context of extreme grace, mercy, and respect.

For some, this document may be a step on that journey and may direct God's people in a congregation to other resources that may be helpful. The outcome of such dialogue may not be a baseline level of agreement but rather a broader perspective and understanding that relates to the image of God, God's grace and mercy, the complexity of Scripture, genuine pastoral care, and acceptance and embracing of differences. This may be a situation in which all continue to grow and learn but in which full agreement at a foundational level will not be achieved this side of heaven. And we trust that our loving God, who knows we do not know all things (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12), will extend grace to us in our finite knowledge of his will in this matter.

May you be blessed as you prayerfully study, discern, and discuss the content of this report, so that "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:15-16).

The full report is available at www.classisgreast.org/downloads/ssmstudyreport2016.pdf.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Alfred E. Mulder, stated clerk

Personal Appeal

1. Mr. F. Yang

Appeal of Mr. F. Yang from a decision of Classis Alberta North on October 14, 2015.